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# THE THREE BRIDES

## CHAPTER I The Model And Her Copies

There is sure another Flood toward, that so many couples are coming to the Ark.—As You Like It

“Ah! it is a pitiable case!”

“What case, boys?”

“Yours, mother, with such an influx of daughters-in-law.”

“I suspect the daughters-in-law think themselves more to be pitied.”

“As too many suns in one sphere.”

“As daughters-in-law at all.”

“There’s a ready cure for that. Eh, Charlie?”

“The sight of the mother-in-law.”

“Safe up on the shelf? Ha, you flattering boys!”

“Well, each of the three bridegrooms has severally told us that his bride was a strong likeness of the mother, so she will have the advantage of three mirrors!”

“Ay, and each married solely for her benefit. I wonder which is the truest!”

“Come, Baby Charles, don’t *you* take to being cynical and satirical,” said the mother. “It would be more to the purpose to consider of the bringing them home. Let me see, Raymond and his Cecil will be at Holford’s Gate at 5.30. They must have the carriage in full state. I suppose Brewer knows.”

“Trust the ringers for scenting it out.”

“Julius and Rosamond by the down train at Willansborough, at 4.50. One of you must drive old Snapdragon in the van for them. They will not mind when they understand; but there’s that poor wife of Miles’s, I wish she could have come a few days earlier. Her friend, Mrs. Johnson, is to drop her by the express at Backsworth, at 3.30.”

“Inconvenient woman!”

“I imagine that she cannot help it; Mrs. Johnson is going far north, and was very good in staying

with her at Southampton till she could move. Poor little thing! alone in a strange country! I'll tell you what! One of you must run down by train, meet her, and either bring her home in a fly, or wait to be picked up by Raymond's train. Take her Miles's letter."

The two young men glanced at one another in dismay, and the elder said, "Wouldn't nurse do better?"

"No, no, Frank," said the younger, catching a distressed look on their mother's face, "I'll look up Miles's little African. I've rather a curiosity that way. Only don't let them start the bells under the impression that we are a pair of the victims. If so, I shall bolt."

"Julius must be the nearest bolting," said Frank. "How he accomplished it passes my comprehension. I shall not believe in it till I see him. There, then, I'll give orders. Barouche for the squire, van for the rector, and the rattling fly for the sailor's wife. So wags the course of human life," chanted Frank Charnock, as he strolled out of the room.

"Thanks, Charlie," whispered his mother. "I am grieved for that poor young thing. I wish I could go myself. And, Charlie, would you cast an eye round, and see how things look in their rooms? You have always been my daughter."

"Ah! my vocation is gone! Three in one day! I wonder which is the best of the lot. I bet upon Miles's Cape Gooseberry.—Tired, mother darling? Shall I send in nurse? I must be off, if I am to catch the 12.30 train."

He bent to kiss the face, which was too delicately shaped and tinted to look old enough to be in expectation of three daughters-in-law. No, prostrate as she was upon pillows, Mrs. Charnock Poyntsett did not look as if she had attained fifty years. She was lady of Compton Poyntsett in her own right; and had been so early married and widowed, as to have been the most efficient parental influence her five sons had ever known; and their beautiful young mother had been the object of their adoration from the nursery upwards, so that she laughed at people who talked of the trouble and anxiety of rearing sons.

They had all taken their cue from their senior, who had always been more to his mother than all the world besides. For several years, he being as old of his age as she was young, Mr. and Mrs. Charnock Poyntsett, with scarcely eighteen years between their ages, had often been taken by strangers for husband and wife rather than son and mother. And though she knew she ought to wish for his marriage, she could not but be secretly relieved that there were no symptoms of any such went impending.

At last, during the first spring after Raymond Charnock Poyntsett, Esquire, had been elected member for the little borough of Willansborough, his mother, while riding with her two youngest boys, met with an accident so severe, that in two years she had never quitted the morning-room, whither she had at first been carried. She was daily lifted to a couch, but she could endure no further motion, though her general health had become good, and her cheerfulness made her room pleasant to her sons when the rest of the house was very dreary to them.

Raymond, always the home son, would never have absented himself but for his parliamentary duties, and vibrated between London and home, until, when his mother had settled into a condition that seemed likely to be permanent, and his two youngest brothers were at home, reading each for his examination, the one for a Government clerkship, the other for the army, he yielded to the general recommendation, and set out for a journey on the Continent.

A few weeks later came the electrifying news of his engagement to his second cousin, Cecil Charnock. It was precisely the most obvious and suitable of connections. She was the only child of the head of the family of which his father had been a cadet, and there were complications of inheritance thus happily disposed of. Mrs. Poyntsett had not seen her since her earliest childhood; but she was known to have been educated with elaborate care, and had been taken to the Continent as the completion of her education, and there Raymond had met her, and sped so rapidly with his wooing, that he had been married at Venice just four weeks previously.

Somewhat less recent was the wedding of the second son Commander Miles Charnock. (The younger sons bore their patronymic alone.) His ship had been stationed at the Cape and there, on a hunting expedition up the country, he had been detained by a severe illness at a settler's house; and this had resulted in his marrying the eldest daughter, Anne Fraser. She had spent some months at Simon's Bay while his ship was there, and when he found himself under orders for the eastern coast of Africa, she would fain have awaited him at Glen Fraser; but he preferred sending her home to fulfil the mission of daughterhood to his own mother.

The passage had been long and unfavourable, and the consequences to her had been so serious that when she landed she could not travel until after a few days' rest.

The marriage of the third son had been a much greater surprise. Compton Poyntsett was not a family living; but the patron, hearing of Julius Charnock as a hard-working curate in a distant seaport, wrote to offer it to him; and the same letter to Mrs. Poyntsett to offer it to him; and the same letter to Mrs Poyntsett which conveyed this gratifying intelligence, also informed her of his having proposed to the daughter of the commanding officer of the regiment stationed at the town where lay his present charge. Her father enjoyed the barren honours of the Earldom of Rathforlane, an unimprovable estate in a remote corner of Ireland, burthened with successive families of numerous daughters, so that he was forced to continue in the service, and the

marriage had been hastened by the embarkation of the regiment for India only two days later. The Rectory had, however, been found in such a state of dilapidation, that demolition was the only cure; and thus the Reverend Julius and Lady Rosamond Charnock were to begin their married life in the family home.

The two youngest sons, Francis and Charles, stood on the other side of a gap made by the loss of two infants, and were only twenty-one and nineteen. Frank had passed through Oxford with credit, and had been promised a Government office; while Charles was intended for the army; and both had been reading with a tutor who lived at Willansborough, and was continually employed in cramming, being reported of as the best 'coach' in the country. Charlie, however, had passed a week previously, and was to repair to Sandhurst in another fortnight.

At half-past four there was a light tap at Mrs. Poyntsett's door, and Charlie announced, "Here's the first, mother!" as he brought in a gray-cloaked figure; and Mrs. Poyntsett took a trembling hand, and bestowed a kiss on a cheek which had languor and exhaustion in the very touch.

"She was tired to death, mother," said Charlie, "so we did not wait for the train."

"Quite right!" and as the newcomer sank into the chair he offered—"My dear, you are sadly knocked up! You were hardly fit to come."

"Thank you, I am quite well," answered the fagged timid voice.

"Hark!" as the crash of a peal of bells came up. "Dear child, you will like to rest before any fresh introductions. You shall go to your room and have some tea there."

"Thank you."

"Charlie, call Susan.—She is my boys' old nurse, now mine. Only tell me you have good accounts from my boy Miles."

"Oh yes;" and the hand tightly clasped the closely-written letter for which the mother's eyes felt hungry. "He sent you his love, and he will write to you next time. He was so busy, his first lieutenant was down in fever."

"Where was he?"

"Off Zanzibar—otherwise the crew was healthy—the 12th of August," she answered, squeezing out the sentences as if constrained by the mother's anxious gaze.

"And he was quite well when you parted with him?"

"Quite."

"Ah! you nursed my boy, and we must nurse you for him."

"Thank you, I am quite well." But she bit her lip, and spoke constrainedly, as if too shy and reserved to give way to the rush of emotion; but the coldness pained Mrs. Poyntsett, whose expansiveness was easily checked; and a brief silence was followed by Charlie's return to report that he could not find nurse, and thought she was out with the other servants, watching for the arrival; in another moment, the approaching cheers caused him to rush out; and after many more noises, showing the excitement of the multitude and the advance of the bridal pair, during which Mrs. Poyntsett lay with deepening colour and clasped hands, her nostrils dilating with anxiety and suppressed eagerness, there entered a tall, dark, sunburnt man bringing on his arm a little, trim, upright, girlish figure; and bending down, he exclaimed, "There, mother, I've brought her—here's your daughter!"

Two little gloved hands were put into hers, and a kiss exchanged, while Raymond anxiously inquired for his mother's health; and she broke in by saying, "And here is Anne—Miles's Anne, just arrived."

"Ah, I did not see you in the dark," said Raymond. "There, Cecil, is a sister for you—you never had one."

Cecil was readier with greeting hand and cheek than was Anne, but at the same moment the tea equipage was brought in, and Cecil, quite naturally, and as a matter of course, began to preside over the low table, while Raymond took his accustomed chair on the further side of his mother's sofa, where he could lean over the arm and study her countenance, while she fondled the hand that he had hung over the back. He was describing the welcome at the station, and all through the village—the triumphal arches and shouts.

"But how they *did* miss you, mother," said Charlie. "Old Gurnet wrung my hand in tears as he said, 'Yes, sir, 'tis very fine, but it beats the heart out of it that madam bain't here to see.'"

"Good old Gurnet!" responded Raymond. "They are famously loyal. The J. C. P. crowned all above all the Cs and Rs, I was happy to see."

"J. was for Julius—not Julia," said the mother.

"No; J. H. C. and R. C. had a separate device of roses all to themselves. Hark! is that a cheer beginning again? Had we not better go into the drawing-room, mother? it will be so many for you all together."

"Oh no, I must see you all."

The brothers hurried out with their welcome; and in another minute, a plump soft cheek was pressed to the mother's, devouring kisses were hailed on her, and a fuller sweeter tone than had yet been heard answered the welcome.

"Thank you. So kind! Here's Julius! I'll not be in your way."

"Dearest mother, how is it with you?" as her son embraced her. "Rose has been longing to be with you."

"And we've all come together! How delicious!" cried Rosamond, enfolding Anne in her embrace; "I didn't know you were come!—See, Julius!"

But as Julius turned, a startled look came over Anne's face; and she turned so white, that Rosamond exclaimed, "My dear—what—she's faint!" And while Cecil stood looking puzzled, Rosamond had her arm round the trembling form, and disappeared with her, guided and assisted by Nurse Susan.

"Isn't she—?" exclaimed Julius, in a voice of triumph that made all smile.

"Full of sweet kindness," said Mrs. Poyntsett; "but I have only seen and heard her yet, my dear Julius. Susan will take her to her room—my old one."

"Oh, thank you, mother," said Julius, "but I hardly like that; it seems like your giving it up."

"On the contrary, it proves that I do not give it up, since I put in temporary lodgers like you.—Now Cecil is housed as you preferred, Raymond—in the wainscot-rooms."

"And where have you put that poor Mrs. Miles?" asked Raymond. "She looks quite knocked up."

"Yes, she has been very ill on the voyage, and waited at Southampton to gather strength for the journey.—I am so grateful to your good Rose, Julius.—Why, where is the boy? Vanished in her wake, I declare!"

"His venerable head is quite turned," said Frank. "I had to get inside alone, and let them drive home outside together to avoid separation."

Raymond repeated his question as to the quarters of Miles's wife.

"I had the old schoolroom and the bedroom adjoining newly fitted up," answered Mrs. Poyntsett. "Jenny Bowater was here yesterday, and gave the finishing touches. She tells me the rooms look very nice.—Cecil, my dear, you must excuse deficiencies; I shall look to you in future."

"I hope to manage well," said Cecil. "Had I not better go up now? Will you show me the way, Raymond?"

The mother and her two younger sons remained.

"Haven't I brought you home a splendid article?" was Frank's exclamation. "Julius has got the best of it."

"I back my Cape Gooseberry," returned Charles. "She has eyes and hair and skin that my Lady can't match, and is a fine figure of a woman besides."

"Much you know of Rosamond's eyes!"

"Or you either, boxed up in the van."

"Any way, they have made roast meat of his Reverence's heart! The other two take it much more easily."

"She's a mere chicken," said Charlie. "Who would have thought of Raymond being caught by a callow nestling?"

"And so uncommonly cool," added Frank.

"It would take much to transform Raymond," interposed the mother. "Now, boys, away with you; I must have a little quiet, to repair myself for company after dinner."

Charlie settled her cushions with womanly skill, and followed his brother. "Well, Frank, which is the White Cat? Ah, I thought so—she's yet to come."

"Not one is fit to hold a candle to *her*. You saw that as plain as I did, Charlie; Eleonora beats them all."

"Ah, you're not the youngest brother, remember. It was he who brought her home at last. Come, you need not knock me down; I shall never see any one to surpass the mother, and I'll have no one till I do."

## CHAPTER II

### The Population of Compton Poyntsett

He wanted a wife his brow hoose to keep,  
But favour wi' woin' was fashous to seek.—Laird o' Cockpen

In the bright lamplight of the dining-table, the new population first fully beheld one another, and understood one another's looks.

There was much family resemblance between the five brothers. All were well-grown well-made men, strong and agile, the countenance pleasing, rather square of mould, eyebrows straight and thick, nose well cut and short, chin firm and resolute-looking, and the complexion very dark in Raymond, Frank, and the absent Miles. Frank's eyes were soft, brown, rather pensive, and absent in expression; but Raymond's were much deeper and darker, and had a steadfast gravity, that made him be viewed as formidable, especially as he had lost all the youthful glow of colouring that mantled in his brother's olive cheek; and he had a short, thick, curly brown beard, while Frank had only attained to a black moustache, that might almost have been drawn on his lip with charcoal.

Charlie was an exception—fair, blue-eyed, rosy, and with a soft feminine contour of visage, which had often drawn on him reproaches for not being really the daughter all his mother's friends desired for her.

And Julius, with the outlines of the others, was Albino, with transparent skin mantling with colour that contrasted with his snowy hair, eyebrows, and the lashes, veiling eyes of a curious coral hue, really not unpleasing under their thick white fringes, but most inconveniently short of sight, although capable of much work; in fact, he was a curiously perfect pink-and-white edition of his dark and bronzed brother the sailor.

The dark eyes came from the father's side; Cecil had them, and very observing orbs they seemed to be, travelling about from one face to another, and into every corner of the room, scrutinizing every picture or piece of plate, and trying to see into the conservatory, which had a glass door opening from one end of the room. She was the youngest of the brides, and her features and form seemed hardly developed, nor had she attained the air of a matron; her fashionable dress of crisp white worked muslin with blue trimmings, and blue ribbons in her brown hair, only gave her the air of a young girl at her first party, in spite of her freedom from all shyness as she sat at the head of the table in contented self-possession, her little slender figure as upright as a perfect spine could make it.

Very different was the bride on Raymond's right hand. She was of middle height, soft, round, and plump, carrying her head a little tenderly on one side with a delightful *déagée* kind of ease, and air of vivacious indolence. Her complexion was creamy and colourless, her nose rather *retroussé*, her lips full and parting in a delicious roguish smile, answering to the sleepily twinkling eyes, whose irides seemed to shade so imperceptibly into the palest gray, that there was no telling where the pupils ended, especially as the lids were habitually half closed, as if weighed down by the black length of their borders. The habit of arching up one or other of the eyebrows, in surprise or interrogation, gave a drollery to the otherwise nonchalant sweetness of the countenance. The mass of raven black hair was only adorned by a crimson ribbon, beneath which it had been thrust into a net, with a long thing that had once been a curl on the shoulder of the white tumbled bodice worn over a gray skirt which looked as if it had done solitary duty for the five weeks since the marriage, and was but slightly relieved by a crimson sash.

Rosamond made some apology when she saw Cecil's dainty equipment. "Dressed, you correct little thing! You put me to shame; but I had no notion which box my evening things are in, and it would have been serious to irritate the whole concern."

"And she was some time with Anne," added Julius.

"Ah! with my good will Anne should not have been here!" rejoined Rosamond. "Didn't I meet old Mrs. Nurse at your threshold, with an invitation from Mrs. Poyntsett to dine with her in her room, and didn't we find the bird flown at the first stroke of the gong?"

"Oh, I am very well!" repeated Anne.

Yet she was far more colourless than Julius, for her complexion was not only faded by sickness, but was naturally of the whitest blonde tint; the simple coils of her hair "lint white," and her eyes of the lightest tint of pure blue. The features were of Scottish type, all the more so from being exaggerated by recent illness; but they were handsome enough to show that she must have been a bonnie lassie when her good looks were unimpaired. Her figure far surpassed in height that of both the other ladies, and was very slender, bending with languor and fatigue in spite of her strenuous attempts to straighten it. She was clad in a perfectly plain, almost quaker-looking light dove-coloured silk dress, fitting closely, and unrelieved by any ribbon or ornament of any description, so that her whole appearance suggested nothing but the words "washed out."

It was clear that to let her alone was merciful, and there was no lack of mutual communications among the rest. Frank and Charlie gave their account of the condition of the game.

"Do you let your tenants shoot rabbits?" exclaimed Cecil, as if scandalized. "We never do at Dunstone."

"It prevents an immense amount of discontent and ill-will and underhand work," said Raymond.

"My father never will listen to any nonsense about rabbits," proceeded Cecil. "If you once begin

there is no end to it, they are sure to encroach. He just sends them a basket of game at the beginning and end of the season."

"By the bye," said Raymond, "I hope ours have all been sent out as usual."

"I can answer for a splendid one at our wedding breakfast," said Rosamond. "The mess-man who came to help was lost in admiration. Did you breakfast on ortolans, Cecil?"

"Or on nightingales' tongues?" added Charlie.

"You might as well say fatted dormice and snails," said Frank. "One would think the event had been eighteen hundred years ago."

"Poor Frank! he's stuffed so hard that it is bursting out at all his pores!" exclaimed Charlie.

"Ah! you have the advantage of your elder, Master Charles!" said Raymond, with a paternal sound of approbation.

"Till next time," said Frank. "Now, thank goodness, mine is once for all!"

The conversation drifted away to Venice and the homeward journey, which Raymond and Cecil seemed to have spent in unremitting sight-seeing. The quantities of mountains, cathedrals, and pictures they had inspected was quite appalling.

"How hard you must have worked!" exclaimed Rosamond. "Had you never a day's rest out of the thirty?"

"Had we, Cecil? I believe not," said Raymond.

"Sundays?" gasped Anne's low voice at his elbow.

"Indeed," triumphantly returned Cecil, "between English service and High Mass, and Benediction, and the public gardens, and listening to the band, we had not a single blank Sunday."

Anne started and looked aghast; and Raymond said, "The opportunity was not to be wasted, and Cecil enjoyed everything with unwearied vigour."

"Why, what else should we have done? It would have been very dull and stupid to have stayed in together," said Cecil, with a world of innocent wonder in her eyes. Then turning to her neighbour, "Surely, Julius, you went about and saw things!"

"The sea at Filey Bridge, and the Church Congress at Leeds," he answered, smiling.

"Very shocking, is it not, Cecil?" said Rosamond, with mock gravity; "but he must be forgiven, for he was tired to death! I used to think, for my part, that lovers were a sort of mild lunatics, never to be troubled or trusted with any earthly thing; but that's one of the things modern times have changed! As he was to be going, all the clerical staff of St. Awdry's must needs have their holiday and leave him to do their work; indeed, one was sent off here. For six weeks I never saw him, except when he used to rush in to say he couldn't stay; and when at last we were safe in the coupé, he fairly went to sleep before we got to the first station.—Hush! you *know* you did! And no wonder, for he had been up two nights with some sort of infidel who was supposed to be dying. Then that first week at Filey, he used to bring out his poetry books as the proper sort of thing, and try to read them to me on the sands: but by the time he had got to the bottom of a page, I used to hear the words dragging out slower and slower—

Whereon the—lily—maid—of—Astolat  
Lay—smiling—like—a—star-fish—fast—asleep."

Wherewith Rosamond dropped her head and closed her eyes; while the brothers shouted with mirth, except Frank, whose countenance was 'of one hurt on a vulnerable side.'

"Disrespect to Elaine? Eh, Frank?" said Charlie; "how many pegs has Julius gone down in your estimation?"

Frank would not commit himself, but he was evidently at the era of sensitiveness on the poetical side. Cecil spoke for him. "How very provoking! What did you do to him, Rosamond?"

"I kept off the sand-flies! I can't say but I was glad of a little rest, for I had been packing up for the whole family for ten days past, with interludes of rushing out into the town; for whatever we had not forgotten, the shops had not sent home! Oh! what a paradise of quiet it was under the rocks at Filey—wasn't it, Julius?"

"We will go there again next time we have a chance," said Julius, looking blissful.

"I would never go again to the same place," cried Cecil. "That's not the way to acquire new ideas."

"We are too old to acquire new ideas, my dear," drawled Rosamond, sleepily.

"What did you go to the Church Congress for!" asked Charlie.

"I hope Julius was awake by that time," said Frank.

"Not if we are to have all the new ideas tried on us," said Raymond, dryly.

"I went to a Congress once!" exclaimed Cecil.

"Indeed!" said her husband, surprised.

"Yes. We thought we ought to encourage them. It was the Congress of Sunday-school managers for our archdeaconry."

"Did you acquire any new ideas?" asked Frank; while Rosamond's very eyelashes seemed to curl with suppressed diversion.

"Oh yes. We explained our system of tickets, and the Arch-deacon said it was a very good one, and ought to be adopted everywhere."

This mode of acquisition of new ideas was quite too much for Julius and Charlie, who both exploded; but Frank retained composure enough to ask, "Did you explain it in person?"

"No. We made Mr. Venn."

"The schoolmaster?" said Julius.

"No. He is *our* clergyman, and he always does as *we* tell him; and *so* Dunstone is quite the model parish of the archdeaconry."

Julius could not help making an odd little bend of the head, half deferential, half satirical; and Raymond said, "Cecil, I believe it rests with you to make the move." An ingenuous girlish blush mantled on her cheek as she looked towards Rosamond and moved.

The drawing-room adjoined the dining-room, and likewise had a glass door leading into the conservatory; but this, like the other windows, was concealed by the pale-blue damask curtains that descended from cornices gilded like the legs of the substantial chairs and sofas. There was, however, no lack of modern light cane and basket seats round the fire, and it looked cheery and comfortable. Rosamond put an arm round Anne's waist—"Poor tired dear, come and lie on the sofa."

"Oh no, I couldn't. The gentlemen will come in."

"All brothers! What, will you only be satisfied with an easy-chair! A charming room, and a charming fire!"

"Not so nice as a library," said Cecil, stabbing the fire with the poker as a sort of act of possession. "We always sit in the library at Dunstone. State rooms are horrid."

"This only wants to be littered down," said Rosamond. "That's my first task in fresh quarters, banishing some things and upsetting the rest, and strewing our own about judiciously. There are the inevitable wax-flowers. I have regular blarney about their being so lovely, that it would just go to my heart to expose them to the boys."

"You have always been on the move," said Cecil, who was standing by the table examining the ornaments.

"You may say so! there are not many of Her Majesty's garrisons that I have not had experience of, except my native country that I wasn't born in. It was very mean of them never once to send us to Ireland."

"Where were you born?" said Cecil, neither of the two catching at the bull which perhaps Rosamond had allowed to escape by way of trying them.

"At Plymouth. Dick and I were both born at Plymouth, and Maurice at Scutari; then we were in the West Indies; the next two were born all up and down in Jamaica and all the rest of the Islands—Tom and Terry—dear boys, I've got the charge of them now they are left at school. Three more are Canadians; and little Nora is the only Irish-born one amongst us."

"I thought you said you had never been in Ireland."

"Never quartered there, but on visits at Rathforlane," said Rosamond. "Our ten years at home we have been up and down the world, till at last you see I've ended where I began—at Plymouth."

"Oh, what a lovely Florentine mosaic!" exclaimed Cecil, who had taken but slight interest in this itinerary. "It is just like a weight at Dunstone." Then opening a miniature-case, "Who is this—Mrs. Poyntsett when she was young?"

"Most likely," said Rosamond. "It is like her now, and very like Charlie."

"Yes. Charles is quite unlike the family."

"What family?" said Rosamond.

"The Charnocks, of course. Raymond is a perfect Charnock!"

"A vast advantage," murmured Rosamond.

"Of course," said Cecil, taking it quite seriously. "No one else could be the same thing to us. Papa said there was not a match in the whole world that could have gratified him so much."

"How old are you, Cecil?" quoth Rosamond, with a ripple in her voice.

"Oh, his age was no matter. I don't like young men. That's not the drawback; no, it is that horrid Poyntsett at the end of the name."

"You see you had better have waived your objections to youth, and taken a younger son."

"I couldn't," said this naive young person. "Besides, there is much more of a field for me here than at Dunstone since papa's marriage."

Whatever Rosamond had on the tip of her tongue was averted by the entrance of the three younger brothers. Julius seated himself beside her in the cushioned fireside corner; and Cecil asked where Raymond was.

"Just stepped in to see my mother," said Frank. "This room opens into hers. Will you come to them?"

"Not yet," said Cecil. "I want you to tell me about the neighbourhood."

"Just what I want," said Rosamond. "Whenever I ask, Julius always says there's Dr. Easterby."

Frank and Charlie burst out laughing.

"Dr. Easterby is one of the greatest men in the English Church," said Julius.

"Precisely! But what is the regiment at Backsworth?" and as Charlie named it, "Oh, what fun! That's where Laurie Cookson exchanged. He will be sure to send us cards for everything."

"At Dunstone we never used to go to garrison gaieties," said Cecil, gravely.

"Oh! I'm a military pariah," said Rosamond, hastily.

"Who are the land-owners?" continued Cecil. "There was a place I saw from the line, but Raymond didn't hear when I asked whose it was. Close to the station, I mean."

"That is Sirenwood," said Charles. "Sir Harry Vivian's. He is just come back there with his two daughters."

"I thought Emily Vivian was dead," said Julius. "You don't mean *that* women!"

"*That* woman?" laughed his wife. "What has she done to be a *that* woman?"

"Offended his Reverence," said Frank, in that sort of jocose tone which betrays annoyance.

"A heartless mischievous woman!" said Julius.

Rosamond cocked up her left eyebrow with an ineffably droll look, which encouraged Charlie to say, "Such fierceness can only be prompted by personal experience. Look out, Rosamond!"

"Come 'fess, Julius," said she, merrily. "'Fess and make it up."

"I—I have nothing to confess," said Julius, seriously.

"Hasn't he indeed?" said she, looking at the brothers.

"Oh! don't ask us," said Charlie. "His youthful indiscretions were over long before our eyes had risen above the horizon!"

"Do you mean that they have really come home to live here?" demanded Julius, with singular indifference to the personal insinuations.

"I am sorry it is so painful to you," said I Frank, somewhat ironically; "but Sir Harry thinks it right to return and end his days among his own people."

"Is he ill, then?"

"I can't gratify you so far," returned Frank; "he is a fine old fellow of sixty-five. Just what humbugging papers call a regular specimen of an old English gentleman," he added to Cecil.

"Humbugging indeed, I should hope," muttered Julius. "The old English gentleman has reason to complain!"

"There's the charity of the clergy!" exclaimed Frank. "No forgiveness for a man who has spent a little in his youth!"

"As an essential of the old English gentleman?" asked Julius.

"At any rate, the poor old fellow has been punished enough," said Charlie.

"But what is it? Tell me all about it," said Cecil. "I am sure my father would not wish me to associate with dissipated people."

"Ah! Cecil," said Rosamond. "You'll have to take refuge with the military, after all!"

"It is just this," said Charlie. "Sir Harry and his only son were always extravagant, one as bad as the other—weren't they, Julius? Phil Bowater told me all about it, and how Tom Vivian lost fifteen thousand pounds one Derby Day, and was found dead in his chambers the next morning,



they said from an over-dose of chloroform for neuralgia. Then the estate was so dipped that Sir Harry had to give up the estate to his creditors, and live on an allowance abroad or at watering-places till now, when he has managed to come home. That is to say, the house is really leased to Lady Tyrrell, and he is in a measure her guest—very queer it must be for him in his own house.”

“Is Lady Tyrrell *that* woman?” asked Rosamond.

“I conclude so,” said Charlie. “She was the eldest daughter, and married Lord Tyrrell, who died about two years ago. She has no children, so she has taken the family in charge, patches up Sir Harry’s affairs with her jointure, and chaperons her sister.”

“What is she like?”

“Ask Frank,” said Charlie, slyly.

“No!” said Frank, with dignity. “I shall say no more, I only excite prejudice.”

“You are right, Frank,” said Julius, who had evidently recovered from the shock. “It is not fair to judge people now from what they were eleven years ago. They have had some terrible lessons, and may be much changed.”

“Ay,” said Frank; “and they have been living in an atmosphere congenial to you, at Rockpier, and are hand and glove with all the St. Chrysostom folk there. What do you say to that, Julius? I can tell you they are enchanted with your curate!”

“They are not in this parish.”

“No, but they turn up here—the ladies, at least—at all the services at odd times that Bindon has begun with.”

“Ah! by the bye, is Herbert Bowater come?”

“Yes, the whole family came over to his installation in Mrs. Hornblower’s lodgings.”

“I saw him this morning, poor old Herbs,” added Frank, “looking uncommonly as if he felt himself in a strait waistcoat.”

“What, are there two curates?” demanded Cecil, in a tone of reprobation.

Julius made a gesture of assent, with a certain humorous air of deprecation, which, however, was lost upon her.

“We never let Mr. Venn have one,” continued Cecil, “except one winter when he was ill, and then not a young one. Papa says idle young clergymen are not to be encouraged.”

“I am entirely of Mr. Charnock’s opinion. But if I have exceeded the Dunstone standard, it was not willingly. Herbert Bowater is the son of some old friends of my mother’s, who wanted to keep their son near home, and made it their request that I would give him a title.”

“And the Bowaters are the great feature in the neighbourhood,” added Frank. “Herbert tells me there are wonderful designs for entertaining the brides.”

“What do they consist of?” asked Rosamond.

“All the component parts of a family,” said Frank. “The eldest daughter is a sort of sheet-anchor to my mother, as well as her own. The eldest son is at home now. He is in the army.”

“In the Light Dragoons?” asked Rosamond. “Oh! then I knew him at Edinburgh! A man with yellow whiskers, and the next thing to a stutter.”

“I declare, Julius, she is as good as any army list,” exclaimed Charlie.

“There’s praise!” cried Frank. “The army list is his one book! What a piece of luck to have you to coach him up in it!”

“I dare say Rosamond can tell me lots of wrinkles for my outfit,” said Charles.

“I should hope so, having rigged out Dick for the line, and Maurice for the artillery!”

Charlie came and leant on the mantel-shelf, and commenced a conversation *sotto voce* on the subject nearest his heart; while Cecil continued her catechism.

“Are the Bowaters intellectual?”

“Jenny is very well read,” said Julius, “a very sensible person.”

“Yes,” said Frank; “she was the only person here that so much as tried to read Browning. But if Cecil wants intellect, she had better take to the Duncombes, the queerest firm I ever fell in with. He makes the turf a regular profession, actually gets a livelihood out of his betting-book; and she is in the strong-minded line—woman’s rights, and all the rest of it.”

“We never had such people at Dunstone,” said Cecil. “Papa always said that the evil of being in parliament was the having to be civil to everybody.”

Just then Raymond came back with intelligence that his mother was about to go to bed, and to call his wife to wish her good night. All went in succession to do the same.

"My dear," she said to Anne, "I hoped you were in bed."

"I thought I would wait for family worship."

"I am afraid we don't have prayers at night, my dear. We must resume them in the morning, now Raymond and Julius are come."

Poor Anne looked all the whiter, and only mumbled out a few answers to the kind counsels lavished upon her. Mrs. Poyntsett was left to think over her daughters-in-law.

Lady Rosamond did not occupy her much. There was evidently plenty of good strong love between her and her husband; and though her training might not have been the best for a clergyman's wife, there was substance enough in both to shake down together in time.

But it was Raymond who made her uneasy—Raymond, who ever since his father's death had been more than all her other sons to her. She had armed herself against the pang of not being first with him, and now she was full of vague anxiety at the sense that she still held her old position. Had he not sat all the evening in his own place by her sofa, as if it were the very kernel of home and of repose? And whenever a sense of duty prompted her to suggest fetching his wife, had he not lingered, and gone on talking? It was indeed of Cecil; but how would she have liked his father, at the honeymoon's end, to prefer talking of her to talking with her? "She has been most carefully brought up, and is very intelligent and industrious," said Raymond. His mother could not help wondering whether a Roman son might not thus have described a highly accomplished Greek slave, just brought home for his mother's use.

### CHAPTER III

## Parish Explorations

A cry more tuneable  
Was never holla'd to, nor cheer'd with horn,  
In Crete, in Sparta, nor in Thessaly:  
Judge, when you hear.—But, soft; what nymphs are these?  
Midsummer Night's Dream

It was quite true that Cecil Charnock Poyntsett was a very intelligent industrious creature, very carefully brought up—nay, if possible, a little too much so. "A little wholesome neglect" had been lacking.

The only child of her parents who had lived to see a second birthday was sure to be the centre of solicitude. She had not been spoilt in the usual acceptation of the word, for she had no liberty, fewer indulgences and luxuries than many children, and never was permitted to be naughty; but then she was quite aware that each dainty or each pleasure was granted or withheld from a careful consideration of her welfare, and that nothing came by chance with her. And on her rare ebullitions of self-will, mamma, governess, nurse, nay even papa, were all in sorrowful commotion till their princess had been brought to a sense of the enormity of her fault.

She lost her mother at fourteen, but the same anxious training was carried on by her father; and after three years he married her mother's most intimate friend, avowedly that the perfect system might be continued. Cecil's gaieties as a come-out young lady were selected on the same judicious principles as her childish diversions; and if ever the Dunstone family favoured an entertainment not to their taste, it was after a debate on the need of condescension and good-nature. She had, however, never had a season in London—a place her father hated; but she was taken abroad as soon as she was deemed old enough thoroughly to appreciate what she was to see there; and in Switzerland her Cousin Raymond, who had at different times visited Dunstone, overtook the party, and ere long made his proposals. He was the very man to whom two or three centuries ago Mr. Charnock would have betrothed the heiress in her infancy; and Cecil had never liked any one so well, feeling that her destiny came to a proper culmination in bestowing her hand on the most eligible Charnock, an M.P., and just a step above her father in rank and influence.

Her step-mother was under orders to spend the winter in Italy and the wedding had therefore taken place in Venice, so that Cecil might finish her journey as a wife. She had been very happy and fully occupied; Raymond, being younger and stronger than her parents, was more competent to escort her to every height or depth to which she wished to go, hunted up information for her, and was her most obedient servant, only resisting any prolongation of the journey beyond the legitimate four weeks; nor indeed had Cecil been desirous of deferring her introduction to her new sphere.

There she stood, her hair and pretty Parisian winter dress arranged to perfection, contemplating with approval the sitting-room that had been appropriated to her, the October sunshine lighting up the many-tinted trees around the smooth-shaven dewy lawn, and a bright fire on the hearth, shelves and chiffoniers awaiting her property, and piles of parcels, suggestive of wedding presents, awaiting her hand. She was standing at the table, turning out her travelling-bag with the comfortable sensation that it was not to be immediately re-packed, and had just disinterred a

whole library of note-books, when her husband opened the door. "I believe Jenkins is waiting for your appearance to bring in the urn, my dear."

"I'm coming; but surely there ought to be a bell or gong to assemble the family."

"It might disturb my mother. What sleep she gets is in the morning. I never go to her till eleven o'clock, unless I am going out for the day."

"And what will she want me to do for her?" asked Cecil, glancing at her empty shelves.

"A woman's tact will soon find out. All I wish is that she should be your first object."

It was a much larger *all* than could be realized by the son whose happiest moments had been spent in devotion to her, and who thought the motherless girl must rejoice doubly in such a mother.

"But I am free till eleven," said Cecil.

"Free always, I hope," he returned, with a shade of vexation. Therewith they descended the broad stairs into the panelled hall, where a great fire was blazing on the hearth, and Rosamond and the two young brothers were standing chatting merrily before it.

Julius, she said, had his primary sermon heavy on his mind, and had risen before day to attack it; and she sped away to summon him from Mrs. Poyntsett's beautiful old dressing-room, where he sat writing amid all the old associations. Anne was discovered hanging over the dining-room fire, looking whiter and more exhausted than the night before, having indeed been the first to come down-stairs. She was rebuked for fatiguing herself, and again murmured something about family worship.

"We must begin to-morrow," said Raymond. "We have got a chaplain now."

Julius, however, on entering excused himself, saying that after Sunday he should be at Matins at nine o'clock; whereupon Anne looked at him in mute astonishment.

Raymond, feeling that he ought to cultivate the solitary sister-in-law, began asking about Miles; but unlike the typical colonist, she was very silent, and her replies were monosyllabic, till Rosamond created a diversion by talking to Frank; and then Raymond elicited that Glen Fraser was far up the country—King Williamstown nearer than any other town. They had sent thither for a doctor for Miles, and he stayed one night, but said that mother's treatment was quite right; and as it was thirty miles off he did not come again. Thirty miles! what sort of roads? Not bad for wagons. It only took two days to get there if the river was not in flood. Had she not been married there? Yes, they all rode in thither for the purpose. Was it the nearest church, then? There was one only nine miles off, to which papa went when there was service—one Sunday in three, "for he is an Episcopalian, you know."

"And not your mother?" asked Cecil.

"I don't think she was at home," said Anne.

"Then had you a Presbyterian Kirk?" asked Cecil, remembering that in Scotland gentle blood and Anglicanism did not go together as uniformly as she believed them to do in England.

"There was one at Schneyder's Kloof, but that was Dutch."

"Then did you go nowhere?" asked Cecil.

"There was Mr. Pilgrim's."

"A clergyman?"

"No, a settler. He used to pray and expound every Sunday."

"What does he call himself?" said Cecil, growing more severe.

"I don't know," said Anne. "He gathers together a little flock of all denominations, who only care to hear the word."

"Such a voice in the wilderness as often does good service," said Julius, with a perception that the side with which he least agreed best deserved support.

He and Rosamond were bent on a tour of parochial inspection, as were Raymond and Cecil on a more domestic one, beginning with the gardens.

Cecil was the first lady down-stairs, all in claret colour trimmed with gray fur, with a little fur and velvet cap upon her head.

"There! it is a clear morning, and you can see the view," said Raymond, opening the hall door.

"Very prettily undulating ground," she said, standing on the steps, and looking over a somewhat rapid slope scattered with trees to the opposite side of the valley, where a park with a red mansion in the midst gleamed out among woods of green, red, orange, and brown tints. "How you are shut in! That great Spanish chestnut must be a perfect block when its leaves are out. My father would never let it stand so near the house."

"It is too near, but it was planted at the birth of my mother's brother."

"Who died?"

"Yes, at seven years old. It was her first grief."

"Then it would vex her if you cut it."

Raymond laughed. "It is hers, not mine."

"I forgot." There was a good deal in the tone; but she added, "What is that place opposite?"

"Sirenwood. It belongs to Sir Harry Vivian; but he does not live there."

"Yes, he does," said Cecil. "Your brothers say he has come back with his two daughters."

"There is only one unmarried."

"There is a widow come to keep house for him—Lady Tyrrell."

"Very likely," said Raymond; "my mother only writes with difficulty, so I hear little when I am from home."

"Is it true that they are horrid people, very dissipated, and not fit for me to associate with?"

"That is putting it strongly," said Raymond, quietly. "They are not likely to be very desirable acquaintances for you, but there is no reason you should not associate with them on ordinary terms of courtesy."

"Ah! I understand—as member's wife."

"I don't see what that has to do with it," said Raymond. "Ah! Rosamond!" as she came down in a Galway cloak over her black velveteen, "on the way to view your domain?"

"Yes, and yours," she said, nodding to Cecil. "You appreciate such English apple-pie order. It looks as if you never suffered a stray leaf to dance without an old woman to hunt it down. And what's that red house smiling across the valley?"

"Sirenwood," repeated Raymond; then to Julius he said, "Did you know it was inhabited again?"

"Frank said so," answered Julius, without further remark, giving his arm to his wife, who clasped both hands on it; while the other couple looked on as if doubtful whether this were a trying duty incumbent on them.

"What is it all about?" said Rosamond, as they walked down the avenue of walnuts leading to the iron gates in the opposite direction from Sirenwood. "Which of you was *that woman's* victim? Was it a sailor love of Miles's? I hope not! That poor little African might not stand a gay ghost cropping up again."

"Miles is far removed from the conventional sailor."

"Then it is reduced to the grave Raymond."

"I wish I had betrayed nothing."

"Now you may as well proceed to betray the rest, instead of leaving me to exercise my fancy."

"It is no secret, only such things are best not brought up again. Camilla Vivian was poor Raymond's *grande passion*, and you may imagine what a grief that was to my mother, especially as the poor brother was then living—one of the most fascinating, dangerous men I ever saw; and the whole tone of the place was ultra gay and thoughtless, the most reckless extravagance. However, he was set upon it, and my mother was forced to consent to the engagement. She seemed equally devoted to him, till she met Lord Tyrrell at some country house, and then a quarrel was picked, either by her mother or herself, about my mother retaining the headship of her own house. It was a palpable excuse, but it served to break the affair off, and Raymond was cruelly cut up. My mother made herself everything to him from that moment, gave up all her former habits to be with him, sent the little boys to school, and fairly dragged him through the trouble!"

"How long ago was it?"

"Ten years—yes, ten years. So far as ceasing to care a straw for a heartless woman like that, he has got over it, no doubt; but it has made a graver man of him for life, and I doubt whether, but for my mother's accident, he ever would have married."

"Did you marry for your mother's sake, Julius, or only tell her so?"

"For shame, my Lady Mischief!"

"And do you think the fair Camilla returned with plans that she finds disconcerted?"

"How can I tell? I have not seen her since I was a lad of eighteen.—Ah! how d'ye do, Betty?" in a tone of relief; "you've not seen my wife."

This was the first of a long series of introductions. Compton Poynsett was a straggling village, with the church, schools, and Rectory, ten minutes' walk from the park gates. It had not been neglected, so that Julius had not the doubtful satisfaction of coming like a missionary or

reformer. The church, though not exactly as with his present lights he would have made it, was in respectable order, and contained hardly anything obnoxious to his taste; the schools were well built, properly officered, and the children under such discipline that Rosamond declared she could no more meddle with them than with her father's regiment.

The Rectory was at that moment level with the ground, and Julius explaining the plans, when up came the senior curate. Mr. Bindon, whom she, as well as Julius, greeted as an old friend, was the typical modern priest, full of his work, and caring for nothing besides, except a Swiss mountain once a year; a slight, spare, small, sallow man, but with an enormous power of untiring energy.

Scarcely had Rosamond shaken hands with him, standing where her drawing-room rug was to be in future days, when a merry whistle came near, and over the wall from the churchyard leapt first a black retriever, secondly a Skye terrier, thirdly a bull ditto, fourthly a young man, or rather an enormous boy, who for a moment stood amazed and disconcerted at the unexpectedly worshipful society into which he had jumped!

"Ha! Herbert! is that you?" laughed Julius.

"I beg your pardon!" he breathlessly exclaimed. "I was just taking the short cut! I had no idea—Here, Mungo, you ruffian!" as the Skye was investigating Lady Rosamond's boot.

"Oh, I like him of all things! I am glad to welcome you to our future house!" as she held out her hand to the Reverend Herbert Bowater, the junior curate, a deacon of a fortnight's standing, whose round open happy blue eyes, ruddy cheeks, merry lips, and curly light hair, did not seem in keeping with the rigidly straight collar and waistcoat, and the long black coat, at present plentifully streaked with green tree-moss, while his boots and trousers looked as if they had partaken of the mud-bath which his dogs had evidently been wallowing in.

"Off! off!" were his words, as he shook hands with his rectoress. "Get away, Rollo!" with an energetic shove of the foot to the big dog, who was about to shake his dripping coat for the ladies' special benefit. "I saw you arrive last evening," he said, in the conversational tone of a gentlemanly school-boy; "didn't you find it very cold?"

"Not very. I did not see you, though."

"He was organizing the cheers," said Mr. Bindon. "You shone in that, Bowater. They kept such good time."

"You were very good to cheer us at all," said Julius, "coming in the wake of the Squire as we did."

"The best of it was," said the junior, "that Charlie was so awfully afraid that he and poor Miles's wife would be taken for the Squire, that he dashed in on his way to warn me to choke them off. If she hadn't been ill, I must have set the boys on for a lark! How is she, though?" he asked in a really kind tone.

"She looks very ill, poor thing," said Julius.

Here the bull terrier became assiduous in his attentions to Rosamond; and between his master's calls and apologies, and her caresses and excuses, not much more was heard, till Julius asked with mock gravity, "And are these all you've brought over, Herbert?"

"Yes, all; I'd half a mind to bring the two greyhounds, but my father thought they would get into trouble in the preserves, and there isn't room at Mrs. Hornblower's place," he answered, with apologetic simplicity.

"What a pity Durham has been reduced!" said Mr. Bindon, dryly. "It would have been the right preferment for Bowater. The Bishop was obliged by statute to keep a pack of hounds."

"But, sir," expostulated the deacon, turning to the Rector, colouring all over his honest rosy face, "you don't object! You know, of course, I've given up sport," he added ruefully; "but only just as companions!—Ain't you, Rollo?" he added, almost with tears in his eyes, and a hand on the smooth black head, belonging to such a wise benignant face, that Rosamond was tempted to pronounce the dog the more clerical looking of the two.

"You are very welcome," said Julius, laughing, "provided you can manage with the old women's cats. I should find such companions rather awkward in pastoral visits."

"I'll teach them, sir! You may depend on it! We did have a little flare-up yesterday, but I showed them the sense of it. You might teach those dogs anything!—Ha! what then, Tartar! Halloo, Mungo! Rats, rats, rats!"

A prodigious scratching and snorting was audible in what had been a cellar of the quondam Rectory; and Rollo, becoming excited, dashed up to the scene of action, with a deep bass war-cry, while, to Rosamond's great amusement, "rats" was no less a peal to Rector and senior; and for the next quarter of an hour the three clergymen moved bricks, poked with their sticks, and cheered on the chase till the church clock struck one, the masons began to return from dinner, and the sounds of the bell at the Hall recalled the party to order.

"There, Rose! Our first day!" said Julius, aghast.

"You'd better come to lunch at my rooms," said the young curate, eagerly. "Do! Mother has

brought the jolliest hamper! Game-pie, and preserved magnum-bonums, and pears off the old jargonelle.—Come, Lady Rosamond, do.—Come along, Bindon! There's such a dish of damson-cheese! Do!"

That "*do*," between insinuation and heartiness, was so boyish, that it was quite irresistible to the lady, who consented eagerly, while Julius wrote a word or two on a card, which he despatched to the Hall by the first child he encountered. In a few minutes they reached the nice clean bay-windowed room over the village shop, comically like an undergraduate's, in spite of the mother's and sister's recent touches.

There ensued a resolute quieting of the dogs, and a vigorous exertion of hospitality, necessitating some striding up and down stairs, and much shouting to Mrs. Hornblower and her little niece, who rejoiced in the peculiar name of Dilemma; while Rosamond petted Tartar upon her lap, and the two elder clergymen, each with an elbow against the window-frame and a knee on the seat, held council, based on the Rector's old knowledge of the territory and the curate's recent observations during his five weeks' sojourn.

The plans to be put in force next week were arranged during the meal, and the junior observed that he would walk home to-night and back on Saturday evening, since after that he should be tied pretty fast.

And he started with Julius and Rosamond on their further progress, soon, however, tumbling over another stone wall with all his dogs, and being only heard hallooing to them as they yelped after the larks.

"That is a delicious boy!" said Rosamond, laughing merrily. "A nice fellow—but we mustn't make it a custom to be always going in to partake of his hampers, or we shall prey inordinately on Mrs. Bowater's preserves."

"He was just like the hero of

"Oh, I have a plum-cake,  
And a rare feast I'll make."

I do like a boy with a sweet tooth!"

"Like him! Of course I do. The Bowaters are like one's own kindred! I only hope I shall not spoil him."

"Hasn't his mother done that for you?"

"I wish he had spent a year or two at Cuddesdon! I ought to have seen him before consenting to give him a title at once, but his father and Jenny wished it so much. Ah! come in here. Bindon said Lucy Martin was a case for a lady."

Rosamond's hearty good-nature was much more at ease among ailing old women than prim school-children, and she gave great satisfaction in the cottages.

Julius did not of course come as a stranger, and had a general impression as to names and families; but he had been absent, except on short visits, for five years, so that Rosamond declared that this was a staple of his conversation: "Then it was Tom Deane—no, it was John Deane that married Blake's son—no, it was Blake's daughter that died who is living in the next house."

They finished with a long and miry lane, lying along the valley, and leading to the cottages of a little clan, the chief of whom seemed to be a large-boned lively-eyed old dame, who, after minute inquiries after "the Lady Poyntsett," went on, "And be it true, Master Julius, as that young gentleman of Squire Bowater's is one of your passons?"

Julius admitted the fact.

"And be ye going to put he up in the pulpit to preach to we? 'Pon my word of honour, says I to Sally when her telled I, we shall have little Dick out of the infant-school next!"

"We're all young, Betty! Can't you put up with any one that is not older than yourself! I'm afraid he would hardly be able to get up the pulpit stair."

The Rector's reply delighted Betty; but she returned to the charge. "No, no, sir, I be coming to hear ye next Sunday. Sally have turned my black bonnet a purpose. It be one of the Lady Poyntsett's, as her gave I when my old gentleman was took two years after the Squire—when bonnets was bonnets, you know, ma'am. Now tell me true, be ye to preach morning or arternoon, sir?"

"In the morning, I hope, Betty."

"Then I'll be there, Master Julius, to the third seat from the front; but it ain't becoming for a woman of my age, seventy-nine come Christmas, to sit under a slip of a lad as hasn't got the taste of the birch off his back."

"That's too bad, Betty," broke in Rosamond, speaking out of conviction. "Mr. Bowater isn't so young as he looks, and he was too good a boy ever to need the birch."

"All the wuss for he," retorted the undaunted Betty. "Spare the rod, and spile the child."

The village wit was left triumphant, and Julius proposed to return by a cross-road leading into the plantations. Suddenly a scud of rain mixed with whirling yellow leaves sent them hurrying into a cart-shed, where, with a sudden start, they found themselves rushing in on some one. Who was it? A girl—a young lady. That was evident, as Rosamond panted out, "I beg your pardon!" and the next moment there was the exclamation, "Mr. Julius Charnock! You don't remember me? Eleonora Vivian!"

"Miss Vivian! you have the advantage of me," said Julius, a little stiffly. "Let me introduce my wife."

The hands met, and Rosamond perceived in the failing light a very fine-looking maiden, with a superbly carried head and neck, simply dressed in gray cloth. "Are you sheltering here, or are you sketching?" she asked, seeing some paper and drawing materials.

"I was giving a lesson. See," exhibiting some bold outlines on large paper. "Does not my pupil do me credit?"

"Very spirited," said Rosamond. "Where is she?"

"He is gone to fetch me his grandmother's umbrella. He is the little Gurth of these parts."

"Of whom you are making a Giotto?" asked Julius, thawing a little.

"Exactly; I found him drawing on a barn-door with such zeal and spirit, that I could not help offering him some lessons. Only see, does he not get on? I wish I could get him to the school of design."

"May I ask what becomes of his pigs?" demanded Julius.

"Don't you hear?" as sundry grunts and squeals of those eminently conversational animals were audible through the walls. "They are driven home to this rick-yard, so here I meet the boy."

"Who is he?" asked the Rector.

"I only know that he answers to the name of Joe. And here he comes," as a boy about ten years old came lumbering up in big boots, with a heavy plaid shawl on one arm, and an immense green umbrella in the other.

"Thank you, Joe. Make your bow to the lady and gentleman."

This was a pull of the flaxen forelock; for Joe was a slender, pretty, fair boy, of that delicately-complexioned English type which is not roughened till after many years of exposure.

"That's right, my man," said Julius, kindly. "What is your name?"

"Please, sir, Joshua Reynolds."

"Instinct," whispered Rosamond.

"Or influence of a name," returned Miss Vivian.

"Are you one of Dan Reynolds's boys, or Tim's?" proceeded

"No, I bides with granny."

Julius made no further attempt at disentangling the pedigree but inquired about his employments. Did he go to school?

"When there ain't nothing to be done."

"And what can be done by such a mite?" asked Rosamond.

"Tell the lady," said the Rector; "what work can you do?"

"Bird-starving."

"Well!"

"And stoon-picking, and cow-herding, and odd jobs up at Farmer Light's; but they won't take I on for a carter-boy not yet 'cause I bean't not so lusty as some on 'em."

"Have you learnt to read?"

"Oh yes, very nicely," interposed Miss Vivian.

"Did you teach him?" said Rosamond.

"No! He could read well before I came to the place. I have only been at home six weeks, you know, and I did not know I was poaching on your manor," she added *sotto voce* to Julius, who could not but answer with warm thanks.

It was discovered that the rain had set in for the night, and an amicable contest ensued between the ladies as to shawl and umbrella, each declaring her dress unspoilable, till it ended in Eleonora having the shawl, and both agreeing to share the umbrella as far as the Sirenwood lodge.

However, the umbrella refused to open, and had to be given to the boy, who set his teeth into an extraordinary grin, and so dealt with the brazen gear as to expand a magnificent green vault, with a lesser leathern arctic zone round the pole; but when he had handed it to Miss Vivian, and she had linked her arm in Lady Rosamond's, it proved too mighty for her, tugged like a restive horse, and would fairly have run away with her, but for Rosamond's holding her fast.

"Lost!" they cried. "Two ladies carried away by an umbrella!"

"Here, Julius, no one can grapple with it but you," called Rosamond.

"I really think it's alive!" panted Eleonora, drawn up to her tip-toes before she could hand it to Julius, who, with both clinging to his arm, conducted them at last to the lodge, where Julius could only come in as far as it would let him, since it could neither be let down nor left to itself to fly to unknown regions.

A keeper with a more manageable article undertook to convey Miss Vivian home across the park; and with a pleasant farewell, husband and wife plodded their way home, along paths the mud of which could not be seen, only heard and felt; and when Rosamond, in the light of the hall, discovered the extent of the splashes, she had to leave Julius still contending with the umbrella; and when, in spite of the united efforts of the butler and footman, it still refused to come down, it was consigned to an empty coach-house, with orders that little Joe should have a shilling to bring it down and fetch it home in the morning!

## CHAPTER IV Shades In Sunshine

My friends would be angered,  
My minnie be mad.—Scots Song

"Whom do you think we met, mother?" said Julius, coming into her room, so soon as he had made his evening toilette, and finding there only his two younger brothers. "No other than Miss Vivian."

"Ah! then," broke in Charlie, "you saw what Jenkins calls the perfect picture of a woman."

"She is very handsome," soberly returned Julius. "Rose is quite delighted with her. Do you know anything of her?"

"Jenny Bowater was very fond of poor Emily," rejoined the mother. "I believe that she had a very good governess, but I wish she were in better hands now."

"I cannot think why there should be a universal prejudice for the sake of one early offence!" exclaimed Frank.

"Oh, indeed!" said Julius, amazed at such a tone to his mother.

"I only meant—mother, I beg your pardon—but you are only going by hearsay," answered Frank, in some confusion.

"Then you have not seen her?" said Julius.

"I! I'm the last person she is likely to seek, if you mean Camilla."

"She inquired a great deal after you, mother," interposed Frank, "and said she longed to call, only she did not know if you could see her. I do hope you will, when she calls on Cecil. I am sure you would think differently. Promise me, mother!"

"If she asks for me, I will, my boy," said Mrs. Poyntsett, "but let me look! You aren't dressed for dinner! What will Mistress Cecil say to you! Ah! it is time you had ladies about the house again."

The two youths retreated; and Julius remained, looking anxiously and expressively at his mother.

"I am afraid so," she said; "but I had almost rather he were honestly smitten with the young one than that he believed in Camilla."

"I should think no one could long do that," said Julius.

"I don't know. He met them when he was nursing that poor young Scotsman at Rockpier, and got fascinated. He has never been quite the same since that time!" said the mother anxiously. "I don't blame him, poor fellow!" she added eagerly, "or mean that he has been a bit less satisfactory—oh no! Indeed, it may be my fault for expressing my objection too' plainly; he has always been reserved with me since, and I never lost the confidence of one of my boys before!"

That Julius knew full well, for he—as the next eldest at home—had been the recipient of all his mother's perplexities at the time of Raymond's courtship. Mrs. Poyntsett had not been a woman of intimate female friends. Her sons had served the purpose, and this was perhaps one great element in her almost unbounded influence with them. Julius was deeply concerned to see her eyes glistening with tears as she spoke of the cloud that had risen between her and Frank.



"There is great hope that this younger one may be worthy," he said. "She has had a very different bringing up from her sister, and I did not tell you what I found her doing. She was teaching a little pig-herd boy to draw."

"Ah! I heard Lady Tyrrell was taking to the education of the people line."

"I want to know who the boy is," said Julius. "He called himself Reynolds, and said he lived with granny, but was not a son of Daniel's or Timothy's. He seemed about ten years old."

"Reynolds? Then I know who he must be. Don't you remember a pretty-looking girl we had in the nursery in Charlie's time? His 'Fan-fan' he used to call her."

"Ah, yes, I remember; she was a Reynolds, for both the little boys could be excited to fury if we assumed that she was a fox. You don't mean that she went wrong?"

"Not till after she had left us, and seemed to be doing well in another place; but unfortunately she was allowed to have a holiday in the race week, and a day at the course seems to have done the mischief. Susan can tell you all about it, if you want to know. She was as broken-hearted as if Fanny had been her own child—much more than the old mother herself, I fear."

"What has become of the girl?"

"Gone from bad to worse. Alas! I heard a report that she had been seen with some of the people who appear on the race-course with those gambling shooting-galleries, or something of that sort."

"Ah! those miserable races! They are the bane of the country. I wish no one would go near them."

"They are a very pleasant county gathering."

"To you, mother, and such as you; but you could have your county meeting without doing quite so much harm. If Raymond would only withdraw his subscription."

"It would be as much as his seat is worth! Those races are the one great event of Wil'sbro' and Backsworth, the harvest of all the tradespeople. Besides, you know what is said of their expedience as far as horses are concerned."

"I would sacrifice the breed of horses to prevent the evils," said Julius.

"*You* would, but—My boy, I suppose this is the right view for a clergyman, but it will never do to force it here. You will lose all influence if you are over-strained."

"Was St. Chrysostom over-strained about the hippodrome?" said Julius, thoughtfully.

Mrs. Poyntsett looked at him as he leant upon the chimney-piece. Here was another son gone, in a different way, beyond her reach. She had seen comparatively little of him since his University days; and though always a good and conscientious person, there had been nothing to draw her out of secular modes of thought; nor had she any connection with the clerical world, so that she had not, as it were, gone along with the tone of mind that she had perceived in him.

He did not return to the subject, and they were soon joined by his elder brother. At the first opportunity after dinner, Frank got Rosamond up into a corner with a would-be indifferent "So you met Miss Vivian. What did you think of her?"

Rosamond's intuition saw what she was required to think, and being experienced in raving brothers, she praised the fine face and figure so as to find the way to his heart.

"I am so glad you met her in that way. Even Julius must be convinced. Was not he delighted?"

"I think she grew upon him."

"And now neither of you will be warped. It is so very strange in my mother, generally the kindest, most open-hearted woman in the world, to distrust and bear a grudge against them all for the son's dissipation—just as if that affected the ladies of a family!"

"I did not think it was entirely on his account," said Rosamond.

"Old stories of flirtation!" said Frank, scornfully; "but what are they to be cast up against a woman in her widowhood? It is so utterly unlike mother, I can't understand it."

"Would not the natural conclusion be that she knew more, and had her reasons?"

"I tell you, Rosamond, I know them infinitely better than she does. She never saw them since Lady Tyrrell's marriage, when Eleonora was a mere child; now I saw a great deal of them at Rockpier last year. There was poor Jamie Armstrong sent down to spend the winter on the south coast; and as none of his own people could be with him, we—his Oxford friends, I mean—took turns to come to him; and as I had just gone up for my degree, I had the most time. The Vivians had been living there ever since they went on poor Emily's account. They did not like to leave the place where she died you see; and Lady Tyrrell had joined them after her husband's death. Such a pleasant house! no regular gaieties, of course, but a few friends in a quiet way—music and charades, and so forth. Every one knew everybody there; not a bit of our stiff county ways, but meeting all day long in the most sociable manner."

"Oh yes, I know the style of place."

"One gets better acquainted in a week than one does in seven years in a place like this," proceeded Frank. "And you may tell Julius to ask any of the clerics if Lenore was not a perfect darling with the Vicar and his wife, and her sister too; and Rockpier is a regular tip-top place for Church, you know. I'm sure it was enough to make a fellow good for life, just to see Eleonora walking up the aisle with that sweet face of hers, looking more like heaven than earth."

Rosamond made reply enough to set him off again. "Lady Tyrrell would have been content to stay there for ever, she told me, but she thought it too confined a range for Eleonora; there was no formation of character, though I don't see how it could have formed better; but Lady Tyrrell is a thoroughly careful motherly sister, and thought it right she should see a little of the world. So they broke up from Rockpier, and spent a year abroad; and now Lady Tyrrell is making great sacrifices to enable her father to come and live at home again. I must say it would be more neighbourly to welcome them a little more kindly!"

"I should think such agreeable people were sure to win their way."

"Ah! you don't know how impervious our style of old squire and squires can be! If even mother is not superior to the old prejudice, who will be? And it is *very* hard on a fellow; for three parts of my time is taken up by this eternal cramming—I should have no heart for it but for her—and I can't be going over to Sirenwood as I used to go to Rockpier, while my mother vexes herself about it, in her state. If she were up and about I should not mind, or she would know better; but what can they—Lenore, I mean—think of me, but that I am as bad as the rest?"

"Do you mean that anything has passed between you?"

"No, not with Lenore. Her sister spoke to me, and said it was not right when she had seen nothing but Rockpier; but she as good as promised to stand my friend. And when I get to the office, in two years, I shall have quite enough to begin upon, with what my mother allows us."

"Then you hope she will wait for that?"

"I feel sure of it—that is, if she is not annoyed by this abominable usage from my family. Oh! Rosamond, you will help us when you get into your own house, and you will get Julius to see it in a proper light. Mother trusts to him almost as much as to Raymond; but it is our misfortune to be so much younger that she can't believe us grown up."

"O, Frank," said Charlie, coming in, "here's Price come up about the puppies.—What, Rosamond, has he got hold of you? What a blessing for me! but I pity you."

Frank and Charlie went off together; and Julius was in the act of begging Cecil to illuminate a notice of the services, to be framed and put into the church porch, when Raymond came in from the other room to make up a whist-table for his mother. Rosamond gladly responded; but there was a slight accent of contempt in Cecil's voice, as she replied, "I never played a game at cards in my life."

"They are a great resource to my mother," said Raymond. "Anne, you are too tired to play?—No, Julius, the pack is not there; look in the drawer of the chiffonier."

Julius handed the list he had been jotting down to Cecil, and followed his brother, with his hands full of cards, unconscious of the expression of dismay, almost horror, with which Anne was gazing after him.

"Oh! let us be resolute!" she cried, as soon as the door was shut. "Do not let us touch the evil thing!"

"Cards?" said Cecil. "If Mrs. Poyntsett cannot be amused without them, I suppose we shall have to learn. I always heard she was such an intellectual woman."

"But we ought to resist sin, however painful it may be," said Anne, gathering strength; "nay, even if a minister sets the example of defection."

"You think it wicked," said Cecil. "Oh no, it is stupid and silly, and an absurd waste of time, but no more."

"Yes, it is," said Anne. "Cards are the bane of thousands."

"Oh yes, gambling and all that; but to play in the evening to amuse an invalid can have no harm in it."

"An invalid and aged woman ought to have her mind set upon better things," said Anne. "I shall not withdraw my testimony, and I hope you will not."

"I don't know," said Cecil. "You see I am expected to attend to Mrs. Poyntsett; and I have seen whist at Dunstone when any dull old person came there. What a troublesome crooked hand Julius writes—just like Greek! What's all this? So many services—four on Sunday, two every day, three on Wednesdays and Fridays! We never had anything like this at Dunstone."

"It is very superstitious," said Anne.

"Very superfluous, I should say," amended Cecil. "I am sure my father would consent to nothing of the kind. I shall speak to Raymond about it."

"Yes," said Anne; "it does seem terrible that a minister should try to make up for worldly amusements by a quantity of vain ceremonies."

"I wish you would not call him a minister, it sounds like a dissenter."

"I think ministers their best name, except pastors."

"Both are horrid alike," said Cecil. "I shall teach all the people to call Julius the Rector. That's better than Mr. Charnock—what Raymond ought to be."

Anne was struck dumb at this fearful display of worldliness; and Cecil betook herself to the piano, but the moment her husband appeared she showed him the list.

"He has cut out plenty of work," said Raymond, "but three of them must want a field for their energies."

"It is preposterous. I want you to speak to him about it."

"You are not expected to go to them all," Raymond made answer.

"Then there's no sense in having them," responded Cecil. "Evening services are very bad for the people, bringing them out late. You ought to tell him so."

"He is Rector, and I am not," said Raymond.

"Mr. Venn did nothing without papa's consent," exclaimed

"My dear Cecil, don't let your loyalty make a Harry the Eighth of your father," said Raymond; "the clergyman ought to be a free agent."

"You don't approve?"

"I don't approve or disapprove. It is not a matter I know anything about."

"But I assure you it has been all thought over at Dunstone."

"Come, my mother wants to go to bed, and you are keeping her waiting."

Cecil was silenced for the moment, but not daunted; for was it not the foremost duty of the lady of the manor to keep the clergyman in order, more especially when he was her own husband's younger brother? so she met her brother-in-law with "Julius, when I undertook that notice, I had no notion you were going to have so many services."

"Is there more than you have time to paint? Then Bindon can do it, or Jenny Bowater."

"No! it is not time or trouble; but I do not think such a number of services desirable."

"Indeed!" said he, looking amused.

"Yes. An over number of services frequented by no one only brings the Church into contempt. I heard papa say so. We only had regular Sunday and Saint's Day services, and I am sure Dunstone was quite as religious a place as there is any need to be."

"I am glad to hear it," said Julius, an odd look flickering about his face; "but as I am afraid Compton is not as religious a place as there is need to be, I must try, by your leave, all means of making it so. Good night."

He was gone, and Cecil was not sure that he had not presumed to laugh at her.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **A Sunday of Excitement**

Strangers in court do take her for the queen.—Shakespeare

The first Sunday of Julius Charnock's ministry was spent in an unexpected manner. In the darkness of the autumn morning there was a knock at the door, and a low hurried call in Anne's voice at the bedroom door: "Rosamond! Julius, pray look out! Isn't there a great fire somewhere?"

"Fire! Here?" cried Rosamond, springing up.

"No, not here. A great way off. You could beat it back."

Rosamond had by this time rushed to the window which looked out the wrong way, found her dressing-gown, and scrambled into it in the dark ere joining Anne in the gallery, from the end window of which the lurid light in the sky, with an occasional flame leaping up, was plainly visible. When Julius joined them he declared it to be at Willansborough, and set off to call up the coachman and despatch the fire-engine, his wife calling after him to send for the soldiers at Backsworth.

Frank and Charlie came rushing down in gratified excitement, declaring that it was tremendous—the church at least—and exulting in the attainment of their life-long ambition, the riding out on the fire-engine. Servants bustled about, exclaiming, tramping, or whisking on the stairs; and Raymond presently appeared to ask whether his mother were ill, and, when reassured on that score, hurrying to ascertain whether she were alarmed, before he started for the scene of action.

“Let me come and stay with her,” said Rosamond, a striking figure, in a scarlet dressing-gown, with a thick plait of black hair hanging down to her waist on either side.

“Thank you, it will be very kind,” said Raymond, running down before her, and meeting Susan waddling out in a fringe of curl-papers, for some mysterious instinct or echo had conveyed to her and her mistress that there was fire somewhere—perhaps at home. Mrs. Poyntsett was not a nervous woman, and from the time she saw her eldest son come in, all fright was over, and she could have borne to hear that the house over her head was burning, in the perfect trust that he would save her from all peril; nor had he any difficulty in committing her to Rosamond, when he hurried away to finish dressing and repair to the spot.

Nothing could be seen from her room, but the little ante-room between it and the drawing-room had an excellent view, as the ground fell away from it, and there was an opening among the trees.

“We must get you there!” exclaimed Rosamond, in her excitement, helping her into some garments, and then running out as she heard a step—“Here, Julius, help me;” and without more ado, the mother was transported between them to the broad low couch under the window, and there bestowed in a nest of pillows, shawls, and rugs, that seemed to grow up under Rosamond’s touch.

Then following Julius out into the hall as he met his brother, Rosamond clung to him, entreating, “Please, please don’t run into any dangerous places.”

“Never fear, dearest; I am not likely.”

“Don’t let him, pray!” she said, turning to Raymond. “Make him remember how blind he is.”

“I’ll take good care of him, Rosamond,” said the elder brother kindly; “I’m used to it.”

“And send for the ---th,” she added. “There is nothing like soldiers at a fire.”

“The glare must have given notice,” said Julius, “but we’ll send if needful. Let go, you foolish girl; I’m not leading a forlorn hope.”

Did Raymond, as he mounted his horse, turning from the contact of the white and black heads, admire the reasonableness of the Cecil who had never shown any fears for his safety, nor any tendency to run about the passages in her *robe de chambre*, though she was now dressing with all speed?

The women-folk had to depend on their own eyes for intelligence, for every male, not only of the household but of the village, between the ages of five and seventy, started for Wil’sbro’, and a good many females followed their example, including the cook and her suite.

However, Susan remained, to find her mistress flown, and in her fright, give Lady Rosamond as round a scolding as if she had been Charlie, for her rashness in attempting a transit, which Dr. Hayter had pronounced to be as much as her mistress’s life was worth. Having thus relieved her mind, and finding that Mrs. Poyntsett was really very comfortable, or else too eager and anxious to find out if she was not, the good woman applied herself to the making of coffee.

Anne and Cecil had found their way to the leads, and were thence summoned to partake of this hasty meal, after which they proposed going to look from the brow of the hill; and Mrs. Poyntsett insisted that Rosamond should not stay behind on her account; and, glad to appease the restlessness of anxiety, out went the ladies, to find the best view of the town,—usually a white object in the distance, but now blurred by smoke thick and black in the daylight, and now and then reddened by bursts of flame.

Anne had been reassured as to the need of beating out the fire and trampling down a place to isolate it, as in the bush-fires of her experience; and Rosamond related the achievements of the regiment in quenching many a conflagration in inflammable colonial cities.

It occurred to her that the best place whence to see it was the tower of the church, which, placed upon a little knoll, was standing out in full relief against the lurid light. She found the key at the sexton’s, and led the way up the broken stone stair to the trap-door, where they emerged on the leads, and, in spite of the cold wind and furious flapping of the flag above their heads, stood absorbed in the interest of the sight.

There was a black mass in the open space, whence rose fitful clouds of smoke, the remnants of the fire, which had there done its worst; and beyond was a smoky undefined outline, with tongues of flame darting up, then volumes of dense white smoke, denoting a rush of water from the engines. Black beings flitted about like ants round a disturbed nest; Rosamond hoped she detected some scarlet among them, and Cecil lamented over not having brought her opera-glass. Even without this, it was possible to make out two long lines of men between the fire and the river, and at times they fancied they heard the shouting, but the wind generally carried it away. The cold was bitter, and they had to hold together and keep a tight grip upon their garments

against the gusts that seemed to rock the tower; but they could not bear to turn away, though the clock beneath pealed out hour after hour; for still, as the flames were subdued in one place they broke out in another; but gradually smoke became predominant, and then grew thinner, and as some of the black specks began to straggle into the road as if returning to Compton, the desire to hear became more pressing than that to see, and the three ladies began to descend—a slow and weary process, cutting them off from the view, and lasting so long, that the road was no longer deserted when they finally emerged into the churchyard.

Young Mr. Bowater, grimed, dusty, hatless, and his hair on end, and Rollo following with his feathery tail singed, hurried up at once. "I'm not fit to touch, Lady Rosamond," as he showed a black hand, and bowed to the others.

"Where's Ju—where's my husband?" exclaimed Rosamond.

"Just behind, riding home with Raymond and the rest of them. Wasn't it a magnificent flare-up? But there was no loss of life; and this dog was of as much use as two men—carried whatever I told him."

"Good old man! You've suffered too!" said Rosamond. "Pah! you're like a singed horse; but never mind, you're a hero."

"And where is Mr. Charnock Poyntsett?" said Cecil, retreating from the dog, which her sisters-in-law were vehemently patting.

"He was arranging with the mayor. Church, paper-mills, and town-hall got the worst of it. It was well he came down; old Briggs, the mayor, lost his head, and Fuller never had one. Every one gave contrary orders till he came down, and then, didn't we work!"

The curate stretched his stalwart limbs, as if they were becoming sensible of the strain they had undergone.

"Did you say the church was burnt?" asked Cecil.

"Yes; and a very good thing too! Hideous place, where you couldn't do right if you died for it! The fire began there—stoves no doubt—and there it would have stopped if any one had had any sense; but there they would run and gape, and the more I tried to get them to form a chain and drench the warehouses, the more they wouldn't do it. And when the flame once got hold of the paper—did you see it?—it was not a thing to forget. I verily believe the whole town would have gone if the Charnocks hadn't come and got a little discipline into the asses. It was just life and death work, fighting the fire to hinder it from getting across Water Lane, and then it would have been all up with High Street. The tongues broke out like live things ready to lick up everything; and it was like killing dragons to go at them with the hose and buckets. I declare my arms are fit to drop out of their sockets. And the Rector devoted himself to carrying out bed-ridden old women. I forgot to tell you, Lady Rosamond, he has broken his—There now, I never meant to frighten you—broken his spectacles."

"You did it on purpose," she said, laughing at her own start.

"No, indeed, I did not."

"And is it quite out now?"

"Yes; when the Backsworth engines and the soldiers came up, it was like the Prussians at Waterloo."

"Oh, then it was done," said Rosamond. "Take care! my grandfather was in the Light Division."

"And my uncle in the Guards," said the curate. But before the Waterloo controversy could be pursued, four or five figures on horseback came round the knoll, and Raymond and Julius sprang off their horses, introducing the three officers who followed their example.

One was Rosamond's old acquaintance, the Colonel, a friend of her father; but she had little attention to spare for them till she had surveyed her husband, who looked nothing worse than exceedingly dusty, and at fault without his spectacles.

Inquiries were made for Frank and Charlie. They were walking home. They had worked gallantly. The flames were extinguished, but the engines must go on playing on them for some time longer. No lives lost, and very few casualties, but the paper-mills were entirely destroyed, and about twenty tenements, so that great distress was to be apprehended.

Such intelligence was being communicated as the party stood together in a group, when there was a light tinkling of bells, and two ladies in a light open carriage, drawn by two spirited ponies, dashed round the knoll; and at the moment something must have gone wrong with them, for there was a start, a pull, a call of "Raymond! Raymond!"

Throwing his bridle to Herbert Bowater, he sprang to the horses' heads.

"Mr. Poyntsett! Thank you! I beg your pardon," said the lady, recovering herself; and Rosamond instantly perceived that she must be Lady Tyrrell, for she was young-looking, very handsome, and in slight mourning; and her companion was Miss Vivian. Julius, holding his surviving glass to his eye, likewise stepped forward. "Thank you, it was so stupid," the lady ran on. "Is not there something wrong with the traces? I don't know how they got themselves harnessed, but there

was no keeping at home."

"I think all is right," said Raymond, gravely, making the examination over to a servant. "Let me introduce my wife, Lady Tyrrell."

The lady held out her hand. "I hope we shall be excellent neighbours.—My sister.—You remember little Lena," she added to the brothers. "She stole a march on us, I find. I heard of your encounter on Friday. It was too bad of you not to come in and let us send you home; I hope you did not get very wet, Lady Rosamond.—Ah! Mr. Strangeways, I did not know you were there," she proceeded, as the youngest of the officers accosted her; "come over and see us. You're better provided now; but come to luncheon any day. I am sure to be at home at half-past one; and I want so much to hear of your mother and sisters." And with a universal bow and smile she nourished her whip, her ponies jangled their bells, and the ladies vanished.

"Stunning pair that!" was young Strangeways' exclamation.

"Most beautiful!" murmured Cecil, in a low voice, as if she was quite dazzled. "You never said she was like that," she added reproachfully to Julius.

"Our encounter was in the dark," he answered.

"Oh, I did not mean the young one, but Lady Tyrrell. She is just like a gem we saw at Firenze—which was it?"

"Where?" said Raymond, bewildered.

"Firenze—Florence," she said, deigning to translate; and finding her own reply. "Ah, yes, the Medusa!" then, as more than one exclaimed in indignant dismay, she said, "No, not the Gorgon, but the beautiful winged head, with only two serpents on the brow and one coiled round the neck, and the pensive melancholy face."

"I know," said Julius, shortly; while the other gentlemen entered into an argument, some defending the beauty of the younger sister, some of the elder; and it lasted till they entered the park, where all were glad to partake of their well-earned meal, most of the gentlemen having been at work since dawn without sustenance, except a pull at the beer served out to the firemen.

Cecil was not at all shy, and was pleased to take her place as representative lady of the house; but somehow, though every one was civil and attentive to her, she found herself effaced by the more full-blown Rosamond, accustomed to the same world as the guests; and she could not help feeling the same sense of depression as when she had to yield the head of her father's table to her step-mother.

Nor could she have that going to church for the first time in state with her bridegroom she had professed to dread, but had really anticipated with complacency; for though Julius had bidden the bells to be rung for afternoon service, Raymond was obliged to go back to Wil'sbro' to make arrangements for the burnt-out families, and she had to go as lonely as Anne herself.

Lady Tyrrell and her sister were both at Compton Church, and overtook the three sisters-in-law as they were waiting to be joined by the Rector.

"We shall have to take shelter with you," said Lady Tyrrell, "poor burnt-out beings that we are."

"Do you belong to Wil'sbro'?" said Rosamond.

"Yes; St. Nicholas is an immense straggling parish, going four miles along the river. I don't know how we shall ever be able to go back again to poor old Mr. Fuller. You'll never get rid of us from Compton."

"I suppose they will set about rebuilding the church at once," said Cecil. "Of course they will form a committee, and put my husband on it."

"In the chair, no doubt," said Lady Tyrrell, in a tone that sounded to Rosamond sarcastic, but which evidently gratified Cecil. "But we will have a committee of our own, and you will have to preside, and patronize our bazaar. Of course you know all about them."

"Oh yes!" said Cecil, eagerly. "We have one every year for the Infirmary, only my father did not approve of my selling at a stall."

"Ah! quite right then, but you are a married woman now, and that is quite a different thing. The stall of the three brides. What an attraction! I shall come and talk about it when I make my call in full form! Good-bye again."

Cecil's balance was more than restored by this entire recognition to be prime lady-patroness of everything. To add to her satisfaction, when her husband came home to dinner, bringing with him both the curates, she found there was to be a meeting on Tuesday in the Assembly-room, of both sexes, to consider of the relief of the work-people, and that he would be glad to take her to it. Moreover, as it was to be strictly local, Rosamond was not needed there, though Raymond was not equally clear as to the Rector, since he believed that the St. Nicholas parishioners meant to ask the loan of Compton Poyntsett Church for one service on a Sunday.

"Then I shall keep out of the way," said Julius. "I do not want to have the request made to me in public."

"You do not mean to refuse?" said Cecil, with a sort of self-identification with her constituents.

"The people are welcome to attend as many of our services as they like; but there is no hour that I could give the church up to Mr. Fuller on a Sunday."

"Nor would the use of St. Nicholas be very edifying for our people," added Mr. Bindon.

His junior clenched it by saying with a laugh, "I should think not! Fancy old Fuller's rusty black gown up in our pulpit!"

"I rejoice to say that is burnt," rejoined Mr. Bindon.

"What bet will you take that a new one will be the first thing subscribed for?" said the deacon, bringing a certain grave look on the faces of both the elder clergy, and a horror-stricken one upon Anne's; while Cecil pronounced her inevitable dictum, that at Dunstone Mr. Venn always preached in a gown, and "we" should never let him think of anything nonsensical.

Rosamond was provoked into a display of her solitary bit of ecclesiastical knowledge—"A friar's gown, the most Popish vestment in the church."

Cecil, thoroughly angered, flushed up to the eyes and bit her lips, unable to find a reply, while all the gentlemen laughed. Frank asked if it were really so, and Mr. Bindon made the well-known explanation that the Geneva gown was neither more nor less than the monk's frock.

"I shall write and ask Mr. Venn," gasped Cecil; but her husband stifled the sound by saying, "I saw little Pettitt, Julius, this afternoon, overwhelmed with gratitude to you for all the care you took of his old mother, and all his waxen busts."

"Ah! by the bye!" said Charlie, "I did meet the Rector staggering out, with the fascinating lady with the long eyelashes in one arm, and the moustached hero in the other."

"There was no pacifying the old lady without," said Julius. "I had just coaxed her to the door, when she fell to wringing her hands. Ah! those lovely models, that were worth thirty shillings each, with natural hair—that they should be destroyed! If the heat or the water did but come near them, Adolphus would never get over it. I could only pacify her by promising to go back for these idols of his heart as soon as she was safe; and after all, I had to dash at them through the glass, and that was the end of my spectacles."

"Where was Pettitt himself?"

"Well employed, poor little fellow, saving the people in those three cottages of his. No one supposed his shop in danger, but the fire took a sudden freak and came down Long Street; and though the house is standing, it had to be emptied and deluged with water to save it. I never knew Pettitt had a mother till I found her mounting guard, like one distracted, over her son's bottles of perfumery."

"And dyes?" murmured Raymond under his breath; but Frank caught the sound, and said, "Ah, Julius! don't I remember his inveigling you into coming out with scarlet hair?"

"I don't think I've seen him since," said Julius, laughing. "I believe he couldn't resist such an opportunity of practising his art. And for my part, I must say for myself, that it was in our first holidays, and Raymond and Miles had been black and blue the whole half-year from having fought my battles whenever I was called either 'Bunny' or 'Grandfather.' So when he assured me he could turn my hair to as sweet a raven-black as Master Poyntsett's, I thought it would be pleasing to all, forgetting that he could not dye my eyes, and that their effect would have been some degrees more comical."

"For shame, Julius!" said Rosamond. "Don't you know that one afternoon, when Nora had cried for forty minutes over her sum, she declared that she wanted to make her eyes as beautiful as Mr. Charnock's. Well, what was the effect?"

"Startling," said Raymond. "He came down in shades of every kind of crimson and scarlet. A fearful object, with his pink-and-white face glowing under it."

"And what I had to undergo from Susan!" added Julius. "She washed me, and soaped me, and rubbed me, till I felt as if all the threshing-machines in the county were about my head, lecturing me all the time on the profanity of flying against Scripture by trying to alter one's hair from what Providence had made it. Nothing would do; her soap only turned it into shades of lemon and primrose. I was fain to let her shave my head as if I had a brain fever; and I was so horribly ashamed for years after, that I don't think I have set foot in Long Street since till to-day."

"Pettitt is a queer little fellow," said Herbert. "The most truculent little Radical to hear him talk, and yet staunch in his votes, for he can't go against those whose hair he has cut off from time immemorial."

"I hope he has not lost much," said Julius.

"His tenements are down, but they were insured; and as to his stock, he says he owes its safety entirely to you, Julius. I think he would present you with both his models as a testimonial, if you could only take them," said Raymond.

Cecil had neither spoken nor laughed through all this. She was nursing her wrath; and after

marching out of the dining-room, lay in wait to intercept her husband, and when she had claimed his attention, began, "Rosamond ought not to be allowed to say such things."

"What things?"

"Speaking in that improper way about a gown."

"She seems to have said what was the fact."

"It can't be! It is preposterous! I never heard it before."

"Nor I; but Bindon evidently is up in those matters."

"It was only to support Rosamond; and I am quite sure she said it out of mere opposition to me. You ought to speak to Julius."

"About what?" said Raymond.

"Her laughing whenever I mention Dunstone, and tell them the proper way of doing things."

"There may be different opinions about the proper way of doing things." Then as she opened her eyes in wonder and rebuke, he continued, in his elder-brotherly tone of kindness, "You know I told you already that you had better not interfere in matters concerning his church and parish."

"We always managed things at Dunstone."

Hang Dunstone! was with some difficulty suppressed; but in an extra gentle voice Raymond said, "Your father did what he thought his duty, but I do not think it mine, nor yours, to direct Julius in clerical matters. It can only lead to disputes, and I will not have them."

"It is Rosamond. I'm sure I don't dispute."

"Listen, Cecil!" he said. "I can see that your position may be trying, in these close quarters with a younger brother's wife with more age and rank than yourself."

"That is nothing. An Irish earl, and a Charnock of Dunstone!"

"Dunstone will be more respected if you keep it in the background," he said, holding in stronger words with great difficulty. "Once for all, you have your own place and duties, and Rosamond has hers. If you meddle in them, nothing but annoyance can come of it; and remember, I cannot be appealed to in questions between you and her. Julius and I have gone on these nine-and-twenty years without a cloud between us, and I'm sure you would not wish to bring one now."

Wherewith he left her bewildered. She did not perceive that he was too impartial for a lover, but she had a general sense that she had come into a rebellious world, where Dunstone and Dunstone's daughter were of no account, and her most cherished notions disputed. What was the lady of the manor to do but to superintend the church, parsonage, and parish generally? Not her duty? She had never heard of such a thing, nor did she credit it. Papa would come home, make these degenerate Charnocks hear reason, and set all to rights.

## CHAPTER VI

### Wedding Visits

Young Mrs. Charnock Poyntsett had plenty of elasticity, and her rebuffs were less present to her mind in the morning than to that of her husband, who had been really concerned to have to inflict an expostulation; and he was doubly kind, almost deferential, giving the admiration and attention he felt incumbent on him to the tasteful arrangements of her wedding presents in her own sitting-room.

"And this clock I am going to have in the drawing-room, and these Salvati glasses. Then, when I have moved out the piano, I shall put the sofa in its place, and my own little table, with my pretty Florentine ornaments."

Raymond again looked annoyed. "Have you spoken to my mother?" he said.

"No; she never goes there."

"Not now, but if ever she can bear any move it will be her first change, and I should not like to interfere with her arrangements."

"She could never have been a musician, to let the piano stand against the wall. I shall never be able to play."

"Perhaps that might be contrived," said Raymond, kindly. "*Here* you know is your own domain, where you can do as you please."

"Yes; but I am expected to play in the evening. Look at all those things. I had kept the choicest for the drawing-room, and it is such a pity to hide them all up here."



Raymond felt for the mortification, and was unwilling to cross her again, so he said, "I will ask whether my mother would object to having the piano moved."

"This morning?"

"After eleven o'clock—I never disturb her sooner; but you shall hear before I go to Backsworth."

"An hour lost," thought Cecil; but she was too well bred to grumble, and she had her great work to carry on of copying and illustrating her journal.

Mrs. Poyntsett readily consented. "Oh yes, my dear, let her do whatever she likes. Don't let me be a bugbear. A girl is never at home till she has had her will of the furniture. I think she will find that moving out the piano betrays the fading of the rest of the paper, but that is her affair. She is free to do just as she likes. I dare say the place does look antediluvian to young eyes."

So Raymond was the bearer of his mother's full permission; and Cecil presided with great energy over the alterations, which she carried out by the aid of the younger servants, to the great disgust of their seniors. She expected the acclamations of her contemporaries; but it happened that the first of them to cross the room was Julius, on his way to his mother's room after luncheon, and he, having on a pair of make-shift glasses, till the right kind could be procured from London, was unprepared for obstacles in familiar regions, stumbled over an ottoman, and upset a table with the breakage of a vase.

He apologized, with much regret; but the younger brothers made an outcry. "What has come to the place? Here's the table all over everything!"

"And where are the bronzes?"

"And the humming-birds? Miles's birds, that he brought home after his first voyage."

"And the clock with the two jolly little Cupids? Don't you remember Miles and Will Bowater dressing them up for men-of-war's men? Mother could not bring herself to have them undressed for a year, and all the time the clock struck nohow!"

"This is an anatomical study instead of a clock," lamented Frank. "I say, Cecil, do you like your friends to sit in their bones, like Sydney Smith?"

"I never saw such a stupid old set of conservatives!" broke in Rosamond, feeling for Cecil's mortification. "In an unprejudiced eye the room looks infinitely better, quite revived! You ought to be much obliged to Cecil for letting you see all her beautiful things."

"Why don't you favour us with yours?" said Charlie.

"I know better! Mine aren't fit to wipe the shoes of Cecil's! When I get into the Rectory you'll see how hideous they are!" said Rosamond, with the merriest complacency. "Couvre-pieds to set your teeth on edge, from the non-commissioned officers' wives; and the awfulest banner-screen you ever saw, worked by the drum-major's own hands, with Her Majesty's arms on one side, and the De Courcy ones on the other, and glass eyes like stuffed birds' to the lion and unicorn. We nearly expired from suppressed laughter under the presentation."

Then she went round, extorting from the lads admiration for Cecil's really beautiful properties, and winning gratitude for her own cordial praise, though it was not the artistic appreciation they deserved. Indeed, Cecil yielded to the general vote for the restoration of the humming-birds, allowing that, though she did not like stuffed birds in a drawing-room, she would not have banished them if she had known their history.

This lasted till Charlie spied a carriage coming up the drive, which could be seen a long way off, so that there was the opportunity for a general *saute qui peut*. Cecil represented that Rosamond ought to stay and receive her bridal visits; but she was unpersuadable. "Oh no! I leave all that for you! My time will come when I get into the Rectory. We are going in the dog-cart to the other end of the parish.—What's its name—Squattlesea Marsh, Julius?"

"Squattlesford!" said Charlie. "If Julius means to drive you, look out for your neck!"

"No, it's the other way, I'm going to drive Julius!—Come along, or we shall be caught!"

Cecil stood her ground, as did Anne, who was too weary and indifferent to retreat, and Frank, who had taken another view of the carriage as it came nearer.

"I must apologize for having brought nothing but my father's card," said Lady Tyrrell, entering with her sister, and shaking hands: "there's no such thing as dragging him out for a morning call."

"And Mr. Charnock Poyntsett is not at home," replied Cecil. "He found so much county business waiting for him, that he had to go to Backsworth."

"It is the better opportunity for a little private caucus with you," returned Lady Tyrrell, "before the meeting to-morrow. I rather fancy the gentlemen have one of their own."

"Some are to dine here to-night," said Cecil.

"We ladies had better be prepared with our proposals," said Lady Tyrrell.

At the same time Frank drew near Miss Vivian with a large book, saying, "These are the photographs you wished to see."

He placed the book on the ottoman, and would thus have secured a sort of *tête-à-tête*; but Eleonora did not choose to leave Mrs Miles Charnock out, and handed her each photograph in turn, but could only elicit a cold languid "Thank you." To Anne's untrained eye these triumphs of architecture were only so many dull representations of 'Roman Catholic churches,' and she would much rather have listened to the charitable plans of the other two ladies, for the houseless factory women of Wil'sbro'.

The bazaar, Lady Tyrrell said, must be first started by the Member's wife; and there should be an innermost committee, of not more than three, to dispose of stalls and make arrangements.

"You must be one," said Cecil. "I know no one yet."

"You will, long before it comes off. In fact, I am as great a stranger as yourself. Ah! there's an opportunity!" as the bell pealed. "The Bowaters, very likely; I saw their Noah's ark as I passed the Poyntsett Arms, with the horses taken out. I wonder how many are coming—worthy folks!"

Which evidently meant insufferable bores.

"Is there not a daughter?" asked Cecil.

"You need not use the singular, though, by the bye, most of them are married."

"Oh, pray stay!" entreated Cecil, as there were signs of leave-taking.

"I should do you no good. You'll soon learn that I am a sort of Loki among the Asagötter."

Cecil laughed, but had time to resume her somewhat prim dignity before the lengthened disembarkation was over, and after all, produced only four persons; but then none were small—Mrs. Bowater was a harsh matron, Mr. Bowater a big comely squire, the daughters both tall, one with an honest open face much like Herbert's, only with rather less youth and more intelligence, the other a bright dark glowing gipsy-faced young girl.

Eleonora Vivian, hitherto gravely stiff and reserved, to poor Frank's evident chagrin, at once flashed into animation, and met the elder Miss Bowater with outstretched hands, receiving a warm kiss. At the same time Mr. Bowater despatched Frank to see whether his mother could admit a visitor; and Lady Tyrrell observed, "Ah! I was about to make the same petition; but I will cede to older friends, for so I suppose I must call you, Mr. Bowater—though my acquaintance is of long standing enough!"

And she put on a most charming smile, which Mr. Bowater received with something inarticulate that might be regarded as a polite form of 'fudge,' which made Cecil think him a horribly rude old man, and evidently discomposed his wife very much.

Frank brought back his mother's welcome to the Squire; but by this time Eleonora and Miss Bowater had drawn together into a window, in so close and earnest a conversation that he could not break into it, and with almost visible reluctance began to talk to the younger sister, who on her side was desirous of joining in the bazaar discussion, which had been started again in full force; until there was a fresh influx of visitors, when Lady Tyrrell decidedly took leave with her sister, and Frank escorted them to their carriage, and returned no more.

In the new shuffling of partners, the elder Miss Bowater found herself close to Anne, and at once inquired warmly for Miles, with knowledge and interest in naval affairs derived from a sailor brother, Miles's chief friend and messmate in his training and earlier voyages. There was something in Joanna Bowater's manner that always unlocked hearts, and Anne was soon speaking without her fence of repellant stiffness and reserve. Certainly Miles was loved by his mother and brothers more than he could be by an old playfellow and sisterly friend, and yet there was something in Joanna's tone that gave Anne a sense of fellow-feeling, as if she had met a countrywoman in this land of strangers; and she even told how Miles had thought it right to send her home, thinking that she might be a comfort to his mother. "And not knowing all that was going to happen!" said poor Anne, with an irrepressible sigh, both for her own blighted hopes, and for the whirl into which her sore heart had fallen.

"I think you will be," said Joanna, brightly; "though it must be strange coming on so many. Dear Mrs. Poyntsett is so kind!"

"Yes," said Anne, coldly.

"Ah! you don't know her yet. And Lady Rosamond! She is delightful!"

"Have you seen her!"

"We met them just now in the village, but my brother is enchanted. And do you know what was Julius's first introduction to her? It was at a great school-feast, where they had the regimental children as well as the town ones. A poor little boy went off in an epileptic fit, and Julius found her holding him, with her own hand in his mouth to hinder the locking of the teeth. He said her fingers were bitten almost to the bone, but she made quite light of it."

"That was nice!" said Anne; but then, with a startled glance, and in an undertone, she added, "Are they Christians?"

Joanna Bowater paused for a moment between dismay and desire for consideration, and in that moment her father called to her, "Jenny, do you remember the dimensions of those cottages in Queckett's Lane?" and she had to come and serve for his memory, while he was indoctrinating a younger squire with the duties of a landlord.

Meanwhile Mrs. Bowater was, for the tenth time, consulting her old friend upon Mrs. Hornblower's capabilities of taking care of Herbert, and betraying a little disappointment that his first sermon had not yet been heard; and when his voice was complimented, she hoped Julius would spare it—too much exertion could not be good for so young a man, and though dear Herbert looked so strong, no one would believe how much sleep he required. Then she observed, "We found Camilla Vivian—Lady Tyrrell I mean—calling. Have you seen her?"

"No."

"Well, she really seems improved!"

"Mr. Bowater has been telling me she is handsomer than ever!"

"Oh yes! That's all gentlemen think of; but I meant in other ways. She seems full of the rebuilding of St. Nicholas, and to be making great friends with your new daughter. You don't think," lowering her voice, "that Raymond would have any objection to meeting her?"

"Certainly not!"

"I did not suppose he would, but I thought I would just ask you. It would be rather marked not to invite him for the 3rd, you know; and Jenny was always so fond of poor Emily, kept up a correspondence with her to the last. It was the first time she had met the little one since they came back. Not that she is little now, she is very tall and quite handsome *even* by the side of Edith. We just saw Lady Rosamond—a sweet face—and Herbert perfectly raves about her!"

"She is a most unselfish warm-hearted creature!" said Mrs. Poyntsett.

"I am so glad! And Miles's wife, I hope she will come. Poor thing, she looks very poorly."

"Yes, I am very anxious about her. If she is not better in a day or two, I shall insist on her having advice."

"Poor dear, I don't wonder! But she had better come to Strawyers; Jenny will cheer her if any one can, and we shall have a nice lively party, I hope! She will only mope the more if she never goes out."

"I am afraid she is hardly equal to it; besides, poor child," added Mrs. Poyntsett, "she seems to have been strictly brought up, and to think our ways rather shocking; and Miles wrote to me not to press her to go into society till he comes home."

"Ah! well, I call that a mistake!" puffed out good-humoured Mrs. Bowater. "Very bad for the poor girl's spirits. By the bye, I hope Julius does not object to Herbert's dancing—not at a public ball, you know, but at home—for if he did, I would try to arrange something else, it would be so hard for the poor boy to have to look on."

"I don't know, I don't think he could," said the mother, considering.

"You see, we thought of a dinner-party for as many as possible. Frank and Charlie won't mind dining in the schoolroom, I know, and having the rest for a dance in the evening; but if Julius did think it unclerical—Jenny says he won't, and papa laughs, and says, 'Poh! poh! Julius is no fool;' but people are so much more particular than they used to be, and I would not get the dear boy into a scrape for the world."

Mrs. Poyntsett undertook to ascertain his opinions on this knotty point, and to let her know if they were adverse; and then she begged for a visit from Jenny, whose brother had no accommodation for her in his lodgings. She could not be spared till after the entertainment on the 3rd, nor till a visit from her married sister was over; but afterwards, her mother was delighted that she should come and look after Herbert, who seemed as much on the maternal mind as if he had not batted his way through Eton, and boated it through Oxford.

Mrs. Poyntsett obtained her word with Julius in good time that evening. He laughed a little. "Poor Herbs! when will people understand that it is the spirit of the thing, the pursuit, not the individual chance participation in any particular amusement, that is unclerical, as they are pleased to call it?"

"What do you think of Herbert?"

"A boy, and a very nice boy; but if he doesn't get his healthful play somehow, he will burst out like a closed boiler some day."

"A muscular Christian on your hands?"

"Not theoretically, for he has been well taught; but it's a great animal that needs to work off its steam, and if I had known it, I would not have undertaken the problem of letting him do that, without setting up bad habits, or scandalizing the parish and Bindon—who is young the other way, and has no toleration. We had this morning's service in a state of siege from all the dogs. Herbert thought he had shut them safely up, but they were all at his heels in the churchyard; and

though he rated them home, and shut all the doors, we heard them whining and scratching at each in turn."

"I thought I should have died of it," said Rosamond, entering. "His face grew red enough to set his surplice on fire, and Mr. Bindon glared at him, and he missed his verse in the Psalm; for there was the bull terrier, crouching and looking abject at the vestry-door, just restrained by his eye from coming further."

"What shall you do about it, Julius?" asked his mother, much amused.

"Oh, that will remedy itself. All dogs learn to understand the bell."

And then the others began to drop in, and were told of the invitation that was coming.

"I say, Rosamond," cried Charlie, "can brothers and sisters-in-law dance together?"

"That depends on how the brothers-in-law dance," returned Rosamond. "Some one, for pity's sake, play a waltz!—Come along Charlie! the hall is a sweet place for it!—Whistle, Julius!—Frank, whistle!"

And away she whirled. Frank, holding out his hands, was to his surprise accepted by Cecil, and disappeared with her into the hall. Julius stood by the mantelpiece, with the first shadow on his brow his mother had seen since his arrival. Presently he spoke in a defensive apologetic tone: "She has always been used to this style of thing."

"Most naturally," said the mother.

"Not that they ever did more than their position required, and Lady Rathforlane is a truly careful mother. Of course some things might startle you stay-at-home people; but in all essentials—"

"I see what you mean."

"And what seems like rattle is habit."

"Simple *gaieté de cœur!*"

"So it is better to acquiesce till it subsides of itself. You see it is hard, after such a life of change and variety, to settle down into a country parsonage."

"What are you saying there?" said Rosamond, tripping in out of breath.

"That I don't know how you are to put up with a pink-eyed parson, and a hum-drum life," said Julius, holding out a caressing hand.

"Now that's hard," pleaded she; "only because I took a frolic with Baby Charles! I say, Julius, shall we give it up altogether and stay at home like good children? I believe that is what would suit the told Rabbit much better than his kid gloves,"—and her sweet face looked up at him with a meek candid gaze.

"No," he said, "that would not do. The Bowaters are our oldest friends. But, Rosie, as you *are* a clergyman's wife, could you not give up round dances?"

"Oh no, no! That's too bad. I'd rather never go to a dance at all, than sit still, or be elbowed about in the square dances. You never told me you expected that!"—and her tones were of a child petulant at injustice.

"Suppose," he said, as a delightful solution, "you only gratified Frank and Charlie by waltzing with them."

She burst into a ringing laugh. "My brothers-in-law! How very ridiculous! Suppose you included the curates?"

"You know what I mean," he said gravely.

"Oh, bother the parson's wife! Haven't I seen them figuring away by scores? Did we ever have a regimental ball that they were not the keenest after?"

"So they get themselves talked of!" said Julius, as Anne's quiet entrance broke up the dialogue.

Mrs. Poyntsett had listened, glad there was no appeal to her, conscious that she did not understand the merits of the case, and while she doubted whether her eldest son had love enough, somewhat afraid lest his brother had not rather too much for the good of his lawful supremacy.

## CHAPTER VII

### Unfruitful Suggestions

"Raymond! Can you spare me a moment before you go into your mother's room?"

It was Rosamond who, to his surprise, as he was about to go down-stairs, met him and drew him

into her apartment—his mother's own dressing-room, which he had not entered since the accident.

"Is anything the matter?" he said, thinking that Julius might have spared him from complaints of Cecil.

"Oh no! only one never can speak to you, and Julius told me that you could tell me about Mrs. Poyntsett. I can't help thinking she could be moved more than she is." Then, as he was beginning to speak, "Do you know that, the morning of the fire, I carried her with only one of the maids to the couch under the tent-room window? Susan was frightened out of her wits, but she was not a bit the worse for it."

"Ah! that was excitement."

"But if it did not hurt her then, why should it hurt her again? There's old General M'Kinnon, my father's old friend, who runs about everywhere in a wheeled-chair with a leg-rest; and I can't think why she should not do the same."

Raymond smiled kindly on her, but rather sadly; perhaps he was recollecting his morning's talk about the occupancy of the drawing-room. "You know it is her spine," he said.

"So it is with him. His horse rolled over him at Sebastopol, and he has never walked since. I wanted to write to Mary M'Kinnon; but Julius said I had better talk to you, because he was only at home for a fortnight, when she was at the worst, and you knew more about it."

"Yes," said Raymond, understanding more than the Irish tongue fully expressed. "I never saw a woman sit better than she did, and she looked as young and light in the saddle as you could, till that day, when, after the rains, the bank where the bridle-path to Squattles End was built up, gave way with the horse's feet, and down she went twenty feet, and was under the horse when Miles and I got down to her! We brought her on a mattress to that room, not knowing whether she were alive; and she has never moved out of it! It was agony to her to be touched."

"Yes but it can't be that now. Was not that three years ago?"

"Not so much. Two and a half. We had Hayter down to see her, and he said perfect rest was the only chance for her."

"And has not he seen her lately?"

"He died last winter; and old Worth, who comes in once a week to look at her, is not fit for more than a little watching and attention. I dare say we all have learnt to acquiesce too much in her present state, and that more might be done. You see she has never had a lady's care, except now and then Jenny Bowater's."

"I do feel sure she could bear more now," said Rosamond, eagerly. "It would be such a thing if she could only be moved about that down-stairs floor."

"And be with us at meals and in the evening," said Raymond, his face lightening up. "Thank you, Rosamond!"

"I'll write to Mary M'Kinnon to-morrow, to ask about the chair," cried Rosamond; and Raymond, hearing the door-bell, hurried down, to find his wife standing alone over the drawing-room fire, not very complacent.

"Where have you been, Raymond?"

"I was talking to Rosamond. She has seen a chair on which it might be possible to move my mother about on this floor."

"I thought—" Cecil flushed. She was on the point of saying she thought Rosamond was not to interfere in her department any more than she in Rosamond's; but she kept it back, and changed it into "Surely the doctor and nurses must know best."

"A fresh eye often makes a difference," said Raymond. "To have her among us again—!" but he was cut short by the announcement of Mr. and Miss Fuller.

"Poor Mr. Fuller," as every one called him, was the incumbent of St. Nicholas, Willansborough, a college living always passed by the knowing old bachelor fellows, and as regularly proving a delusion to the first junior in haste for a wife. Twenty-five years ago Mr. Fuller had married upon this, which, as Mr. Bindon said, was rather a reason for not marrying—a town with few gentry, and a petty unthriving manufacture, needing an enormous amount of energy to work it properly, and getting—Mr. Fuller, with force yearly decreasing under the pressure of a sickly wife, ill-educated, unsatisfactory sons, and unhealthy, aimless daughters. Of late some assistance had been obtained, but only from Mr. Driver, the 'coach' or cramming tutor, who was directing the studies of Frank and half a dozen more youths, and his aid was strictly limited to a share in the Sunday services.

The eldest daughter accompanied the Vicar. Her mother had not health (or perhaps clothes) for a dinner-party, and it was the first time she had ever been in the house. Very shy and in much awe she was! Cecil viewed her as a constituent, and was elaborately civil and patronizing, doing the honours of all the photographs and illustrations on which she could lay hands, and only eliciting alternately 'Very nice,' and 'How sweet!' A little more was made of the alarms of the

fire, and the preparations for clearing the house, and there was a further thaw about the bazaar. It would be such a relief from plain work, and she could get some lovely patterns from her cousin who had a missionary basket; but as to the burnt-out families, the little knowledge or interest she seemed to have about them was rather astounding, unless, as Rosamond suspected, she thought it 'shop,' and uninteresting to the great ladies of Compton-Poynsett Hall.

Meanwhile, her father made the apprehended request for the loan of Compton Church during the intervals of services, and when the Rector explained how brief those intervals would be, looked astonished, and dryly complimented him on his energy and his staff, somewhat as if the new broom were at the bottom of these congratulations.

The schools were to be used for services until a temporary iron church could be obtained, for which Julius, to make up for his churlishness in withholding his own church, made the handsomer donation, and held out hopes of buying it afterwards for the use of Squattles End. Then, having Mr. Fuller's ear to himself, he ventured to say, though cautiously, as to one who had been a clergyman before he was born, "I wish it were possible to dispense with this bazaar."

Mr. Fuller shrugged his shoulders. "If every one subscribed in the style of this family."

"They would be more likely to do so, without the appeal to secondary motives."

"Try them," said the elder man.

"Exactly what I want to do. I would put up the four walls, begin with what you get from the insurance, a weekly offertory, and add improvements as means came in. This is not visionary. I have seen proof of its success."

"It may serve in new-fashioned city missions, but in an old-established place like this it would create nothing but offence. When you have been in Orders as long as I have, you will find that there is nothing for it but to let people do what they will, not what one thinks best."

"Mr. Fuller," said Julius, eagerly, "will you try an experiment? Drop this bazaar, and I promise you our collection every Sunday evening for the year, giving notice of it to my people, and to such of yours as may be present."

"I do not despise your offer," said Mr. Fuller, laying his hand upon his arm. "You mean it kindly, and if I were in your place, or had only my own feelings to consider, I might attempt it. But it would be only mischievous to interfere with the bazaar. Lady Tyrrell—all the ladies, in fact—have set their minds on it, and if I objected there would instantly be a party cry against me, and that is the one thing I have always avoided."

His tone of superior wisdom, meek and depressed as he always was, tried the Rector's patience enough to make his forehead burn and bring out his white eyebrows in strong relief. "How about a blessing on the work?" he asked, suppressing so much that he hardly knew this was spoken aloud.

Again Mr. Fuller smiled. He had been a bit of a humorist when he was an Oxford don. "Speak of that to Briggs," he said, "and he would answer, 'Cash for me, and the blessing may take care of itself.' As to the ladies—why, they deafen you about blessings on their humble efforts, and the widow's mite."

"Simply meaning that they want their amusement a little—"

"Buttered over," said Mr. Fuller, supplying the word. "Though you are hard on them, Charnock—I don't know about the fine ladies; but there are quiet folk who will work their fingers to the bone, and can do nothing else."

"That's true," said Julius; "and one would gladly find a safe outlet for their diligence."

"You do not trust to it for bringing the blessing," said Mr. Fuller in a tone that Julius liked even less than the mere hopeless faint-heartedness, for in it there was sarcasm on faith in aught but *f s. d.*

The two brothers held another discussion on this matter later that night, on the stairs, as they were on their way to their rooms.

"Won't you come to this meeting to-morrow, Julius?" asked Raymond.

"I don't see that I should be of any use, unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless you would make what seems to me the right proposal, and I could be any support in it."

"What's that?"

"To use the insurance to put up the mere shells and plain indispensable fittings of the church and town-hall, then make the drainage of Water Lane and Hall Street the first object for the rates, while the church is done by subscription and voluntary effort."

"You put the drainage first—even before the church?" said Raymond, smiling, with an elder brother's satisfaction in such an amount of common sense.

"Of course I do," said Julius. "An altar and four walls and chairs are all that ought to be sought for. Little good can be done to people's souls while their bodies are in the feverish discomfort of foul air and water. This is an opportunity not to be wasted, while all the houses are down, town-hall and all."

"The very thing I told Briggs and the others this morning," said Raymond; "but I could not get a hearing; they said there never had been any illness worth mentioning, and in fact scouted the whole matter, as people always do."

"Yes, they take it as a personal insult when you mention the odorous—or odious, savours sweet," said Julius. "I heard a good deal of that when we had the spell of cholera at St. Awdry's."

"I shall work on at it, and I trust to get it done in time," said Raymond; "but it will not be at once. The subject is too new to them, and the irritation it produces must subside before they will hear reason. Besides, the first thing is to employ and feed these paper-makers."

"Of course."

"That will pretty well absorb this first meeting. The ladies will manage that, I think; and when this is provided for, I will try what I can do at the committee; but there is no good in bringing it forward at this great public affair, when every ass can put in his word. Everything depends on whom they choose for the new mayor. If Whitlock comes in, there is some chance of sense and reason being heard. Good night."

As Raymond said, the more immediate object of the meeting fixed for the ensuing day, was to provide for the employment of the numerous women thrown out of employment by the destruction of the paper-mills. A subscription was in hand, but not adequate to the need; and moreover, it was far more expedient to let them maintain themselves.

How this was to be done was the question. Cecil told her husband that at Dunstone they made the women knit stockings; and he replied by recommending the suppression of Dunstone. How strange it was that what she had been used to consider as the source of honour should be here held in what seemed to her disesteem!

Lady Tyrrell's ponies were tinkling up to the door of the hotel where the meeting was to be held, and her gracious smile recalled Cecil's good-humour; Raymond saw them to their seats, and then had to go and take the chair himself on the platform—first, however, introducing his wife to such of the ladies present as he recollected.

She thought he wanted her to sit between melancholy white faced Mrs. Fuller and a bony spinster in a poke-bonnet whom he called Miss Slater; but Cecil, concluding that this last could have no vote, and that the Vicarage was secure, felt free to indulge herself by getting back to Lady Tyrrell, who had scarcely welcomed her before exclaiming, "Mrs. Duncombe, I did not know you were returned."

"I came back on the first news of your flare-up," said the newcomer. "I only came down this morning. I would not have missed this meeting for anything. It is a true woman's question. A fair muster, I see," looking round with her eye-glass, and bowing to several on the platform, especially to Raymond, who returned the bow rather stiffly.

"Ah! let me introduce you," said Lady Tyrrell. "Mrs. Raymond Charnock Poyntsett."

"I am very glad to see you embarked in the cause," said the lady, frankly holding out her hand. "May we often meet in the same manner, though I honestly tell you I'm not of your party; I should go dead against your husband if we only had a chance."

"Come, you need not be so aggressive," laughed Lady Tyrrell; "you haven't a vote yet. You are frightening Mrs. Poyntsett." It was true. Even Cecil Charnock was born too late to be one of the young ladies who, in the first decades of the reformed Parliament, used to look on a Liberal as a *lusus naturæ*, whom they hardly believed to be a gentleman. But a lady who would openly accost the Member's bride with a protest against his politics, was a being beyond her experience, and the contemplation fairly distracted her from her husband's oratory.

She would have taken Miss Slater for the strong-minded female far rather than this small slim person, with the complexion going with the yellower species of red hair and chignon, not unlike a gold-pheasant's, while the thin aquiline nose made Cecil think of Queen Elizabeth. The dress was a tight-fitting black silk, with a gorgeous many-coloured gold-embroidered oriental mantle thrown loosely over it, and a Tyrolean hat, about as large as the pheasant's comb, tipped over her forehead, with cords and tassels of gold; and she made little restless movements and whispered remarks during the speeches.

There was to be a rate to renew the town-hall. The rebuilding of the paper-mills and dwelling-houses was fairly covered by the insurance; but the Vicar, in his diffident apologetic voice, stated that the church had been insufficiently insured, and moreover, that many more sittings were needed than the former building had contained. He then read the list of subscriptions already promised, expressed hopes of more coming in, invited ladies to take collecting cards, and added that he was happy to announce that the ladies of the congregation had come forward with all the beneficence of their sex, and raised a sum to supply a new set of robes.

Here the chairman glanced at his wife, but she was absorbed in watching Mrs. Duncombe's

restless hands; and the look was intercepted by Lady Tyrrell's eyes, which flashed back sympathetic amusement, with just such a glance as used to pass between them in old times; but the effect was to make the Member's face grave and impassive, and his eyes fix on the papers before him.

The next moment Cecil was ardently gazing at Mr. Fuller as he proceeded to his hopes of the bazaar to be held under the most distinguished patronage, and of which he spoke as if it were the subject of anticipations as sanguine as any the poor man could ever appear to indulge in. And there was, in fact, the greatest stamping and cheering there had yet been, perhaps in compliment to the M.P.'s young bride—at least, so Lady Tyrrell whispered, adding that everybody was trying to see her.

Then Mr. Charnock Poyntsett himself took up the exposition of the third branch of the subject, the support of the poor families thrown out of work at the beginning of winter. There could be no employment at the paper-mills till they were repaired; and after the heavy losses, they could not attempt to keep their people together by any payment. It had been suggested that the readiest way of meeting the difficulty, would be to employ the subscriptions already promised in laying in a stock of material to be made up into garments, and then dispose of them out to the women at their homes; and appointing a day once a week when the work should be received, the pay given, and fresh material supplied, by a party of volunteer ladies.

This was, in fact, what he had been instructed to propose by the kindly souls who ordinarily formed the St. Nicholas *bureau de charité*, who had instructed him to be their mouthpiece. There was due applause as the mayor seconded his resolution; but in the midst a clear, rather high-pitched voice rose up close to Cecil, saying, "Mr. Chairman, allow me to ask what sale is anticipated for these garments?"

"I am told that there is a demand for them among the poor themselves," said Raymond, judiciously concealing how much he was taken aback by this female interference.

"Allow me to differ. A permanent work society numbering a few women otherwise unemployed may find a sufficient sale in the neighbourhood under the patronage of charitable ladies; but when you throw in ninety-five or one hundred pair of hands depending on their work for their livelihood, the supply must necessarily soon go beyond any demand, even fictitious. It will not do to think of these women like fancy knitters or embroiderers whose work is skilled. Most of them can hardly mend their own clothes, and the utmost that can be expected of them is the roughest slop work."

"Do you wish any expedient to be proposed?" asked the chairman, in a sort of aside.

"Yes, I have one. I spent yesterday in collecting information."

"Will Captain Duncombe move it?" suggested Raymond.

"Oh no! he is not here. No, it is no use to instruct anybody; I will do it myself, if you please."

And before the astonished eyes of the meeting, the gold-pheasant hopped upon the platform, and with as much ease as if she had been Queen Bess dragooning her parliament, she gave what even the astounded gentlemen felt to be a sensible practical exposition of ways and means.

She had obtained the address of a warehouse ready to give such rough work as the women could be expected to do; but as they were unaccustomed to work at home, and were at present much crowded from the loss of so many houses, and could besides be little depended on for working well enough without superintendence, her plan was to hire a room, collect the women, and divide the superintendence between the ladies; who should give out the work, see that it was properly done, keep order, and the like. She finished off in full order, by moving a resolution to this effect.

There was a pause, and a little consultation among the gentlemen, ending by Raymond's absolutely telling Mr. Fuller that it was a very sensible practical arrangement, and that it *must* be seconded; which the Vicar accordingly did, and it was carried without opposition, as in truth nothing so good had been thought of; and the next thing was to name a committee of ladies, a treasurer and auditor of accounts. There would be no work on Saturdays, so if the ladies would each undertake half a day once a fortnight, the superintendence need not be a burthen.

Mrs. Duncombe and Miss Slater undertook the first start and preliminary arrangements, then each would take her half day in rotation. Lady Tyrrell and her sister undertook two, Cecil two more, and others were found to fill up the vacant space. The chairman moved a vote of thanks to the lady for her suggestion, which she acknowledged by a gracious bow, not without triumph; and the meeting broke up.

Some one asked after Captain Duncombe as she descended into private life. "There's a wonderful filly that absorbs all his attention. All Wil'sbro' might burn as long as Dark Hag thrives! When do I expect him? I don't know; it depends on Dark Hag," she said in a tone of superior good-natured irony, then gathered up the radiant mantle and tripped off along the central street of the little old-fashioned country town, with gravelled not paved side-walks.

"Isn't she very superior?" said Cecil, when her husband had put her on horseback.

"I suppose she is very clever."

"And she spoke capitally."



"If she were to speak. What would your father think of her?"

But for the first time Cecil's allegiance had experienced a certain shock. Some sort of pedestal had hitherto been needful to her existence; she was learning that Dunstone was an unrecognized elevation in this new country, and she had seen a woman attain to a pinnacle that almost dazzled her, by sheer resource and good sense.

All the discussion she afterwards heard did not tend to shake her opinion; Raymond recounted the adventure at his mother's kettle-drum, telling of his own astonishment at the little lady's assurance.

"I do not see why she should be censured," said Cecil. "You were all at a loss without her."

"She should have got her husband to speak for her," said Mrs. Poyntsett.

"He was not there."

"Then she should have instructed some other gentleman," said Mrs. Poyntsett. "A woman spoils all the effect of her doings by putting herself out of her proper place."

"Perfectly disgusting!" said Julius.

Cecil had decidedly not been disgusted, except by the present strong language; and not being ready at repartee, she was pleased when Rosamond exclaimed, "Ah! that's just what men like, to get instructed in private by us poor women, and then gain all the credit for originality."

"It is the right way," said the mother. "The woman has much power of working usefully and gaining information, but the one thing that is not required of her is to come forward in public."

"Very convenient for the man!" laughed Rosamond.

"And scarcely fair," said Cecil.

"Quite fair," said Rosamond, turning round, so that Cecil only now perceived that she had been speaking in jest. "Any woman who is worth a sixpence had rather help her husband to shine than shine herself."

"Besides," said Mrs. Poyntsett, "the delicate edges of true womanhood ought not to be frayed off by exposure in public."

"Yes," said Raymond. "The gain of an inferior power of man in public would be far from compensated by the loss in private of that which man can never supply."

"Granted," said Rosamond slyly though sleepily, "that it always is an inferior power of man, which it does not seem to have been in the actual case."

"It was a point on which she had special knowledge and information," said Mrs. Poyntsett.

"And you were forced to thank her," said Cecil.

"Yes, in common civility," said Raymond; "but it was as much as I could do to get it done, the position was a false one altogether."

"In fact, you were all jealous," said Rosamond.

At which everybody laughed, which was her sole intention; but Cecil, who had said so much less, really thought what Rosamond said in mere play. Those extorted thanks seemed to her a victory of her sex in a field she had never thought of; and though she had no desire to emulate the lady, and felt that a daughter of Dunstone must remember *noblesse oblige*, the focus of her enthusiasm was in an odd state of shifting.

## CHAPTER VIII

### Unsatisfactory

On the evening of the party at Strawyers, Mrs. Poyntsett lay on her sofa, thinking, with a trying recurrence, of that unfortunate and excellent German Dauphine, who was pronounced by the Duchess of Orleans to have died of her own stupidity.

After a fortnight had brought no improvement, but rather the reverse, to poor Anne's wan looks and feeble languid deportment, Mrs. Poyntsett had insisted on her seeing the doctor; and had been assured by him that there was nothing amiss, and that if Mrs Miles Charnock could only be roused and occupied she would be perfectly well, but that her pining and depression might so lower her tone as to have a serious effect on her health.

There was no hope of her husband's return for at least a year, likely eighteen months. What was to be done with her? What could be a more unpropitious fate than for a Colonial girl, used to an active life of exertion and usefulness, and trained to all domestic arts, to be set down in a great English household where there was really nothing for her to do, and usefulness or superintendence would have been interfering; besides, as Miles had thoughts of settling at the

Cape, English experience would serve her little.

She had not cultivation enough for any pursuit to interest her. She was not musical, could not draw; and when Mrs. Poyntsett had, by way of experiment, asked her to read aloud an hour a day, and selected the *Lives of the Lindsays*, as an unexceptionable and improving book, full of Scottish history, and even with African interest, she dutifully did her task as an attention to her invalid mother-in-law, but in a droning husky tone, finding it apparently as severe a penance as it was to her auditor.

The doctor's chief prescription was horse exercise; but what would a constitutional canter be to one accustomed to free rides through the Bush? And she would generally be alone; for even if Charlie, her nearest approach to an ally, had not been going away from home in a few weeks, it could not be expected that he could often ride with her.

It was plain that every one of the whole family was giving continual shocks to Mr. Pilgrim's disciple, even when they felt most innocent; and though the mother was sometimes disposed to be angry, sometimes to laugh at the little shudder and compression of the lips she began to know, she perceived what an addition this must be to the unhappiness of the poor lonely stranger.

"She must be set to some good work," thought Mrs. Poyntsett; "Julius might let her go to his old women. She might get on with them better than with the old women here. And there's Cecil's working affair, it would be just the thing to give her an object. I think I can get through this evening. I've made Susan bring my desk, with all Miles's letters from his first voyage. Shall I suppress the ball?"

Therewith Cecil made her entrance, in glossy white satin and deep lace, beautiful to behold, set off with rainbow glistening opals. She made a quiet complacent show of herself, as one not vain of fine clothes, but used to an affectionate family appreciation of her best attire; and it was the most friendly childlike bit of intimacy that had yet been attained between her and Mrs. Poyntsett.

And when she sat down to wait for the others, Mrs. Poyntsett ventured on telling her the prescription and her own perplexity, hoping for a voluntary offer to employ Anne at Willansborough; but Cecil only pitied her for having 'no resources'; and when Mrs. Poyntsett ventured to suggest finding a niche for her in the work-room, the answer was—"Our days are all disposed of."

"You have two, I think?"

"True; but it would never do for me to give up one of my times. If I seemed to slacken, every one else would."

"What will you do when the Session begins?"

"I shall make some arrangement. I do not think Anne could ever take my place; she would have no authority."

Anne herself here entered, took her knitting, and sat down, apparently unaware of the little pluming gesture by which Cecil unconsciously demanded attention to her bridal satin. One white-gloved gentleman after another dropped in, but none presumed on a remark; Jenkins announced the carriages; but Rosamond had not appeared, and after an excursion up-stairs, Julius returned, declaring that the first carriage must not wait for her, they would come afterwards in the van, for there was something amiss in the dress, she had not had it on since the wedding.

"And she came in so late," said Cecil.

"That was my fault," he said. "We came through the village to leave a message at the doctor's;" and he then insisted that the other pair should set off, taking Frank and Charlie, and prevent dinner from being kept waiting; at which the boys made faces, and declared that it was a dodge of his to join Jenny's party in the schoolroom, instead of the solemn dinner; but they were obliged to submit; and it was not till twenty minutes later, that in glided something white, with blue cashmere and swan's-down over it, moving, as usual, with languid grace.

"Poor Julius!" smiled Rosamond with her dawdling dignity. "Every single thing turned out a misfit! As it is, there's a monstrous hole in my glove, which demands the benevolent fiction of my having torn it by the way. There, one second for the effect!—Good-bye, dear Mrs. Poyntsett;—good-bye, Anne. Come, you monument of patience and resignation!"

For one moment she had slipped back her little mantle, then drawn it on, as, taking her husband's arm, she left the room; but that moment had set Anne's cheeks aflame, and left Mrs. Poyntsett in a startled state of uncertainty, hoping her glance had been mistaken, wondering what could have been *more* amiss, and feeling incapable of entering on the subject with that severe young judge, of narrow experience.

Never had her eldest son failed to come and bid her good night on his way to his own room: it was the great break in her long sleepless hours, and she used to call it a reversal of the relations of those days when he used to watch for her kiss on her way to bed. Nor did he fail her now, but came and stood over her with his fragmentary tidings.

"An immense party—oh yes, there was he persuading them not to wait. Mr. Bowater took Rosamond in to dinner, Cecil went with Sir Harry Vivian. Yes, Lady Tyrrell was there,

wonderfully handsome, but her expression strikes me as altered; there is the sort of pathetic look that, as Cecil said, is like the melancholy Medusa—I wonder if it is genuine. She seems greatly disposed to cultivate Cecil—I wonder what she does it for.”

“Is Cecil attracted? I fancied she was.”

“Yes, a good deal; and I fear the Wil’sbro’ business will throw them together. It is unlucky on Frank’s account likewise. I see we shall have it all over again there.”

“I have great hope in his office taking him away. How was it with them to-night?”

“What I should call arrant coquetry, such as even Camilla never indulged in. The girl kept out of his way—was absolutely chill and repelling half the evening—throwing herself at the officers from Backsworth, till at last Frank obtained a waltz, and after that they were perfectly inseparable.”

“If she coquets, she will soon disgust him! Did Cecil enjoy herself?”

“Oh yes: Phil Bowater opened the ball with her, and she dances very nicely—so quietly, Mrs. Bowater remarked it. As to Rosamond, she was in her native element—*is* indeed, for she would not hear of coming away when we did.”

“And Julius?”

“Standing in a doorway, with others of his kind, absently talking, and watching Rosamond out of the tail of his eye. I say, mother,” lowering his voice, “can’t you give Rosamond a hint about her dress? Cecil says she can’t go out with her again like *that*. Ah,” as he heard a sigh, “I should not have worried you at night.”

“No, you have not. Tell Cecil I will see about it. Rosamond will take it best from an old woman like me.”

Mrs. Poyntsett was quite conscious that Cecil had more high breeding and refinement than Rosamond, who was essentially the Irish Colonel’s daughter, and that the cold temperament of the one irritated the warm nature of the other. More than one flash had revealed Rosamond’s contempt for Cecil’s assumptions and intolerance for her precision—besides, she was five years older, and had not an ideal in Dunstone.

After revolving what form of remonstrance would be least offensive during half the night and day, Mrs. Poyntsett was not prepared for the appearance, about noon, of her son Julius, when, coming to what she termed the confidential side of her couch, he asked hesitatingly, and colouring, “Mother, I want you to tell me, was there anything amiss in Rose’s dress last night?”

“You did not perceive—”

“I’m not used to the style of thing. Is it not the way with what you call full dress?”

“To a certain degree—” she began.

He caught her up. “And here has Cecil been putting my poor Rose into a perfect agony! It is only woman’s censorious nonsense, isn’t it, mother? Mere folly to think otherwise! I knew you would set my mind at rest; and if you would tell Cecil that you will not have Rosamond insulted, it would be as well.”

“Stay, Julius,” as he was walking off complacently, “I grieve, but I must confess that I was going to speak to Rosamond myself.”

He looked very blank.

“Mind, I am certain that it is only an innocent following of what she has been brought up to;” and as he signed a sort of hurt acquiescence, as if trying to swallow the offence, she added, “When do you go out again?”

“Not till Monday, when we dine at Colonel Ross’s. He is an old friend of Lord Rathforlane.”

“Then I am inclined to let it cool. Sometimes advice that has been resented does its work.”

“You don’t think the interference justifiable?”

“Not from that quarter.”

“And can it be needful to attend to it?”

“My dear Julius, it is not a style of dress I could ever have worn, nor have let my daughters have worn, if I had had any.”

“Conclusive, that!” said Julius, getting up, more really angered with his mother than he had been since his childhood.

However, he conquered himself by the time he had reached the door, and came back to say, “I beg your pardon, mother, I know you would not say so without need.”

“Thank you, my boy!” and he saw tears in her eyes, the first time he was conscious of having brought them. As he bent down to kiss her, she rallied, and cheerfully said, “I have no doubt it will all come right—Rosamond is too nice not to feel it at once.”

No such thing; Rosamond was still furious. If he disapproved, she would submit to him; but he had seen nothing wrong, had he?

"My dear Rose, I told you I was no judge: you forget what my eyes are; and my mother—"

"You have been to your mother?"

"My dear, what could I do?"

"And you think I am going to insult my own mother and sisters to please any woman's finical prudish notions? Pray what did Mrs. Poyntsett say?"

The excuse of custom, pleaded by Mrs. Poyntsett, only made Rosamond fiercer. She wished she had never come where she was to hear that her own mother was no judge of propriety, and her husband could not trust her, but must needs run about asking everybody if she were fit to be seen. Such a tempest Julius had never seen outside a back street in the garrison town. There seemed to be nothing she would not say, and his attempts at soothing only added to her violence. Indeed, there was only one thing which would have satisfied her, and that was, that she had been perfectly right, and the whole world barbarously wrong; and she was wild with passion at perceiving that he had a confidence in his own mother which he could not feel in hers.

Nor would he insist that Raymond should force Cecil to apologize. "My dear," he said, "don't you know there are things easier to ask than to obtain?"

To which Rosamond replied, in another gust, that she would never again sit down to table with Cecil until she had apologized for the insult, not to herself, she did not care about that, but to the mother who had seen her dresses tried on: Julius must tell Raymond so, or take her away to any cottage at once. She would not stay where people blamed mamma and poisoned his mind against her! She believed he cared for them more than for her!

Julius had sympathized far longer with her offended feeling than another could have done; but he was driven to assert himself. "Nonsense, Rose, you know better," he said, in a voice of displeasure; but she pouted forth, "I don't know it. You believe every one against me, and you won't take my part against that nasty little spiteful prig!"

"Cecil has behaved very ill to you," said Julius, granting her rather over much; "but she is a foolish conceited child, who does not deserve that Raymond should be worried about her. I foresee plenty of grievances from her; but, Rosie, we must and will not let her come between us and Raymond. You don't know what a brother he has been to me—I hardly think I could have got through my first year at school but for him; and I don't think my sweet Rose could wish to do me such an ill turn as to stir up a feud with such a brother because his wife is provoking."

The luncheon-bell began to sound, and she sobbed out, "There then, go down, leave me alone! Go to them, since you are so fond of them all!"

"I don't think you could come down as you are," said Julius, gravely; "I will bring you something."

"It would choke me—choke me!" she sobbed out.

Julius knew enough of the De Lancy temperament to be aware that words carried them a long way, and he thought solitude would be so beneficial, that he summoned resolution to leave her; but he had not the face to appear alone, nor offer fictions to excuse her absence, so he took refuge in his dressing-room, until he had seen Cecil and Anne ride away from the hall door together.

For the two sisters-in-law had held a little indignation meeting, and Rosamond's misdemeanour had so far drawn them together, that Cecil had offered to take Anne to see the working party, and let her assist thereat.

The coast being clear, Julius went down, encountering nothing worse than the old butler, who came in while he was cutting cold beef, and to whom he said, "Lady Rosamond is rather knocked up; I am going to take her something up-stairs."

Jenkins received this as the result of a dance, but much wanted to fetch a tray, which Julius refused, and set off with an ale-glass in one hand, and in the other the plates with the beef and appliances, Jenkins watching in jealous expectation of a catastrophe, having no opinion of Mr. Julius's powers as a waiter. He was disappointed. The downfall was deferred till the goal was reached, and was then most salutary, for Rosamond sprang to pick up the knife and fork, laughed at his awkwardness, refused to partake without him, produced implements from her travelling-bag, and was as merry as she had been miserable.

Not a word on the feud was uttered; and the pair walked down to the village, where she was exemplary, going into all those more distasteful parts of her duties there, which she sometimes shirked.

And on her return, finding her long-expected letter from Miss M'Kinnon awaiting her, she forgot all offences in her ardour to indoctrinate everybody with the hopes it gave of affording Mrs. Poyntsett a change of room, if not even greater variety. Unfortunately, this eagerness was not met with a corresponding fervour. There was in the household the acquiescence with long-established invalidism, that sometimes settles down and makes a newcomer's innovations unwelcome. Raymond had spoken to the old doctor, who had been timid and discouraging; Susan

resented the implication that the utmost had not been done for her dear mistress; and Mrs. Poynsett herself, though warmly grateful for Rosamond's affection, was not only nervously unwilling to try experiments, but had an instinctive perception that there was one daughter-in-law to whom her increased locomotion would scarcely be welcome, and by no means wished to make this distaste evident to Raymond. Cecil would not have been so strong against the risk and imprudence, if her wishes had been the other way. Moreover, she had been warned off from interference with the Rector's wife in the village, and she did not relish Rosamond's making suggestions as to her province, as she considered the house—above all, when she viewed that lady as in a state of disgrace. It was nothing less than effrontery; and Cecil became stiffer and colder than ever. She demanded of her mother-in-law whether there had been any promise of amendment.

"Oh! Julius will see to all that," said Mrs. Poynsett.

"It is a woman's question," returned Cecil.

"Not entirely."

"Fancy a clergyman's wife! It Mrs. Venn had appeared in that way at Dunstone!"

"You would have left it to Mr. Venn! My dear, the less said the sooner mended."

Cecil was silenced, but shocked, for she was far too young and inexperienced to understand that indecorous customs complied with as a matter of course, do not necessarily denote lack of innate modesty—far less, how they could be confounded with home allegiance; and as to Anne, poor Rosamond was, in her eyes, only too like the ladies who impeded Christiana on her outset.

So her ladyship retreated into languid sleepy dignity towards both her sisters-in-law; and on Monday evening showed herself, for a moment, more *decolletée*, if possible, than before. Mrs. Poynsett feared lest Julius were weak in this matter; but at night she had a visit from him.

"Mother," he said, "it will not happen again. Say no more."

"I am only too thankful."

"What do you think settled it? No less than Lady Tyrrell's admiration."

"What could she have said?"

"I can't make out. Rose was far too indignant to be comprehensible, when she told me on the way home; but there was something about adopting the becoming, and a repetition of—of some insolent praise." And his mother felt his quiver of suppressed wrath. "If Rose had been what that woman took her for, she would have been delighted," he continued; "but—"

"It was horrible to her!" said his mother. "And to you. Yes, I knew it would right itself, and I am glad nothing passed about it between us."

"So am I; she quite separates you from Cecil and Anne, and indeed all her anger is with Lady Tyrrell. She will have it there was malice in inciting her to shock old friends and annoy you—a sort of attempt to sympathize her into opposition."

"Which had a contrary effect upon a generous nature."

"Exactly! She thinks nothing too bad for that woman, and declares she is a serpent."

"That's dear Rosamond's anger; but I imagine that when I occur to Camilla's mind, it is as the obstructive old hag, who once stood in her way; and so, without any formed designs, whatever she says of me is coloured by that view."

"Quite possible; and I am afraid the sister is just such another. She seems quite to belong to Mrs. Duncombe's set. I sat next her at dinner, and tried to talk to her, but she would only listen to that young Strangeways."

"Strangeways! I wonder if that is Susan Lorimer's son?"

"Probably, for his Christian name is Lorimer."

"I knew her rather well as a girl. She was old Lord Lorimer's youngest daughter, and we used to walk in the Square gardens together; but I did not see much of her after I married; and after a good while, she married a man who had made a great fortune by mining. I wonder what her son is like?"

"He must be the man, for he is said to be the millionaire of the regiment. Just the match that Lady Tyrrell would like."

"Ah! that's well," said Mrs. Poynsett.

"From your point of view," said Julius, smiling.

"If he will only speak out before it has had time to go deep with Frank!"

## CHAPTER IX

# Cold Heart

At that very moment the two sisters in question were driving home in the opposite corners of the carriage in the dark.

"Really, Lenore," was Lady Tyrrell saying, "you are a very impracticable girl."

There was a little low laugh in answer.

"What blast has come and frozen you up into ice?" the elder sister added caressingly; but as she felt for Eleonora's hand in the dark, she obtained nothing but the cold handle of a fan. "That's just it!" she said, laughing; "hard ivory, instead of flesh and blood."

"I can't help it!" was the answer.

"But why not? I'm sure you had admiration enough to turn any girl's head."

No answer.

Lady Tyrrell renewed her address still more tenderly—"Lenore, darling, it is quite needful that you should understand your position."

"I am afraid I understand it only too well," came in a smothered voice.

"It may be very painful, but it ought to be made clear before you how you stand. You know that my father was ruined—there's no word for it but ruined."

"Yes."

"He had to give up the property to the creditors, and live on an allowance."

"I know that."

"And, of course, I can't bear speaking of it; but the house is really let to me. I have taken it as I might any other house to let."

"Yes," again assented Eleonora.

"And do you know why?"

"You said it was for the sake of the old home and my father!" said the girl, with a bitter emphasis on the *said*.

"So it was! It was to give you the chance of redeeming it, and keeping it in the family. It is to be sold, you know, as soon as you are of age, and can give your consent. I can't buy it. Mine is only a jointure, a life income, and you know that you might as well think of Mary buying Golconda; but you—you—with such beauty as yours—might easily make a connection that would save it."

There was only a choked sound.

"I know you feel the situation painfully, after having been mistress so long."

"Camilla, you *know* it is not that!"

"Ah, my dear, I can see farther than you avow. You can't marry till you are twenty-one, you know; but you might be very soon engaged, and then we should see our way. It only depends on yourself. Plenty of means, and no land to tie him down, ready to purchase and to settle down. It would be the very thing; and I see you are a thoroughly sensible girl, Lena."

"Indeed! I am not even sensible enough to know who is to be this purchaser."

"Come, Lena, don't be affected. Why! he was the only poor creature you were moderately gracious to."

"I! what do you mean?"

Lady Tyrrell laughed again.

"Oh!" in a tone of relief, "I can explain all that to you. All the Strangeways family were at Rockpier the winter before you came, and I made great friends with Margaret Strangeways, the eldest sister. I wanted very much to hear about her, for she has had a great deal of illness and trouble, and I had not ventured to write to her."

"Oh! was that the girl young Debenham gave up because her mother worried him so incessantly, and who went into a Sisterhood?"

"It was she who broke it off. She found he had been forced into it by his family, and was really attached elsewhere. I never knew the rights of it till I saw the brother to-night."

"Very praiseworthy family confidence!"

"Camilla, you know I object to that tone."

"So do most young ladies, my dear—at least by word."

"And once for all, you need have no fancies about Mr. Lorimer Strangeways. I am civil to him, of course, for Margaret's sake; and Lady Susan was very kind to me; but if there were nothing else against him, he is entirely out of the question, for I know he runs horses and bets on them."

"So does everybody, more or less."

"And you! you, Camilla, after what the turf has cost us, can wish me to encourage a man connected with it."

"My dear Lena, I know you had a great shock, which made the more impression because you were such a child; but you might almost as well forswear riding, as men who have run a few horses, or staked a few thousands. Every young man of fortune has done so in his turn, just by way of experiment—as a social duty as often as not."

"Let them," said Eleonora, "as long as I have nothing to do with them."

"What was that pretty French novel—*Sybille*, was it?—where the child wanted to ride on nothing but swans? You will be like her, and have to condescend to ordinary mortals."

"She did not. She died. And, Camilla, I would far rather die than marry a betting man."

"A betting man, who regularly went in for it! You little goose, to think that I would ask you to do that! As you say we have had enough of that! But to renounce every man who has set foot on a course, or staked a pair of gloves, is to renounce nine out of ten of the world one lives in."

"I do renounce them. Camilla, remember that my mind is made up for ever, and that nothing shall ever induce me to marry a man who meddles with the evils of races."

"Meddles with the evils? I understand, my dear Lena."

"A man who makes a bet," repeated Eleonora.

"We shall see," was her ladyship's light answer, in contrast to the grave tones; "no rules are without exceptions, and I only ask for *one*."

"I shall make none."

"I confess I thought you were coming to your senses; you have been acting so wisely and sensibly ever since you came home, about that young Frank Charnock."

Lady Tyrrell heard a little rustle, but could not see that it was the clasping of two hands over a throbbing heart. "I am very glad you are reasonable enough to keep him at a distance. Poor boy, it was all very well to be friendly with him when we met him in a place like Rockpier, and you were both children; but you are quite right not to let it go on. It would be mere madness."

"For him, yes," murmured the girl.

"And even more so for you. Why, if he had any property worth speaking of, it would be a wretched thing to marry into that family! I am sure I pity those three poor girls! Miles's wife looks perfectly miserable, poor thing, and the other two can't conceal the state of things. She is just the sort of woman who cannot endure a daughter-in-law."

"I thought I heard Lady Rosamond talking very affectionately of her."

"Very excitedly, as one who felt it her duty to stand up for her out-of-doors, whatever she may do indoors. I saw victory in those plump white shoulders, which must have cost a battle; but whatever Lady Rosamond gains, will make it all the worse for the others. No, Eleonora, I have known Mrs. Poynsett's rancour for many years, and I would wish no one a worse lot than to be her son's *fiancée*, except to be his wife."

"She did not seem to object to these marriages."

"The sons took her by surprise. Besides, Raymond's was the very *parti* mothers seek out for their sons. Depend upon it, she sent him off with her blessing to court the unexceptionable cousin with the family property. Poor Raymond, he is a dutiful son, and he has done the deed; but, if I am not much mistaken the little lady is made of something neither mother nor son is prepared for, and he has not love enough to tame her with."

"That may be seen at a glance. He can't help it, poor fellow; he would have had it if he could, like anything else that is proper."

There was a moment's silence; then the exclamation, "Just look there!"

One of the hats was nodding on the box in a perilous manner.

"It is *only* James," said Lady Tyrrell; "as long as it is not the coachman, it matters the less. There's no danger."

"You will not keep him, though!"

"I don't know. He is much the best looking and handiest of the men; and your page, Master Joshua, is no great acquisition yet."

"I wish you would not call him mine; I wish you would send him back to his grandmother. I can't bear his being among those men."

"Very complimentary to my household! They are not a bit worse than the company he came from! You don't believe in rural simplicity, eh?"

"I believe that taking that boy from his home makes us responsible."

"And do I hinder you from catechizing him to your heart's content? or sending him to the school of design?"

Again Eleonora was silent. Perhaps the balancing of the footman's head occupied her mind. At any rate, no more was said till the sisters had reached their home. Then, at the last moment, when there was no time left for a reply, Eleonora cleared and steadied her voice, and said, "Camilla, understand two things for truth's sake. First, I mean what I say. Nothing shall ever induce me to marry a man who bets. Next, I never have forgotten Frank Charnock for one moment. If I have been cold and distant to him, it is because I will not draw him near me to be cruelly scorned and disappointed!"

"I don't mind the why, if the effect is the same," were Lady Tyrrell's last words, as the door opened.

Eleonora's little white feet sped quickly up the steps, and with a hasty good night, she sped across the hall, but paused at the door. "Papa must not be disappointed," she whispered to herself, and dashed her hand over her eyes; and at the moment the lock turned, and a gray head appeared, with a mighty odour of smoke. "Ah! I thought my little Lena would not pass me by! Have you had a pleasant party, my dear? Was young Strangeways there?"

She had nestled in his arms, and hoped to avoid notice by keeping her head bent against him, as she hastily responded to his questions; but he detected something.

"Eh? Camilla been lecturing? Is that it? You've not been crying, little one? It is all right, you know! You and I were jolly enough at Rockpier; but it was time we were taken in hand, or you would have grown into a regular little nun, among all those black coats."

"I wish I were."

"Nonsense! You don't know life! You'll tell another story one of these days; and hark childie, when you've married, and saved the old place, you'll keep the old room for the old man, and we'll have our own way again."

She could but kiss him, and hide her agitation in caresses, ere hurrying up the stairs she reached her own rooms, a single bed-chamber opening into a more spacious sitting-room, now partially lighted by the candles on the toilette-table within.

She flung herself down on a chair beyond the line of light, and panted out half aloud, "Oh! I am in the toils! Oh for help! Oh for advice! Oh! if I knew the right! Am I unfair? am I cold and hard and proud? Is she telling me true? No, I know she is not—not the whole truth, and I don't know what is left out, or what is false! And I'm as bad—making them think I give in and discard Frank! Oh! is that my pride—or that it is too bad to encourage him now I know more? He'll soon scorn me, and leave off—whatever he ever thought of me. She has taken me from all my friends—and she will take him away! No one is left me but papa; and though she can't hurt his love, she has got his confidence away, and made him join against me! But that one thing I'll never, never do!"

She started up, and opened a locked purple photograph-album, with 'In Memoriam' inscribed on it—her hands trembling so that she could hardly turn the key. She turned to the likeness of a young man—a painful likeness of a handsome face, where the hard verities of sun-painting had refused to veil the haggard trace of early dissipation, though the eyes had still the fascinating smile that had made her brother Tom, with his flashes of fitful good-nature, the idol of his little sister's girlhood. The deadly shock of his sudden death had been her first sorrow; and those ghastly whispers which she had heard from the servants in the nursery, and had never forgotten, because of the hushed and mysterious manner, had but lately started into full force and meaning, on the tongues of the plain-spoken poor.

She gazed, and thought of the wrecked life that might have been so rich in joys; nay, her tenderness for her father could not hide from her how unlike his old age was from that of Mr. Bowater, or of any men who had done their service to their generation in all noble exertion. He had always indeed been her darling, her charge; but she had never known what it was to look up to him with the fervent belief and enthusiasm she had seen in other girls. To have him amused, loitering from reading-room to parade or billiard-room, had been all that she aspired to, and only lately had she unwillingly awakened to the sense how and why this was—and why the family were aliens in their ancestral home.

"And Camilla, who knew all—knew, and lived through the full force of the blight and misery—would persuade me that it all means nothing, and is a mere amusing trifle! Trifle, indeed, that breaks hearts and leads to despair and self-destruction and dishonour! No, no, no—nothing shall lead me to a gamester! though Frank may be lost to me! He will be! he will be! We deserve that he should be! I deserve it—if family sins fall on individuals—I deserve it! It is better for him—better—better. And yet, can he forget—any more than I—that sunny day—? Oh! was she luring him on false pretences? What shall I do? How will it be? Where is my counsellor? Emily, Emily, why did you die?"



Emily's portrait—calm, sweet, wasted, with grave trustful eyes—was in the next page. The lonely girl turned to it, and gazed, and drank in the soothing influence of the countenance that had never failed to reply with motherly aid and counsel. It rested the throbbing heart; and presently, with hands clasped and head bent, Eleonora Vivian knelt in the little light closet she had fitted as an oratory, and there poured out her perplexities and sorrows.

## CHAPTER X

### A Truant

Since for your pleasure you came here,  
You shall go back for mine.—COWPER

"How like Dunstone you have made this room!" said Raymond, entering his wife's apartment with a compliment that he knew would be appreciated.

Cecil turned round from her piano, to smile and say, "I wish papa could see it."

"I hope he will next spring; but he will hardly bring Mrs. Charnock home this winter. I am afraid you are a good deal alone here, Cecil. Is there no one you would like to ask?"

"The Venns," suggested Cecil; "only we do not like them to leave home when we are away; but perhaps they would come."

Raymond could not look as if the proposal were a very pleasing one. "Have you no young-lady friends?" he asked.

"We never thought it expedient to have intimacies in the neighbourhood," said Cecil.

"Well, we shall have Jenny Bowater here in a week or two."

"I thought she was your mother's friend."

"So she is. She is quite young enough to be yours."

"I do not see anything remarkable about her."

"No, I suppose there is not; but she is a very sensible superior person."

"Indeed! In that commonplace family."

"Poor Jenny has had an episode that removes her from the commonplace. Did you ever hear of poor Archie Douglas?"

"Was not he a good-for-nothing relation of your mother?"

"Not that exactly. He was the son of a good-for-nothing, I grant, whom a favourite cousin had unfortunately married, but he was an excellent fellow himself; and when his father died, she had Mrs. Douglas to live in that cottage by the Rectory, and sent the boy to school with us; then she got him into Proudfoot's office—the solicitor at Backsworth, agent for everybody's estates hereabouts. Well, there arose an attachment between him and Jenny; the Bowaters did not much like it, of course; but they are kind-hearted and good-natured, and gave consent, provided Archie got on in his profession. It was just at the time when poor Tom Vivian was exercising a great deal more influence than was good among the young men in the neighbourhood; and George Proudfoot was rather a joke for imitating him in every respect—from the colour of his dog-cart to the curl of his dog's tail. I remember his laying a wager, and winning it too, that if he rode a donkey with his face to the tail, Proudfoot would do the same; but then, Vivian did everything with a grace and originality."

"Like his sister."

"And doubly dangerous. Every one liked him, and we were all more together than was prudent. At last, two thousand pounds of my mother's money, which was passing through the Proudfoots' hands, disappeared; and at the same time poor Archie fled. No one who knew him could have any reasonable doubt that he did but bear the blame of some one else's guilt, most likely that of George Proudfoot; but he died a year or two back without a word, and no proof has ever been found; and alas! the week after Archie sailed, we saw his name in the list of sufferers in a vessel that was burnt. His mother happily had died before all this, but there were plenty to grieve bitterly for him; and poor Jenny has been the more like one of ourselves in consequence. He had left a note for Jenny, and she always trusted him; and we all of us believe that he was innocent."

"I can't think how a person can go about as usual, or ever get over such a thing as that."

"Perhaps she hasn't," said Raymond, with a little colour on his brown cheek. "But I'm afraid I can't make those visits with you to-day. I am wanted to see the plans for the new town-hall at Wil'sbro'. Will you pick me up there?"

"There would be sure to be a dreadful long waiting, so I will luncheon at Sirenwood instead; Lady Tyrrell asked me to come over any day."

"Alone? I think you had better wait for me."

"I can take Frank."

"I should prefer a regular invitation to us both."

"She did not mean to make a formal affair."

"Forms are a protection, and I do not wish for an intimacy there, especially on Frank's account."

"It would be an excellent match for Frank."

"Indeed, no; the estate is terribly involved, and there are three daughters; besides which, the family would despise a younger son. An attachment could only lead to unhappiness now, besides the positive harm of unsettling him. His tutor tells me that as it is he is very uneasy about his examination—his mind is evidently preoccupied. No, no, Cecil, don't make the intercourse unnecessarily close. The Vivians have not behaved well to my mother, and it is not desirable to begin a renewal. But you shall not lose your ride, Cecil; I'll ask one of the boys to go with you to the Beeches, and perhaps I shall meet you there."

"He talks of my lonely life," said Cecil, to herself, "and yet he wants to keep me from the only person who really understands me, all for some rancorous old prejudice of Mrs. Poyntsett's. It is very hard. There's no one in the house to make a friend of—Rosamond, a mere garrison belle; and Anne, *bornée* and half a dissenter; and as soon as I try to make a friend, I am tyrannized over, and this Miss Bowater thrust on me."

She was pounding these sentiments into a sonata with great energy, when her door re-opened, and Raymond again appeared. "I am looking for two books of Mudie's. Do you know where they can be? I can't make up the number."

"They are here," said Cecil; "Lanfrey's *Vie de Napoleon*; but I have not finished them."

"The box should have gone ten days ago. My mother has nothing to read, and has been waiting all this time for the next part of *Middlemarch*," said Raymond.

"She said there was no hurry," murmured Cecil.

"No doubt she did; but we must not take advantage of her consideration. Reading is her one great resource, and we must so contrive that your studies shall not interfere with it."

He waited for some word of regret, but none came; and he was obliged to add, "I must deprive you of the books for the present, for she must not be kept waiting any longer; but I will see about getting them for you in some other way. I must take the box to the station in the dog-cart." He went without a word from her. It was an entirely new light to her that her self-improvement could possibly be otherwise than the first object with everyone. At home, father and mother told one another complacently what Cecil was reading, and never dreamt of obstructing the virtuous action. Were her studies to be sacrificed to an old woman's taste for novels?

Cecil had that pertinacity of nature that is stimulated to resistance by opposition; and she thought of the Egyptian campaign, and her desire to understand the siege of Acre. Then she recollected that Miss Vivian had spoken of reading the book, and this decided her. "I'll go to Sirenwood, look at it, and order it. No one can expect me to submit to have no friends abroad nor books at home. Besides, it is all some foolish old family feud; and what a noble thing it will be for my resolution and independence to force the two parties to heal the breach, and bridge it over by giving Miss Vivian to Frank."

In this mood she rang the bell, and ordered her horses; not however till she had reason to believe the dog-cart on the way down the avenue. As she came down in her habit, she was met by Frank, returning from his tutor.

"Have I made a mistake, Cecil! I thought we were to go out together this afternoon!"

"Yes; but Raymond was wanted at Willansborough, and I am going to lunch at Sirenwood. I want to borrow a book."

"Oh, very well, I'll come, if you don't mind. Sir Harry asked me to drop in and look at his dogs."

This was irresistible; and Frank decided on riding the groom's horse, and leaving him to conduct Anne to the rendezvous in the afternoon—for Charlie had been at Sandhurst for the last week—running in first to impart the change of scheme to her, as she was performing her daily task of reading to his mother.

He did so thus: "I say, Anne, Cecil wants to go to Sirenwood first to get a book, so Lee will bring you to meet us at the Beeches at 2.30."

"Are you going to luncheon at Sirenwood?" asked Mrs. Poyntsett.

"Yes; Cecil wants to go," said the dutiful younger brother.

"I wish you would ask Cecil to come in. Raymond put himself into such a state of mind at finding me reading Madame de Sévigné, that I am afraid he carried off her books summarily, though I told him I was glad of a little space for my old favourites."

Cecil was, however, mounted by the time Frank came out, and they cantered away together, reaching the portico of Sirenwood in about twenty minutes.

Cecil had never been in the house before, having only left her card, though she had often met the sisters. She found herself in a carpeted hall, like a supplementary sitting-room, where two gentlemen had been leaning over the wide hearth. One, a handsome benignant-looking old man, with a ruddy face and abundant white whiskers, came forward with a hearty greeting. "Ah! young Mrs. Poyntsett! Delighted to see you!—Frank Charnock, you're come in good time; we are just going down to see the puppies before luncheon. Only I'll take Mrs. Poyntsett to the ladies first. Duncombe, you don't know Mrs. Raymond Poyntsett—one must not say senior bride, but the senior's bride. Is that right?"

"No papa," said a bright voice from the stairs, "you haven't it at all right; Mrs. Charnock Poyntsett, if you please—isn't it?"

"I believe so," replied Cecil. "Charnock always seems my right name."

"And you have all the right to retain it that Mrs. Poyntsett had to keep hers," said Lady Tyrrell, as they went up-stairs to her bedroom. "How is she?"

"As usual, thank you; always on the sofa."

"But managing everything from it?"

"Oh, yes."

"Never was there such a set of devoted sons, models for the neighbourhood."

Cecil felt a sense of something chiming in with her sources of vexation, but she only answered, "They are passionately fond of her."

"Talk of despotism! Commend me to an invalid! Ah! how delightfully you contrive to keep your hair in order! I am always scolding Lenore for coming in dishevelled, and you look so fresh and compact! Here is my sanctum. You'll find Mrs. Duncombe there. She drove over in the drag with her husband on their way to Backsworth. I am so glad you came, there is so much to talk over."

"If our gentlemen will give us time," said Mrs. Duncombe; "but I am afraid your senator will not be as much absorbed in the dogs as my captain."

"I did not come with my husband," said Cecil; "he is gone to Willansborough to meet the architect."

"Ah, about the new buildings. I do hope and trust the opportunity will not be wasted, and that the drainage will be provided for."

"You are longing to have a voice there," said Lady Tyrrell, laughing.

"I am. It is pre-eminently a woman's question, and this is a great opportunity. I shall talk to every one. Little Pettitt, the hair-dresser, has some ground there, and he is the most intelligent of the tradesmen. I gave him one of those excellent little hand-bills, put forth by the Social Science Committee, on sanitary arrangements. I thought of asking you to join us in ordering some down, and never letting a woman leave our work-room without one."

"You couldn't do better, I am sure," said Lady Tyrrell; "only, what's the use of preaching to the poor creatures to live in good houses, when their landlords won't build them, and they must live somewhere?"

"Make them coerce the landlords," said Mrs. Duncombe; "that's the only way. Upheave the masses from beneath."

"But that's an earthquake," said Cecil.

"Earthquakes are sometimes wholesome."

"But the process is not so agreeable that we had not rather avert it," said Lady Tyrrell.

"All ours at Dunstone are model cottages," said Cecil; "it is my father's great hobby."

"Squires' hobbies are generally like the silver trough the lady gave her sow," said Mrs. Duncombe; "they come before the poor are prepared, and with a spice of the autocrat."

"Come, I won't have you shock Mrs. Charnock Poyntsett," said Lady Tyrrell. "You illogical woman! The poor are to demand better houses, and the squires are not to build them!"

"The poor are to be fitly housed, as a matter of right, and from their own sense of self-respect," returned Mrs. Duncombe; "not a few favourites, who will endure dictation, picked out for the model cottage. It is the hobby system against which I protest."

"Without quite knowing what was conveyed by it in this instance?" said Lady Tyrrell. "I am sure there is nothing I wish more than that we had any power of improvement of the cottages here; but influence is our only weapon."

"By the bye, Mrs. Poyntsett," continued Mrs. Duncombe, "will you give a hint to Mrs. Miles

Charnock that it will never do to preach to the women at the working-room? I don't mean holding forth," she added, seeing Cecil's look of amazement; "but improving the occasion, talking piously, giving tracts, and so forth."

"I thought you gave sanitary tracts!" said Lady Tyrrell.

"That is quite different."

"I doubt whether the women would see the distinction. A little book *is* a tract to them."

"I would abstain rather than let our work get a goody reputation for indoctrinating sectarianism. It would be all up with us; we might as well keep a charity school."

"I don't think the women dislike it," said Cecil.

"Most likely they think it the correct thing, the grain which they must swallow with our benefits; but for that very reason it injures the whole tone, and prevents them learning independence. Put it in that light; I know you can."

"I don't think Anne would understand," said Cecil, somewhat flattered.

"I doubt whether there are three women in the neighbourhood who would," said Lady Tyrrell.

"People always think charity—how I hate the word!—a means of forcing their own tenets down the throats of the poor," said Mrs. Duncombe. "And certainly this neighbourhood is as narrow as any I ever saw. Nobody but you and—shall I say the present company?—has any ideas. I wonder how they will receive Clio Tallboys and her husband?"

"Ah! you have not heard about them," said Lady Tyrrell. "Most delightful people, whom Mrs. Duncombe met on the Righi. He is a Cambridge professor."

"Taillebois—I don't remember the name," said Cecil, "and we know a great many Cambridge men. We went to a Commencement there."

"Oh, not Cambridge on the Cam! the American Cambridge," said Mrs. Duncombe. "He is a quiet, inoffensive man, great on political economy; but his wife is the character. Wonderfully brilliant and original, and such a lecturer!"

"Ladies' lectures *would* startle the natives," said Lady Tyrrell.

"Besides, the town-hall is lacking," said Mrs. Duncombe; "but when the Tallboys come we might arrange a succession of *soirées*, where she might gather her audience."

"But where?" said Lady Tyrrell. "It would be great fun, and you might reckon on me; but where else? Mrs. Charnock Poyntsett has to think of *la belle mère*."

"She has given up the management of all matters of society to me," said Cecil with dignity; "you may reckon on me."

"No hope of the Bowaters, of course," said Mrs. Duncombe.

"Miss Bowater is coming to stay with us," volunteered Cecil.

"To be near that unlucky Life Guardsman *manqué*," said Mrs. Duncombe.

"Come, I'll not have honest Herbert abused," said the other lady. "He is the only one of the Bowaters who has any go in him."

"More's the pity, if he can't use it. Is his sister coming to help the Reverend Julius to drill him?"

"On Mrs. Poyntsett's account too, I fancy," said Lady Tyrrell; "Jenny Bowater is her amateur companion. Indeed, I believe it was no slight disappointment that her sons' appreciation did not quite reach the pitch of the mother's."

"Indeed!" asked Mrs. Duncombe; "I thought there had been a foolish affair with poor young Douglas."

"*Celà n'empêche pas*. By the bye, have you finished Fleurange?"

"Oh, you are quite welcome to it. It is quite as goody as an English tale in one volume."

This opened the way to Cecil's desire to borrow Lanfrey, not concealing the reason why; and she was gratified by the full sympathy of both ladies, who invited her in self-defence to join in their subscription to Rolandi, to which she eagerly agreed, and would have paid her subscription at once if there had not been a term to be finished off first.

The gong summoned them to luncheon, and likewise brought down Miss Vivian, who shook hands rather stiffly, and wore a cold, grave manner that did not sit badly on her handsome classical features. The countenance was very fine, but of the style to which early youth is less favourable than a more mature development; and she was less universally admired than was her sister. Her dress was a dark maroon merino, hanging in simple, long, straight folds, and there was as little distortion in her coiffure as the most moderate compliance with fashion permitted; and this, with a high-bred, distinguished deportment, gave an air almost of stern severity. This deepened rather than relaxed at the greeting from Frank—who, poor fellow! had an uncontrollably wistful eager look in his face, a sort of shy entreaty, and was under an incapacity of keeping up a

conversation with anybody else, while trying to catch the least word of hers.

She, however, seemed to have more eyes and ears for her father than for any one else, and he evidently viewed her as the darling and treasure of his life. His first question, after performing the duties of a host, was, "Well, my little Lenore, what have you been doing?"

"The old story, papa," raising her clear, sweet voice to reach his rather deaf ears.

"Got on with your drawing?—The child is competing with a club, you must know."

"Not exactly, papa: it is only a little society that was set on foot at Rockpier to help us to improve ourselves."

"What is your subject this month?" Frank asked.

"A branch of blackberries," she answered briefly.

"Ah!" said Lady Tyrrell, "I saw your pupil bringing in a delicious festoon—all black and red fruit and crimson and purple leaves. He is really a boy of taste; I think he will do you credit."

"The new Joshua Reynolds," said Frank, glad of an excuse to turn towards Eleonora. "Rosamond mentioned her discovery."

"You might have seen him just now figuring as Buttons," said Lady Tyrrell. "Degradation of art, is it not? But it was the only way to save it. Lenore is teaching him; and if his talent prove worth it we may do something with him. Any way, the produce of native genius will be grand material for the bazaar."

"Card-board prettinesses!" said Mrs. Duncombe; "you spoil him with them; but that you'll do any way—make him fit for nothing but a flunkey."

"Unappreciated zeal!" said Lady Tyrrell, glancing at her sister, who flushed a little, and looked the more grave.

"Eh, Lenore," said her father, "wasn't it to please you that Camilla made me take your pet to make havoc of my glasses?"

"You meant it so, dear papa," said Eleonora, calling up a smile that satisfied the old gentleman. "It was very kind in you."

Fresh subjects were started, and on all the talk was lively and pleasant, and fascinated Cecil, not from any reminiscence of Dunstone—for indeed nothing could be more unlike the tone that prevailed there: but because it was so different from that of Compton Poyntsett, drifting on so unrestrainedly, and touching so lightly on all topics.

By the close of the meal, rain had set in, evidently for the afternoon. Frank offered to ride home, and send the carriage for Cecil; but the Duncombes proposed to take her and drop her at home; and to this she consented, rather to Frank's dismay, as he thought of their coach appearing at his mother's door.

Lady Tyrrell took her up to resume her hat; and on the way, moved by distaste to her double surname, and drawn on by a fresh access of intimacy, she begged to be called Cecil—a privilege of which she had been chary even in her maiden days; but the caressing manner had won her heart, and spirit of opposition to the discouragement at home did the rest.

The request was reciprocated with that pensive look which was so touching. "I used to be Camilla to all the neighbourhood, and here I find myself—miles'—no, leagues further off—banished to Siberia."

"How unjust and unkind!" cried Cecil.

"My dear, you have yet to learn the gentle uncharitableness of prejudice. It is the prevailing notion that my married life was a career of dissipation. Ah! if they only knew!"

"The drag is round," said Mrs. Duncombe's voice at the door, in all its decisive abruptness, making both start.

"Just ready," called Lady Tyrrell; adding, in a lower tone, "Ah! she is startling, but she is genuine! And one must take new friends when the old are chilly. She is the only one—"

Cecil's kiss was more hearty than any she had given at Compton, and she descended; but just as she came to the door, and was only delaying while Frank and Captain Duncombe were discussing the merits of the four horses, the Compton carriage appeared in the approach, and Raymond's head within. Lady Tyrrell looked at Cecil, and saw it was safe to make a little gesture with the white skin of her fair brow, expressing unutterable things.

Mrs. Duncombe lost no time in asking if any steps were being taken for improving the drainage; to which Raymond replied, "No, that was not the business in hand. This was the architecture of the town-hall."

"Splendour of municipality above, and fever festering below," said Mrs. Duncombe.

"Wilsborough is not unhealthy," said Raymond.

She laughed ironically.

"The corporation have been told that they have an opportunity," said Raymond; "but it takes long to prepare people's minds to believe in the expedience of such measures. If Whitlock could be elected mayor there would be some chance, but I am afraid they are sure to take Truelove; and as things are at Wilsborough, we must move all at once or not at all. Individual attempts would do more harm than good."

"Ah! you fear for your seat!" said the plain-spoken lady.

Raymond only chose to answer by a laugh, and would not pursue the subject so treated. He was politeness itself to all; but he withstood Lady Tyrrell's earnest entreaties to come in and see some Florentine photographs, growing stiffer and graver each moment, while his wife waxed more wrathful at the treatment which she knew was wounding her friend, and began almost to glory in having incurred his displeasure herself. Indeed, this feeling caused the exchange of another kiss between the ladies before Sir Harry handed Cecil into the carriage, and Raymond took the yellow paper books that were held out to her.

Looking at the title as they drove off, he said quietly, "I did not mean to deprive you, Cecil; I had ordered Lanfrey from Bennet for you."

She was somewhat abashed, but was excited enough to answer, "Thank you. I am going to join Lady Tyrrell and Mrs. Duncombe in a subscription to Rolandi's."

He started, and after a pause of a few moments said gently, "Are you sure that Mr. and Mrs. Charnock would like to trust your choice of foreign books to Mrs. Duncombe?"

Taking no notice of the point of this question, she replied, "If it is an object to exchange books at home faster than I can read them properly, I must look for a supply elsewhere."

"You had better subscribe alone," he replied, still without manifest provocation.

"That would be uncivil now."

"I take that upon myself."

Wherewith there came a silence; while Cecil swelled as she thought of the prejudice against her friend, and Raymond revolved all he had ever heard about creatures he knew so little as women, to enable him to guess how to deal with this one. How reprove so as not to make it worse? Ought not his silent displeasure to suffice? And in such musings the carriage reached home.

It had been an untoward day. He had been striving hard against the stream at Willansborough. The drainage was not only scouted as an absurd, unreasonable, and expensive fancy, but the architect whom he had recommended, in the hope that he would insist on ground-work which might bring on the improvement, had been rejected in favour of a kinsman of Mr. Briggs, the outgoing mayor, a youth of the lower walk of the profession—not the scholar and gentleman he had desired, for the tradesman intellect fancied such a person would be expensive and unmanageable.

Twin plans for church and town-hall had been produced, which to Raymond's taste savoured of the gimcrack style, but which infinitely delighted all the corporation; and where he was the only cultivated gentleman, except the timid Vicar, his reasonings were all in vain. The plan was accepted for the town-hall, and the specifications were ordered to be made out for competition, and a rate decided on. The church was to wait for subscription and bazaar; the drains, for reason in Wil'sbro', or for the hope of the mayoralty of Mr. Whitlock, a very intelligent and superior linendraper.

## **CHAPTER XI**

### **Rosamond's Apologue**

Pray, sir, do you laugh at me?—Title of Old Caricature

Was Cecil's allegiance to Dunstone, or was it to the heiress of Dunstone? Tests of allegiance consist in very small matters, and it is not always easy to see the turning-point. Now Cecil had always stood on a pinnacle at Dunstone, and she had found neither its claims nor her own recognized at Compton. One kind of allegiance would have remained on the level, and retained the same standard, whether accepted or not. Another would climb on any pinnacle that any one would erect for the purpose, and become alienated from whatever interfered with such eminence.

So as nobody seemed so willing to own Cecil's claims to county supremacy as Lady Tyrrell, her bias was all towards Sirenwood; and whereas such practices as prevailed at Dunstone evidently were viewed as obsolete and narrow by these new friends, Cecil was willing to prove herself superior to them, and was far more irritated than convinced when her husband appealed to her former habits.

The separation of the welfare of body and soul had never occurred to the beneficence of

Dunstone, and it cost Cecil a qualm to accept it; but she could not be a goody in the eyes of Sirenwood; and besides, she was reading some contemporary literature, which made it plain that any religious instruction was a most unjustifiable interference with the great law, "Am I my brother's keeper?" and so, when she met Anne with a handful of texts neatly written out in printing letters, she administered her warning.

Cecil and Anne had become allies to a certain extent, chiefly through their joint disapproval of Rosamond, not to say of Julius; and the order was so amazing that Anne did not at first take it in; and when she understood that all mention of religion was forbidden, she said, "I do not think I ought to yield in this."

"Surely," said Cecil, "there is no connection between piety and cutting out."

"I don't know," said Anne; "but it does not seem to me to be right to go on with a work where my Master's Name is forbidden."

"Religion ought never to be obtruded," said Cecil.

"The Word ought to flavour everything, in season or out of season," said Anne, thoughtfully.

"Oh! that's impossible. It's your narrow view. If you thrust preaching into everything, we can never work together."

"Oh, then," said Anne, quickly, "I must give it up!" And she turned away with a rapid step, to carry her texts back to her room.

"Anne!" called Cecil, "I did not mean *that!*"

Anne paused for a moment, looked over the baluster, and repeated firmly, "No, Cecil; it would be denying Christ to work where His Name is forbidden."

Perhaps there was something in the elevation and the carved rail that gave the idea of a pulpit, for Cecil felt as if she was being preached at, and turned her back, indignant and vexed at what she had by no means intended to incur—the loss of such a useful assistant as she found in Anne.

"Such nonsense!" she said to herself, as she crossed the hall alone, there meeting with Rosamond, equipped for the village. "Is not Anne going to-day?" she said, as she saw the pony-carriage at the door.

"No. It is so vexatious. She is so determined upon preaching to the women, that I have been obliged to put a stop to it."

"Indeed! I should not have thought it of poor Anne; but no one can tell what those semi-dissenters think right."

"When she declared she ought to do it in season or out of season, what was one to do?" said Cecil.

"I thought that was for clergymen," said Rosamond, hitting the right nail on the head in her ignorance, as so often happened.

"She sees no difference," said Cecil. "Shall I drive you down?" she added graciously, according to the fashion of uniting with one sister-in-law against the other; and Rosamond not only accepted, but asked to be taken on to Willansborough, to buy a birthday present for her brother Terry, get stamps for an Indian letter, and perform a dozen more commissions that seemed to arise in her mind with the opportunity. Her two brothers were to spend the Christmas holidays with her, and she was in high spirits, and so communicative about them that she hardly observed how little interest Cecil took in Terry's achievements.

"Who is that," she presently asked, "with those red-haired children? It looked like Miss Vivian's figure."

"I believe it was. Julius and I often see her walking about the lanes; but she passes like—like a fire-flaught, whatever that is—just bows, and hardly ever speaks."

"She is a strange girl," said Cecil. "Lady Tyrrell says she cannot draw her into any of her interests, but she will go her own way."

"Like poor Anne?"

"No, not out of mere moping and want of intellect, like Anne. But Lady Tyrrell says she feels for her; she was brought a great deal too forward, and was made quite mistress of the house at Rockpier, being her father's darling and all, and now it is trying to her, though it is quite wholesome, to be in her proper place. It is a pity she is so bitter over it, and flies off her own way."

"That boy!" said Rosamond; "I hope she does something for his good."

"She teaches him, I believe; but there's another instance of her strange ways. She was absolutely vexed when Lady Tyrrell took him into the house, though he was her *protégé*, only because it was not done in *her* way. It is a great trial to Camilla."

"I could fancy a reason for that," said Rosamond. "Julius does not like the tone of the household

at all." But she added hastily, "Who could those children be? They did not look *quite* like poor children."

"Ah! she is always taking up with some odd person in her own way," said Cecil. "But here we are. Will you drive on to the hotel, or get out here?"

When, at the end of two hours, the sisters-in-law met at the work-room, and Rosamond had taken a survey of the row of needle-women, coming up one by one to give their work, be paid and dismissed, there was a look of weariness and vexation on Cecil's face. She had found it less easy to keep order and hinder gossip, and had hardly known how to answer when that kind lady, Mrs. Miles Charnock, had been asked after; but she would have scorned to allow that she had missed her assistant, and only politely asked how Rosamond had sped.

"Oh! excellently. People were so well advised as to be out, so I paid off all my calls."

"You did not return your calls without Julius?"

"There's nothing he hates so much. I would not have dragged him with me on any account."

"I think it is due to one's self."

"Ah! but then I don't care what is due to myself. I saw a friend of yours, Cecil."

"Who?"

"Mrs. Duncombe," said Rosamond. "I went to Pettitt's—the little perfumer, you know, that Julius did so much for at the fire; and there she was, leaning on the counter, haranguing him confidentially upon setting an example with sanitary measures."

"Sanitary," corrected Cecil; "*sanitas* is health, *sano* to cure. People never know the difference."

"Certainly I don't," said Rosamond. "It must be microscopic!"

"Only it shows the difference between culture and the reverse," said Cecil.

"Well, you know, I'm the reverse," said Rosamond, leaning sleepily back, and becoming silent; but Cecil was too anxious for intelligence to let her rest, and asked on what Mrs. Duncombe was saying.

"I am not quite sure—she was stirring up his public spirit, I think, about the drainage; and they were both of them deploring the slackness and insensibility of the corporation, and canvassing for Mr. Whitlock, as I believe. It struck me as a funny subject for a lady, but I believe she does not stick at trifles."

"No real work can be carried out by those who do," said Cecil.

"Oh!" added Rosamond, "I met Mrs. and Miss Bowater, and they desired me to say that Jenny can't come till the dinner-party on the 20th, and then they will leave her."

"How cool to send a message instead of writing!"

"Oh! she has always been like one of themselves, like a sister to them all."

"I can't bear that sort of people."

"What sort?"

"Who worm themselves in."

"Miss Bowater could have no occasion for worming. They must be quite on equal terms."

"At any rate, she was only engaged to their poor relation."

"What poor relation? Tell me! Who told you?"

"Raymond. It was a young attorney—a kind of cousin of the Poyntsett side, named Douglas."

"What? There's a cross in the churchyard to Elizabeth Douglas, daughter of Francis Poyntsett, and wife of James Douglas, and at the bottom another inscription to Archibald Douglas, her son, lost in the *Hippolyta*."

"Yes, that must be the man. He was flying from England, having been suspected of some embezzlement."

"Indeed! And was Jenny engaged to him? Julius told me that Mrs. Douglas had been his mother's dearest friend, and that this Archie had been brought up with them, but he did not say any more."

"Perhaps he did not like having had a cousin in an attorney's office. I am sure I had no notion of such a thing."

Rosamond laughed till she was exhausted at the notion of Julius's sharing the fastidious objections she heard in Cecil's voice; and then, struck by the sadness of the story, she cried, "And that makes them all so fond of Miss Bowater. Poor girl, what must she not have gone through! And yet how cheerful she does look!"



"People say," proceeded Cecil, unable to resist the impulse to acquire a partaker in her half-jealous aversion, "that it was a great disappointment that Mrs. Poyntsett could not make her sons like her as much as she did herself."

"Oh!" cried Rosamond, "how little peace we should have if we always heeded what people say!"

"People that know," persisted Cecil.

"Not very wise or very kind people to say so," quoth Rosamond; "though, by the bye, the intended sting is happily lost, considering that it lies among five."

"Why should you assume a sting?"

"Because I see you are stung, and want to sting me," said Rosamond, in so merry a tone that the earnestness was disguised.

"I! I'm not stung! What Mrs. Poyntsett or Miss Bowater may have schemed is nothing to me," said Cecil, with all her childish dignity.

"People talk of Irish imagination," said Rosamond in her lazy meditative tone.

"Well?" demanded Cecil, sharply.

"Only it is not *my* Irish imagination that has devised this dreadful picture of the artful Jenny and Mrs. Poyntsett spinning their toils to entrap the whole five brothers. Come, Cecil, take my advice and put it out of your head. Suppose it were true, small blame to Mrs. Poyntsett."

"What do you mean?" said Cecil, in a voice of hurt dignity.

"I may mean myself." And Rosamond's peal of merry laughter was most amazing and inexplicable to her companion, who was not sure that she was not presuming to laugh at her.

There was a silence, broken at last by Rosamond. "Cecil, I have been tumbled about the world a good deal more than you have, and I never found that one got any good by disregarding the warnings of the natives. There's an immense deal in the cat and the cock."

"I do not understand, said Cecil.

Whereupon Rosamond, in a voice as if she were telling the story to a small child, began: "Once upon a time there was a wee bit mousiekie, that lived in Giberatie O—that trotted out of her hole upon an exploring expedition. By and by she came scuttling back in a state of great trepidation—in fact, horribly nervous. 'Mother, mother!' said the little mouse, 'I've seen a hideous monster, with a red face, and a voice like a trumpet, and a pair of spurs.'"

"Of course, I know that," broke in Cecil.

"Ah, you haven't heard all. 'I should have died of terror,' said the little mouse, 'only that I saw a dear sweet graceful creature, with a lovely soft voice, and a smooth coat, and the most beautiful eyes, and the most exquisite pathetic expression in her smile; and she held out her velvet paw to me, and said, 'Dear little mousiekie-pousie, you're the loveliest creature I ever met, quite unappreciated in these parts. That horrid old cock is terribly vulgar and commonplace; and never you believe your mother if she tells you he is better worth cultivating than one who has such a deep genuine love and appreciation of all the excellences of all mice, and of you in particular with your dun fur.'"

Rosamond could not for her very life help putting in that word *dun*; and Cecil, who had been driving straight on with her eyes fixed on her pony's ears, and rather a sullen expression of forced endurance, faced about. "What you mean by all this I don't know; but if you think it applies to me or my friends, you are much mistaken."

"I told you," said Rosamond, with the same languor, looking out under her half-shut eyes, "that I apply things to myself. I've met both sorts in my time."

And silence reigned for the rest of the way. Cecil had read many more books, knew much more, and was altogether a far more cultivated personage than the Lady Rosamond; but she was not half so ready in catching the import of spoken words; and all this time she was by no means certain whether all this meant warning or meant mockery, though either was equally impertinent, and must be met with the same lady-like indifference, which Cecil trusted that she had never transgressed.

Neither of them, nor indeed any other living creature, knew of a little episode which had occurred about eighteen months previously, when Joanna Bowater had been taking care of Mrs Poyntsett during Raymond's first absence from home after her accident. Of course he took her back to Strawyers as soon as he arrived; and about half-way, after a prolonged and unusual silence, he said, "Jenny, I believe we know one another's histories pretty well. It would be a great happiness and blessing if you could bring yourself to sink the past so far as to take me, and become indeed my mother's daughter. Do not answer me in haste. Think it over, and tell me if it is possible."

Jenny let him drive on more than a mile before she spoke; and when she did, the tears stood on her cheek, and it was quite an effort that her voice was made steady. "No, Raymond, I am very sorry, but it will not do. Two griefs will not make one joy."

"Yes, they would, to my mother."

"Ah! there it lies! Indeed, Raymond, I do feel for you all so much, especially your dear mother, that I would bring myself to it, if I could; but the very thought brings Archie up so vividly before me that I cannot! He has almost seemed to be sitting by me all this time. It seems as though beginning again would kill my right to think of him foremost of all."

"I could bear with that and trust to time," said Raymond. "Think it over, Jenny. I will be candid with you. The old delusion was too strong for any repetition of that kind, as you may see by the lame performance I am making now."

Jenny gave a little agitated laugh, and ejaculated, "Dear Raymond!" then added, "It is not on your account, but mine."

"But," he added, "my marriage is becoming a necessity, if only for my mother's sake; and you stand far before any other woman with me, if that would but satisfy you. I verily believe that in a short time we should be just as comfortable together as if we could start with more romance."

"I dare say we should, dear Raymond," said Jenny; "but I cannot feel that it is the right thing, while I have not *that* feeling for you which overpowers everything else; it seems to me that I ought not to give up my place at home. Papa depends on me a good deal, and they both will want me more and more."

"Less than my mother."

"I don't know; and they are my first duty. I can always come to your mother when I am wanted, and I know in your secret soul you prefer me on those terms."

He made no answer, only when passing the lodge he said, "Will you consider it a little longer, Jenny?"

But this only resulted in a note:—

"DEAR RAYMOND,—Considering only shows me that I must be Archie Douglas's now and for ever. I can't help it. It is better for you; for you can find some young girl who can wake your heart again, as never could be done by your still affectionate J. B."

Raymond and Jenny had met so often since, that the matter was entirely past, and no one ever guessed it.

At any rate, Rosamond, the most ready to plunge into counsel to Cecil, was the least likely to have it accepted; Rosamond had foibles of her own that Cecil knew of, and censured freely enough within herself.

That never-ending question, whether what became the Colonel's daughter became the clergyman's wife, would crop up under endless forms. Rosamond, in all opinions, was good-natured and easy, and always for pardon and toleration to an extent that the Compton code could not understand. She could not bear that anybody should be punished or shut out of anything; while there was no denying that, now the first novelty was passing, she was very lazy as to her parochial work, and that where her feelings were not stirred she was of little use.

Julius seemed shamefully tolerant of her omissions, and likewise of her eagerness for all gaieties. He would not go himself, would not accept a dinner invitation for any of the three busy nights of the week, and refused all those to dances and balls for himself, though he never hindered Rosamond's going.

She used absolutely to cry with passionate entreaties that he would relent and come with her, declaring that he was very unkind, he knew it took away all her pleasure—he was a tyrant, and wanted her not to go. And then he smiled, and owned that he hoped some day she would be tired of it; whereat she raged, and begged him to forbid her, if he really thought her whole life had been so shocking, declaring in the same breath that she would never disown her family, or cast a slur on her mother and sisters.

It always ended in her going, and though never again offending as by her bridal gown, she seldom failed to scandalize Cecil by an excess of talking and of waltzing, such as even Raymond regretted, and which disabled her for a whole day after from all but sofa, sleep, novels, and yawns.

Was this the person whose advice the discreet heiress of Dunstone was likely to follow?

It may be mentioned here, among other elements of difficulty, that Cecil's maid Grindstone was a thorough Dunstonite, who 'kept herself to herself,' was perfectly irreproachable, lived on terms of distant civility with the rest of the household, never complained, but constantly led her young mistress to understand that she was enduring much for her sake.

Cecil was too well trained, and so was she, for a word of gossip or censure to pass between them; but the influence was not the less strong.

## CHAPTER XII

# Pastoral Visiting

A finger's breadth at hand may mar  
A world of light in heaven afar;  
A mote eclipse a glorious star,  
An eyelid hide the sky.—KEBLE.

The dinner was over, and Cecil was favouring the audience with a severely classical piece of music, when, under cover thereof, a low voice said to Julius, "Now, really and truly, tell me how he is getting on?"

"Really and truly, Jenny?"

"Well, not as you would tell mamma, for instance; but as you think in your secret soul."

"I am sorry you think me so duplex."

"Come, you understand how anxious I am about the boy."

"Exactly." And they both laughed.

"Is that all?" said Joanna Bowater.

"*Really and truly* it is! Rose can manage him much better than I can."

"He is very fond of her; but does he—is he—is his heart in his work?" asked the sister, looking with her honest eyes earnestly at Julius, her contemporary and playfellow as a child, and afterwards the companion with whom she had worked out many a deep problem, rendering mutual assistance that made each enter in no common degree into the inner thoughts of the other.

Julius smiled. "I doubt whether he has come to his heart yet."

"Why should he be so young? Think what you were at twenty-three."

"I never had Herbert's *physique*; and that makes an immense difference. I had no taste or capacity for what is a great privation to a fine young fellow like him. Don't look startled! He attempts nothing unfitting; he is too good and dutiful, but—"

"Yes, I know what that *but* means."

"Nothing to be unhappy about. You know how blameless he has always been at Eton and Oxford; and though he may view his work rather in a school-boy aspect, and me as a taskmaster, as long as he is doing right the growth is going on. Don't be unhappy, Jenny! His great clear young voice is delightful to hear; he is capital at choral practices, and is a hero to all the old women and boys, the more so for the qualities that earnestness cannot give, but rather detracts from."

"You mean that he is not in earnest?"

"Don't pervert all I say! He is not past the time of life when all appointed work seems a task, and any sort of excuse a valid cause against it; but he is conscientious, and always good-humoured under a scolding,—and Rosamond does not spare him," he added, laughing.

"Then you don't think there has been a mistake about him?" said Jenny, in a low voice of alarm.

"I have little doubt that when anything develops his inner life, so as to overcome the great strong animal that demands play and exercise, he will be a most useful clergyman."

"Perhaps he is too young, though I don't see how it could be helped. Papa always intended it, because of the living; and Herbert never wished anything else. I thought he really desired it, but now I don't know whether he did not only take it as a matter of course."

"Obedience is no unwholesome motive. As things stood, to delay his ordination would have been a stigma he did not deserve; and though he might have spent a year with advantage in a theological college, pupilage might only have prolonged his boyhood. It must be experience, not simply years of study, that deepens him."

"Ah, those studies!"

"To tell the truth, that's what I am most uneasy about. I take care he should have two hours every forenoon, and three evenings every week, free; but when a man is in his own neighbourhood, and so popular, I am afraid he does not get many evenings at home; and I can't hinder Bindon from admonishing him."

"No," said the sister; "nothing will stir him till the examination is imminent; but I will try what I can do with him for the present. Here he comes, the dear old idle fellow!"

"Joanie, here you are at last, in conclave with the Rector. Lady Rose wants me to sing, and you must accompany me. No one is so jolly for picking one up."

'Picking one up' was apt to be needed by Herbert, who had a good ear and voice, but had always regarded it as 'bosh' to cultivate them, except for the immediately practical purposes that had of

late been forced on him. The choral society had improved him; but Jenny was taken aback by being called on to accompany him in *Mrs. Brown's Luggage*; and his father made his way up to him, saying, "Eh, Herbert! is that the last clerical fashion?"

"'Tis my Rectoress who sets me on, sir," was Herbert's merry answer, looking at her. "Now, Lady Rose, you'll keep me in countenance! My father has never heard you sing *Coming through the Rye*."

"No, no, Herbert, my singing is only to amuse little boys. Here's the higher order of art!"

For Cecil was leading a young lady to the piano, and looking as if she by no means approved of such folly, though everybody had listened to the *Poor Old Cockatoo*, laughed and applauded heartily; and the ensuing performance seemed to be unappreciated by any one except Raymond and Cecil themselves.

Anne was sitting in a corner of the sofa, with a straight back and weary face, having been driven out into the throng by the old friends who came to sit with Mrs. Poynsett; but she brightened as Miss Bowater took a seat beside her, and accepted her inquiries for Captain Charnock far more graciously than the many which had preceded them. Was not her likeness in his album? And had he not spoken of her as one whom Anne would like?

Soon Joanna had led her to tell not only of Miles's last letter, but of those from Glen Fraser, of which she had spoken to no one, under the impression that nobody cared. She even spoke of the excellent farm and homestead which Mr. Van Dorp wanted to sell before going to the Free State, and which her father thought would exactly suit Miles.

"Does he mean to settle there?"

"Oh, yes; he promised me to leave the navy and take me home as soon as this voyage is over," said Anne, eagerly. "If the *Salamanca* only puts in for long enough, he might run up to Glen Fraser, and see Bocksfeld Stoop, and settle it all at once. I am sure he would be delighted with it, and it is only two miles from Mr. Pilgrim's."

"I'm afraid you can never feel this like home," said Jenny.

"Miles wanted me to know his family, and thought I should be useful to his mother," said Anne; "but she does not want anything I could do for her. If she has Raymond, she seems to need nobody else."

"And have you nothing to do?"

"I have letters to write to Miles and to them all at home; and I am making a whole set of shirts and stockings for papa and the boys—it will spare mamma and Jeanie, and I have plenty of time."

"Too much, I am afraid! But Herbert said you were very useful at the Work Society at Wil'sbro'."

"Not now."

"Indeed!"

"No," in the old cold dry tone. But while Jenny was doubting whether to inquire further, innate sympathy conquered, and Anne added, "I wonder whether I did wrong!"

"As how?" asked Joanna, kindly.

"They said"—she lowered her voice—"I must never speak on religious subjects."

"How do you mean? What had you done?"

"One day I found a woman crying because her husband had gone away to seek work, so I told her my husband was further away and repeated the texts I like. She was so much comforted that I printed them on a card for her."

"Was that all?"

"No; there was another poor dear that was unhappy about her baby; and when I bade her pray for it, she did not know how, so I had to tell her a little. There is one who does know her Saviour, and I did love to have a few words of peace with her."

"And was that what was objected to?"

"Yes; they said it would change the whole character of the institution."

"Who did?"

"Cecil—Mrs. Charnock Poynsett. I think Lady Tyrrell and Mrs. Duncombe desired her. I thought it was no place for me where I might not speak one word for Christ, and I said so; but since I have wondered whether the old Adam did not speak in me, and I ought to have gone on."

"My wonder," said Jenny, indignantly, "would be what right they had to stop you. This was private interference, not from the Vicar or the committee."

"But I am not a real visiting lady. I only go to help Cecil."

"I see; but why didn't you ask Julius what was right? He would have told you."

"Oh, no, I could not."

"Why not?"

"It would seem like a complaint of Cecil. Besides—"

"Besides?"

"I don't think Julius is a Christian."

The startling announcement was made in so humble and mournful a voice as almost to disarm Jenny's resentment; and before she had recovered enough for a reply, she was called to take leave of her parents.

Her brother was the professed object of her visit, and she was only at the Hall because there was no accommodation at his lodgings, so that she had no scruple in joining the early breakfast spread for the Rector and his wife, so as to have the morning free for him; but she found Julius alone, saying that his wife was tired after the party; and to Jenny's offer to take her class, he replied, "Thank you, it will be a great kindness if you will teach; but Rose has no regular class. Teaching is not much in her line; and it is a pity she should have to do it, but we have to make the most of the single hour they allow us for godliness."

"Don't you utilize Mrs. Charnock? or is she not strong enough for early hours?"

"Poor Anne! The truth is, I am afraid of her. I fancy all her doctrine comes out of the Westminster Catechism."

"Could Calvinism be put in at seven years old? Would not it be a pouring of stiff glue into a narrow-necked phial?"

"Result—*nil*."

"A few pure drops might get in—and you could give her books."

"It had struck me that it might be wholesome work for her; but the children's good must stand first. And, timid and reserved as she seems, she insisted on preaching at the work-room, so that Cecil had to put a stop to it."

"Are you certain about that preaching?"

"Rose heard of it from Cecil herself."

"Did she ask what it amounted to?"

"I don't know; perhaps I had better find out. I remember it came after that ride to Sirenwood. By the bye, Jenny, I wish Cecil could be hindered from throwing herself into that oak of Broceliande!"

"Are not you so suspicious that you see the waving arms and magic circles everywhere?"

"A friendship with any one here is so unnatural, that I can't but think it a waving of hands boding no good. And there is worse than friendship in that quarter too."

"Oh, but Lenore is quite different!"

"A Vivienne still!" said Julius, bitterly. "If she costs poor Frank nothing more than his appointment, it will be well."

"I don't understand!"

"She caught him in her toils two years ago at Rockpier; and now she is playing fast and loose with him—withdrawing, as I believe; and at any rate keeping the poor foolish boy in such an agitation, that he can't or won't settle to his reading; and Driver thinks he will break down."

"I can't think it of Lenore.—Oh! good morning, Raymond!"

"Good morning! May I come to breakfast number one? I have to go to Backsworth."

"Yes," said Jenny; "we told papa it was too bad to put you on the Prison Committee. What does your wife say?"

"My wife has so many occupations, that she is very sufficient for herself," said Raymond. "I hope you will get on with her, Jenny. If she could only be got to think you intellectual!"

"Me? O, Raymond! you've not been telling her so?" exclaimed Jenny, laughing heartily.

"A very superior coach in divinity, &c.," said Julius, in a tone half banter, half earnest.

But Jenny exclaimed in distress, "No, no, no; say nothing about that! It would never do for Herbert to have it known. Don't let him guess that you know."

"Quite right, Jenny; never fear," said Julius; "though it is tempting to ask you to take Frank in hand at the same time."

"Have you seen anything of the Vivians?" asked Raymond.

"Very little. I hoped to see something of Eleonora from hence."

"I can't understand that young lady," said Julius. "She was very friendly when first we met her; but now she seems absolutely repellent."

"*Tant mieux*," Raymond

"They seem inclined to take up all the good works in hand," said Jenny. "By the bye, what is all this story about Raymond affronting Wil'sbro' by stirring up their gutters? Papa has been quite in a state of mind for fear they should take offence and bring in Mr. Moy."

"Julius only thinks I have not stirred the gutters enough," said Raymond. "And after all, it is not I, but Whitlock. I was in hopes that matters might have been properly looked after if Whitlock had been chosen mayor this year; but, somehow, a cry was got up that he was going to bring down a sanitary commission, and put the town to great expense; and actually, this town-council have been elected *because* they are opposed to drainage."

"And Truelove, the grocer, is mayor?"

"Yes; one of the most impracticable men I ever encountered. One can't get him so much as to understand anything. Now Briggs does understand, only he goes by *£ s. d.*"

"Posterity has done nothing for me, and I will do nothing for posterity, is his principle," said Julius. "Moreover, he is a Baptist."

"No chance for the Church in his time," said Jenny.

"There's the less harm in that," said Raymond, "that the plan is intolerable. Briggs's nephew took the plan of what he calls a German Rat-house, for the town-hall, made in gilt gingerbread; and then adapted the church to a beautiful similarity. If that could be staved off by waiting for the bazaar, or by any other means, there might be a chance of something better. So poor Fuller thinks, though he is not man enough to speak out at once."

"Then the bazaar is really fixed?"

"So far as the resolution goes of the lady population, though Julius is sanguine, and hopes to avert it. After all, I believe the greatest obstructive to improvement is Moy."

"Old Mr. Proudfoot's son-in-law?" said Jenny. "I know he has blossomed out in great splendour on our side of the county, and his daughter is the general wonder. Papa is always declaring he will set up in opposition to you."

"Not much fear of that," said Raymond. "But the man provokes me, he has so much apparent seriousness."

"Even to the persecution of Dr. Easterby," put in Julius. "And yet he is the great supporter of that abominable public-house in Water Lane, the Three Pigeons—which, unluckily, escaped the fire. He owns it, and all those miserable tenements beyond it, and nothing will move him an inch towards doing any good there!"

"I remember," said Jenny, "papa came home very angry on the licensing day; the police had complained of the Three Pigeons, and the magistrates would have taken away the license, but that Mr. Moy made such a personal matter of it."

"You don't mean that he is a magistrate!" exclaimed Julius.

"Yes," said Raymond. "He got the ear of the Lord-Lieutenant."

"And since he has lived at the Lawn, they have all quite set up for county people or anything you please," said Jenny, a little bitterly. "Mrs. Moy drives about with the most stylish pair of ponies; and as to Miss Gussie, she is making herself into a proverb! I can't bear them."

"Well done, Jenny!" exclaimed Julius.

"Perhaps it is wrong," said Jenny, in a low voice. "I dare say I am not just. You know I always did think Mr. Moy could have cleared Archie if he would," she added, with a slightly trembling tone.

"So did I," said Raymond. "I gave him the opportunity after George Proudfoot's death; but when the choice lay between two memories, one could hardly wonder if he preferred to shield his brother-in-law."

"Or himself!" said Jenny, under her breath.

"Come, Jenny," said Julius, feeling that the moment for interruption had come, "it is time we should be off. Methinks there are sounds as if the whole canine establishment at Mrs. Hornblower's were prancing up to meet us."

So it proved; and Jenny had to run the gauntlet through the ecstasies of all the dogs, whose ecclesiastical propriety was quite overthrown, for they danced about her to the very threshold of the church, and had to have the door shut on their very noses. That drop of bitterness, which her sad brief story could not fail to have left in poor Joanna's heart, either passed out of mind in what followed, or was turned into the prayer, "And to turn their hearts;" and she was her bright self again for her promised assistance at the school.

Then Herbert's address was, "Come, Joan, I promised to take you to see the Reeves's pheasant at the Outwood Lodge. Such a jolly old woman!"

"The pheasant?"

"No; the keeper's mother. Tail a yard long! I don't see why we shouldn't turn them out at home. If father won't take it up, I shall write to Phil."

"Thank you, Herbs. Hadn't you better secure a little reading first? I could wait; I've got to write to Will."

"The post doesn't go till five."

"But I want to get it done. The mail goes to-morrow."

"You'll do it much better after a walk. I can't understand anything after the fumes of the school, unless I do a bit of visiting first; and that pheasant is a real stunner. It really is parish work, Jenny. Look here, this is what I'm reading her."

"*Learn to die!*" said Jenny, laughing heartily. "Nothing could be more appropriate, only you should have begun before October."

"You choose to make fun of everything!" answered Herbert, gruffly; and Jenny, deciding that she would see a specimen day, made her peace by consenting to share in the pastoral visit, whether to pheasant or peasant. Indeed, a walk with Herbert was one of the prime pleasures of her life—and this was delightful, along broad gravelled drives through the autumnal woods with tinted beech-leaves above, and brackens of all shades of brown, green, and yellow beneath. And it was charming to see Herbert's ways with the old woman—a dainty old dame, such as is grown in the upper ranks of service, whom he treated with a hearty, bantering, coaxing manner, which she evidently enjoyed extremely. His reading, for he *did* come to more serious matters, was very good—in a voice that without effort reached deaf ears, and with feeling about it that did a great deal to reassure his sister that there was something behind the big bright boy.

But by the time he had done the honours of all the pheasants, and all the dogs, and all the ferrets, and all the stuffed birds, and all the eggs (for the keeper was a bit of a naturalist), and had discussed Mr. Frank's last day's shooting, it was so late, that Jenny had only just time to walk back to the Hall at her best pace, to see Mrs. Poynsett for a few minutes before luncheon; and her reception was, "Is that Herbert's step? Call him in, my dear!—You must make the most of your sister, Herbert. Come in to all meals while she is here."

He heard with gratitude—his sister with consternation. If forenoon pastoral visits were to be on that scale, and he dined out whenever he was not at school or at church, how would his books fare? and yet she could not grudge his pleasure. She could not help looking half foolish, half sad, when she met the Rector's eye.

Julius thought so much of her advice, as to knock at Cecil's sitting-room door, and beg to ask her a question; and as she liked to be consulted, she welcomed him hospitably into that temple, sacred to culture and to Dunstone—full of drawings, books, and china.

"I was thinking," he said, "of offering Anne some parish work. I wanted to know if you saw any objection?"

"Certainly not; I have not been able to make acquaintance yet with all our tenants, but they seem quite to understand the difference in our positions," said Cecil, with due deliberation.

Julius choked his amusement, and waived that point. "But did you not feel obliged to decline her services at the Wil'sbro' work-room?"

"That was quite another thing. What was most undesirable in such an institution would be all very well for your old women."

"What kind of thing?"

"Talking piously, giving away texts, and so on; just the way to make the women think we intended to impose religious instruction and give a sectarian character, defeating our own object."

"Was there any flaw in what she said?"

"I can't tell what she said. It was just a little murmur over the work."

"Not preaching?"

"Not in that sense," said Cecil, with a little compunction.

"I am glad to hear it; it makes a great difference."

"You see," said the lady, "our institution is merely intended to support these women in the time of want; and if we were to couple our assistance with religion we should just sink into a mothers' meeting, and make the women think—"

"Think that you prize the soul more than the body," said Julius, as she halted in search of a word. "I understand, Cecil; you would not be in the prevailing fashion. I don't want to argue that point, only to understand about Anne."

So saying, he went at once to Anne's abode, the old schoolroom, which, like everything else belonging to Mrs. Miles Charnock, had a sad-coloured aspect, although it had been fitted up very prettily. The light was sombre, and all the brighter pictures and ornaments seemed to have been effaced by a whole gallery of amateur photographs, in which the glories of the African bush were represented by brown masses of shade variegated by blotches of white. Even in Miles's own portrait on the table, the gold seemed overwhelmed by the dark blue; and even as Julius entered, she shut it up in its brown case, as too sacred for even his brother's eyes.

However, a flush of pleasure came to her pale face at the invitation to take a class, and to read to a good old woman, whom in his secret soul he thought so nearly a dissenter, that she could not be made more so. She promised her help with some eagerness for as long as she should remain in England, and accepted the books he gave her without protest. Nay, that same evening she took Jenny off into her gray abode, to consult her whether, since she must now join the early breakfast, she could go to daily service without becoming formal.

She even recurred to her question, whether Julius was a Christian, without nearly as much negation in her tones as before; and Jenny, taking it as it was meant, vouched for his piety, so as might render it a little more comprehensible to one matured on Scottish Calvinism and English Methodism, diluted in devout undogmatic minds, with no principle more developed than horror of Popery and of worldliness. Turned loose in solitude, reserve, and sadness, on her husband's family, who did nothing but shock her with manifestations of the latter, she could hardly turn even to the clerical portion of it, while Julius, as well as his curates, bore all the tokens by which she had been taught to know a Papist. Daily intercourse was perhaps drawing her a little towards her brother-in-law; but Herbert Bowater united these obnoxious externals to a careless tongue, and joyous easy-going manner, and taste for amusement, which so horrified Anne, that she once condoled with his sister, and proposed to unite in prayer for his conversion; but this was more than Joanna could bear, and she cried, "I only wish I were as good a Christian as dear Herbert!"

For indeed, the sister's heart intensely esteemed his sweetness, honesty, and simplicity, even while she found it an uphill task to coax him to steady work. After that first morning he was indeed ashamed to let her see the proportion between his pastoral visits and his theological reading; but the newspapers (he had two or three weekly ones) had a curious facility of expansion, and there was a perilous sound in "I'll just see where the meet is,"—not that he had the most distant idea of repairing thither; it was pure filial interest in learning where his father and Edith would be.

Jenny could not tell whether her presence conduced to diligence or to chatter, but he minded her more than any one else, and always stuck close to her, insisting on her admiring all his *protégés*. There was one with whom he was certainly doing a work, which, as Julius truly said, no one more clerical could have done so well—namely, the son of his landlady, a youth who held a small clerkship in an office at Willansborough, and who had fallen this year under the attraction of the Backsworth races, so as to get into serious difficulties with his master, and narrowly escape dismissal for the sake of his mother.

The exceeding good-nature and muscular Christian side of the lodger's character was having a most happy effect on the lad. He had set up a regular hero-worship, which Herbert encouraged by always calling for him when going to the choral practices, getting him into the choir, lending him books, and inviting him to read in his room in the evening. How much they played with the dogs was not known; but at any rate, Harry Hornblower was out of mischief, and his mother was so grateful to Mr. Bowater, that she even went the length of preferring his sermons to those of both his seniors.

The discovery that most vexed Jenny was that Sirenwood had so much of his time. He seemed to be asked to come to dinner whenever Sir Harry saw him, or a chair was left vacant at a party; and though his Rector was inexorable as to releasing him on casual notice from the parish avocations of three nights in the week, the effect was grumbling as savage as was possible from so good-humoured a being; and now and then a regular absence without leave, and a double growl at the consequent displeasure. It was true that in ten minutes he was as hearty and friendly as ever to his colleagues, but that might be only a proof of his disregard of their reproofs, and their small effect.

Eleonora Vivian was not the attraction. No; Herbert thought her a proud, silent, disagreeable girl, and could see no beauty in her; but he had a boy's passion for the matured splendour of her sister's beauty; and she was so kind to him!

What could Jenny mean by looking glum about it? She was stunningly good, and all that. She had done no end of good with clubs and mothers' meetings at her married home; and it was no end of a pity she was not in Compton parish, instead of under poor wretched old Fuller, whom you could not stir—no, not if you tied a firebrand to his tail.

## **CHAPTER XIII**

### **Withered Leaves and Fresh Buds**



Lady Rosamond and Joanna Bowater could not fail to be good friends; Herbert was a great bond of union, and so was Mrs. Poyntsett. Rosamond found it hard to recover from the rejection of her scheme of the wheeled-chair, and begged Jenny to become its advocate; but Mrs. Poyntsett listened with a smile of the unpromising kind—"You too, Jenny?"

"Why not, dear Mrs. Poyntsett? How nice it would be to see you in your own corner again!"

"I don't think my own corner remains."

"Oh! but it could be restored at once."

"Do you think so? No, no, Jenny my dear; cracked china is better left on the shelf out of the way, even if it could bear the move, which it can't."

Then Jenny understood, and advised Rosamond to bide her time, and wait till the session of parliament, when the house would be quieter; and Rosamond nodded and held her peace.

The only person who held aloof was Cecil, who would not rise to the bait when Raymond tried to exhibit Miss Bowater as a superior intellectual woman.

Unluckily, too, Jenny observed one evening at the five o'clock tea, "I hear that Mrs. Duncombe has picked up some very funny people—a lady lecturer, who is coming to set us all to rights."

"A wonderful pair, I hear!" said Frank. "Mrs. Clio Tallboys, she calls herself, and a poor little husband, whom she carries about to show the superiority of her sex."

"A Cambridge professor and a great political economist!" observed Cecil, in a low but indignant voice.

"The Yankee Cambridge!" quoth Frank.

"The American Cambridge is a distinguished university," returned Cecil.

"Cecil is right, Master Frank," laughed his mother; "Cam and Isis are not the only streams of learning in the world."

"I never heard of him," said Jenny; "he is a mere satellite to the great luminary."

"They are worth seeing," added Frank; "she is one of those regular American beauties one would pay to get a sight of."

"Where did you get all this information?" asked Cecil.

"From Duncombe himself. They met on the Righi; and nothing is more comical than to hear him describe the ladies' fraternization over female doctors and lawyers, till they rushed into each other's arms, and the Clio promised to come down on a crusade and convert you all."

"There are two ways of telling a story," said Cecil.

"No wonder the gentlemen quake!" said Mrs. Poyntsett.

"I don't," said Frank, boyishly.

"Because you've no wife to take you in hand," retorted Jenny.

"For my part," said Mrs. Poyntsett, "I can't see what women want. I have always had as many rights as I could exercise."

"Ah! but we are not all ladies of the manor," said Jenny, "nor do we all drive coaches."

"I observe," said Cecil, with dignity, "that there is supposed to be a license to laugh at Mrs. Duncombe and whatever she does."

"She would do better to mind her children," said Frank.

"Children! Has she children?" broke in Anne and Rosamond, both at once.

"Didn't you know it?" said Jenny.

"No, indeed! I didn't think her the sort of woman," said Rosamond. "What does she do with them?"

"Drops them in the gutter," said Frank. "Literally, as I came home, I heard a squeak, and found a child flat in a little watercourse. I picked it out, and the elder one told me it was Ducky Duncombe, or some such word. Its little boots had holes in them, mother; its legs were purple, and there was a fine smart foreign woman flirting round the corner with young Hornblower."

"Boys with long red hair, and Highland dresses?" exclaimed Rosamond. "Yes, the same we saw with Miss Vivian!"

"Exactly!" said Frank, eagerly. "She is quite a mother to those poor little wretches; they watch for her at the Sirenwood gate, and she walks with them. The boy's cry was not for mother or nurse, but for Lena!"

"Pray, did she come at his call?"

"No; but when I carried the brat home, poor Duncombe told me almost with tears, how good she is to them. I fancy he feels their mother's neglect of them."

"I'm sure I gave her credit for having none," said Rosamond.

"Ah!" said Jenny, "you should have heard her condolences with my sister Mary on her last infliction. Fancy Mary's face!"

"No doubt it was to stem a torrent of nursery discussions," said Cecil. "Such bad taste!"

"Which?" murmured Rosamond under her breath, with an arched eyebrow.

"Plain enough," said Frank: "if a woman is a woman, the bad taste is to be ashamed of it."

"Yes," said Cecil, "that is the way with men; they would fain keep us down to the level of the nursery."

"I thought nurseries were usually at the top of the house."

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Poyntsett, disregarding this mischievous suggestion, "they mean that organization, like charity, should begin at home."

"You say that meaningly," said Rosamond. "I have heard very odd stories of domestic affairs at Aucuba Villa, and that she can't get a servant to stay there."

"That man, Alexander, has always been there," said Frank.

"Yes; but he has occasionally to do all the work of the house. Yes, I can't help it, Cecil, Susan will regale me with cook-stories sometimes; and I have heard of the whole establishment turning out on being required to eat funguses."

"I shall beware of dining there!" said Rosamond.

"Don't they dine here to-morrow?" asked Frank.

"No, they are engaged to the Moys," said Cecil.

"But the Vivians come?"

"Oh yes."

Every one knew that already; but Frank could not help having it repeated. It was a mere formal necessity to ask them, and had been accepted as such; but there was some amazement when Cecil brought home Lady Tyrrell and Miss Vivian to lunch and spend the afternoon. It might be intended as one of her demonstrations; for though it was understood that any of the inmates were free to bring home friends to luncheon, it was not done—except with a casual gentleman—without notice to the mistress of the house. Cecil, however, comported herself entirely as in that position, explaining that Lady Tyrrell was come to give her advice upon an intended fernery, and would perform her toilette here, so as to have plenty of time. Frank, little knowing what was passing, was working the whole day at his tutor's for the closely imminent examination; Julius and Raymond were gravely polite; Eleonora very silent; and as soon as the meal was over, Rosamond declared that she should not come out to stand planning in the cold; and though Herbert would have liked nothing better in that company, his Rector carried him off to arrange an Advent service in a distant hamlet; Anne's horse came to the door; and only Joanna remained to accompany the gardening party, except that Raymond came out with them to mark the limits of permissible alteration.

"How unchanged!" exclaimed Lady Tyrrell. "Time stands still here; only where is the grand old magnolia? How sweet it used to be!"

"Killed by the frost," said Raymond, shortly, not choosing to undergo a course of reminiscences, and chafing his wife by his repressive manner towards her guest. When he had pointed out the bed of Americans that were to be her boundary, he excused himself as having letters to finish; and as he went away Cecil gave vent to her distaste to the old shrubs and borders, now, of course, at their worst—the azaleas mere dead branches, the roses with a few yellow night-capped buds still lingering, and fuchsias with a scanty bell or two.

Jenny fought for their spring beauty, all the more because Lady Tyrrell was encouraging the wife to criticize the very things she had tried to sentimentalize over with the husband; but seeing that she was only doing harm, she proposed a brisk walk to Eleonora, who gladly assented, though her sister made a protest about damp, and her being a bad walker. The last things they heard was Cecil's sigh, "It is all so shut in, wherever there is level ground, that the bazaar would be impossible."

"I should hope so!" muttered Jenny.

"What do you mean to do about this bazaar?" asked Eleonora, as they sped away.

"I don't know. Those things so often go off in smoke, that I don't make up my mind till they become imminent."

"I am afraid this will go on," said Eleonora. "Camilla means it and she always carries out her plans; I wish I saw the right line."

"About that?"

"About everything. It seems to me that there never was any one so cut off from help and advice as I am;" then, as Joanna made some mute sign of sympathy, "I knew you would understand; I have been longing to be with you, for there has been no one to whom I could speak freely since I left Rockpier."

"And I have been longing to have you. Mamma would have asked you to stay with us before, only we had the house full. Can't you come now?"

"You will see that I shall not be allowed. It is of no use to think about it!" said the girl, with a sigh. "Here, let us get out of this broad path, or she may yet come after us—persuade Mrs. Charnock Poyntsett it is too cold to stand about—anything to break up a *tête-à-tête*."

Jenny saw she really was in absolute fear of pursuit; but hardly yet understood the nervous haste to turn into a not very inviting side-path, veiled by the trees, whose wet leaves were falling.

"Do you mind the damp?" asked the girl, anxiously.

"No, not at all; but—"

"You don't know what it is never to feel free, but be like a French girl, always watched—at least whenever I am with any one I care to speak to."

"Are you quite sure it is not imagination?"

"O, Joanna, don't be like all the rest, blinded by her! You knew her always!"

"Only from below. I am four years younger; you know dear Emily was my contemporary."

"Dear Emily! I miss her more now than even at Rockpier. But you, who were her friend, and knew Camilla of old, I know you can help me as no one else can."

Jenny returned a caress; and Eleonora spoke on. "You know I was only eight years old when Camilla married, and I had scarcely seen her till she came to us at Rockpier, on Lord Tyrrell's death, and then she was most delightful. I thought her like mother and sister both in one, even more tender than dear Emily. How could I have thought so for a moment? But she enchanted everybody. Clergy, ladies, and all came under the spell; and I can't get advice from any of them—even from Miss Coles—you remember her?"

"Your governess? How nice she was!"

"Emily and I owed everything to her! She was as near being a mother to us as any one could be; and Camilla could not say enough of gratitude, or show esteem enough, and fascinated her like all the rest of us; but she never rested till she had got her off to a situation in Russia. I did not perceive the game at the time, but I see now how all the proposals for situations within reach of me were quashed."

"But you write to her?"

"Yes; but as soon as I showed any of my troubles she reproved me for self-will and wanting to judge for myself, and not submit to my sister. That's the way with all at Rockpier. Camilla has gone about pitying me to them for having to give way to my married sister, but saying it was quite time that she took charge of us; and on that notion they all wrote to me. Then she persuaded papa to go abroad; and I was delighted, little thinking she never meant me to go back again."

"Did she not?"

"Listen! I've heard her praise Rockpier and its church to the skies to one person—say Mr. Bindon. To another, such as our own Vicar, she says it was much too *ultra*, and she likes moderation; she tells your father that she wants to see papa among his old friends; and to Mrs. Duncombe, I've heard her go as near the truth as is possible to her, and call it a wearisome place, with an atmosphere of incense, curates, and old maids, from whom she had carried me off before I grew fit for nothing else!"

"I dare say all these are true in turn, or seem so to her, or she would not say them before you."

"She has left off trying to gloss it over with me, except so far as it is part of her nature. She did at first, but she knows it is of no use now."

"Really, Lenore, you must be going too far."

"I have shocked you; but you can't conceive what it is to live with perpetual falsity. No, I can't use any other word. I am always mistrusting and being angered, and my senses of right and wrong get so confused, that it is like groping in a maze." Her eyes were full of tears, but she exclaimed, "Tell me, Joanna, was there ever anything between Camilla and Mr. Poyntsett?"

"Why bring that up again now?"

"Why did it go off?" insisted Lenore.

"Because Mrs. Poyntsett could not give up and turn into a dowager, as if she were not the mistress herself."

"Was that all?"

"So it was said."

"I want to get to the bottom of it. It was not because Lord Tyrrell came in the way."

"I am afraid they thought so here."

"Then," said Eleonora, in a hard, dry way, "I know the reason of our being brought back here, and of a good deal besides."

"My dear Lena, I am very sorry for you; but I think you had better keep this out of your mind, or you will fall into a hard, bitter, suspicious mood."

"That is the very thing. I am in a hard, bitter, suspicious mood, and I can't see how to keep out of it; I don't know when opposition is right and firm, and when it is only my own self-will."

"Would it not be a good thing to talk to Julius Charnock? You would not be betraying anything."

"No! I can't seem to make up to the good clergyman! Certainly not. Besides, I've heard Camilla talking to his wife!"

"Talking?"

"Admiring that dress, which she had been sneering at to your mother, don't you remember? It was one of her honey-cups with venom below—only happily, Lady Rosamond saw through the flattery. I'm ashamed whenever I see her!"

"I don't think that need cut you off from Julius."

"Tell me *truly*," again broke in Lenore, "what Mrs. Poyntsett really is. She is a standing proverb with us for tyranny over her sons; not with Camilla alone, but with papa."

"See how they love her!" cried Jenny, hotly.

"Camilla thinks that abject; but I can't forget how Frank talked of her in those happy Rockpier days."

"When you first knew him?" said Jenny.

They must have come at length to the real point, for Eleonora began at once—"Yes; he was with his sick friend, and we were so happy; and now he is being shamefully used, and I don't know what to do!"

"Indeed, Lenore," said Jenny, in her downright way, "I do not understand. You do not seem to care for him."

"Of course I am wrong," said the poor girl; "but I hoped I was doing the best thing for him." Then, as Jenny made an indignant sound, "See, Jenny, when he came to Rockpier, Camilla had been a widow about three months. She never had been very sad, for Lord Tyrrell had been quite imbecile for a year, poor man! And when Frank came, she could not make enough of him; and he and I both thought the two families had been devotedly fond of each other, and that she was only too glad to meet one of them."

"I suppose that was true."

"So do I, as things stood then. She meant Frank to be a sort of connecting link, against the time when she could come back here; but we, poor children, never thought of that, and went on together, not exactly saying anything, but quite understanding how much we cared. Indeed, I know Camilla impressed on him that, for his mother's sake, it must go no farther then, while he was still so young; and next came our journey on the Continent, ending in our coming back here last July."

Jenny remembered that Raymond's engagement had not been made known till August, and Frank had only returned from a grouse-shooting holiday a week or two before the arrival of the brides.

"Now," added Eleonora, "Camilla has made me understand that nothing will induce her to let papa consent; and though I know he would, if he were left to himself, I also see how all this family must hate and loathe the connection."

"May I ask, has Frank ever spoken?"

"Oh no! I think he implied it all to Camilla when she bade him wait till our return, fancying, I suppose, that one could forget the other."

"But why does she seem so friendly with him?"

"It is her way; she can't be other than smooth and caressing, and likes to have young men about; and I try to be grave and distant, because—the sooner he is cured of me the better for him," she uttered, with a sob; "but when he is there, and I see those grieved eyes of his, I can't keep it up! And papa does like him! Oh! if Camilla would but leave us alone! See here, Jenny!" and she showed, on her watch-chain, a bit of ruddy polished pebble. "Is it wrong to keep this? He and I found the stone in two halves, on the beach, the last day we were together, and had them set, pretending to one another it was only play. Sometimes I think I ought to send mine back; I know

he has his, he let me see it one day. Do you think I ought to give it up?"

"Why should you?"

"Because then he would know that it must be all over."

"But *is* it all over? Within, I mean?"

"Jenny, you know better!"

"Then, Lenore, if so, and it is only your sister who objects, not your father himself, ought you to torment poor Frank by acting indifference when you do not feel it?"

"Am I untrue? I never thought of that. I thought I should be sacrificing myself for his good!"

"His good? O, Lenore, I believe it is the worst wrong a woman can do a man, to let him think he has wasted his heart upon her, and that she is trifling with him. You don't know what a bad effect this is having, even on his prospects. He cannot get his brain or spirits free to work for his examination."

"How hard it is to know what is right! Here have I been thinking that what made me so miserable must be the best for him, and would it not make it all the worse to relax, and let him see?"

"I do not think so," returned Jenny. "His spirits would not be worn by doubt of *you*—the worst doubt of all: and he would feel that he had something to strive for."

Eleonora walked on for some steps in silence, then exclaimed, "Yes, but there's his family. It would only stir up trouble for them there. They can't approve of me."

"They don't know you. When they do, they will. Now they only see what looks like—forgive me, Lena—caprice and coquetry; they will know you in earnest, if you will let them."

"You don't mean that they know anything about it!" exclaimed Eleonora.

Jenny almost laughed. "Not know where poor Frank's heart is? You don't guess how those sons live with their mother!"

"I suppose I have forgotten what sincerity and openness are," said Eleonora, sadly. "But is not she very much vexed?"

"She was vexed to find it had gone so deep with him," said Jenny; "but I know that you can earn her affection and trust by being staunch and true yourself—and it is worth having, Lena!"

For Jenny knew Eleonora of old, through Emily's letters, and had no doubt of her rectitude, constancy, and deep principle, though she was at the present time petrified by constant antagonism to such untruthfulness as, where it cannot corrupt, almost always hardens those who come in contact with it. And this cruel idea of self-sacrifice was, no doubt, completing the indurating process.

Jenny knew the terrible responsibility of giving such advice. She had not done it lightly. She had been feeling for years past that "'Tis better to have loved and lost, than never to have loved at all;" and she knew that uncertainty of the right to love and trust would have been a pang beyond all she had suffered. To give poor Eleonora, situated as she now was, admission to the free wholesome atmosphere of the Charnock family, was to her kind heart irresistible; and it was pleasant to feel the poor girl clinging to her, as people do to those who have given the very counsel the heart craved for.

It was twilight when the walk was over, and the drawing-room was empty; but Anne came to invite them to Mrs. Poyntett's tea, saying that Cecil had Lady Tyrrell in her own sitting-room. Perhaps Mrs. Poyntett had not realized who was Jenny's companion, for she seemed startled at their entrance; and Jenny said, "You remember Lenore Vivian?"

"I must have seen you as a child," said Mrs. Poyntett, courteously. "You are very like your sister."

This, though usually a great compliment, disappointed Eleonora, as she answered, rather frigidly, "So people say."

"Have you walked far?"

"To the Outwood Lodge."

"To-day? Was it not very damp in the woods?"

"Oh no, delightful!"

"Lena and I are old friends," said Jenny; "too glad to meet to heed the damp."

Here Raymond entered, with the air of a man who had just locked up a heavy post-bag at the last possible moment; and he too was amazed, though he covered it by asking why the party was so small.

"Rosamond has gone to meet her husband, and Cecil has her guest in her own domains."

Then Jenny asked after his day's work—a county matter, interesting to all the magistracy, and their womankind in their degree; and Eleonora listened in silence, watching with quiet heedfulness Frank's mother and brother.

When Frank himself came in, his face was a perfect study; and the colour mantled in her cheeks, so that Jenny trusted that both were touched by the wonderful beauty that a little softness and timidity brought out on the features, usually so resolutely on guard. But when, in the later evening, Jenny crept in to her old friend, hoping to find that the impression had been favourable, she only heard, "Exactly like her sister, who always had the making of a fine countenance."

"The mask—yes, but Lena has the spirit behind the mask. Poor girl! she is not at all happy in the atmosphere her sister has brought home."

"Then I wish they would marry her!"

"Won't you believe how truly nice and good she is?"

"That will not make up for the connection. My heart sank, Jenny, from the time I heard that those Vivians were coming back. I kept Frank away as long as I could—but there's no help for it. It seems the fate of my boys to be the prey of those sirens."

"Well, then, dear Mrs. Poynsett, do pray believe, on my word, that Eleonora is a different creature!"

"Is there no hope of averting it? I thought Camilla would—poor Frank is such insignificant game!"

"And when it does come, don't be set against her, please, dear Mrs. Poynsett. Be as kind to her—as you were to me," whispered Jenny, nestling up, and hiding her face.

"My dear, but I knew you! You were no such case."

"Except that you all were horribly vexed with us, because we couldn't help liking each other," said Jenny.

"Ah! my poor child! I only wish you could have liked any one else!"

"Do you?" said Jenny, looking up. "Oh no, you don't! You would not have me for your supplementary child, if I had," she added playfully; then very low—"It is because the thought of dear Archie, even ending as it did, is my very heart's joy, that I want you to let them have theirs!"

And then came a break, which ended the pleading; and Jenny was obliged to leave Compton without much notion as to the effect of her advice, audacious as she knew it to have been.

## CHAPTER XIV Neither Land Nor Water

A light that never was on sea or land.—WORDSWORTH

Nothing could be prettier than Rosamond's happiness in welcoming her school-boy brothers, and her gratitude to Mrs. Poynsett for inviting them, declaring that she liked boys. Her sons, however, dreaded the inroad of two wild Irish lads, and held council what covers and what horses could most safely be victimized to them, disregarding all testimony in their favour from interested parties. When, therefore, Terence and Thomas de Lancey made their appearance, and were walked in for exhibition by their proud and happy sister, there was some surprise at the sight of two peculiarly refined, quiet boys, with colourless complexions, soft, sleepy, long-lashed, liquid brown eyes, the lowest of full voices, and the gentlest of manners, as if nothing short of an explosion could rouse them.

And it was presently manifest that their sister had said rather too little than too much of Terry's abilities. Not only had he brought home a huge pile of prizes, but no sooner was the *séance* after dinner broken up, than he detained Julius, saying, in a very meek and modest tone, "Rose says you know all the books in the library."

"Rose undertakes a great deal for me. What is this the prelude to?"

"I wanted to ask if I might just look at any book about the physical geography of Italy, or the History of Venice, or the Phœnicians."

"Why, Terry?"

"It is for the Prize Essay," explained the boy; "the subject is the effect of the physical configuration of a country upon the character of a nation."

Julius drew a long breath, astounded at the march of intellect since his time. "They don't expect such things of fellows like you!" he said.

"Only of the sixth, but the fifth may go in for it, and I want to get up to the Doctor himself; I

thought, as I was coming to such a jolly library, I might try; and if I do pretty well, I shall be put up, if any more fellows leave. Do you think I may use the books? I'm librarian, so I know how to take care of them."

"You can be trusted for that, you book-worm," said Julius; "here's the library, but I fear I don't know much about those modern histories. My mother is a great reader, and will direct us. Let us come to her."

Quiet as Terry was, he was neither awkward nor shy; and when Julius had explained his wishes, and Mrs. Poyntsett had asked a few good-natured questions, she was charmed as well as surprised at the gentle yet eager modesty with which the low-pitched tones detailed the ideas already garnered up, and inquired for authorities, in which to trace them out, without the least notion of the remarkable powers he was evincing. She was delighted with the boy; Julius guided his researches; and he went off to bed as happy as a king, with his hands full of little dark tarnished French duodecimos, and with a ravenous appetite for the pasture ground he saw before him. Lower Canada had taught him French, and the stores he found were revelry to him.

Cecil's feelings may be better guessed than described when the return of Mudie's box was hastened that he might have Motley's *Dutch Republic*. She thought this studiousness mere affectation; but it was indisputable that Terry's soul was in books, and that he never was so happy as when turned loose into the library, dipping here and there, or with an elbow planted on either side of a folio.

Offers of gun or horse merely tormented him, and only his sister could drag him out by specious pleas of need, to help in those Christmas works, where she had much better assistance in Anne and the curates—the one for clubs and coals, the other for decorations.

Mrs. Poyntsett was Terry's best friend. He used to come to her in the evening and discuss what he had been reading till she was almost as keen about his success as Frank's. He talked over his ambition, of getting a scholarship, becoming a fellow, and living for ever among the books, for which the scanty supply in his wandering boyhood had but whetted his fervour. He even confided to her what no one else knew but his sister Aileen, his epic in twenty-four books on Brian Boromhe and the Battle of Clontarf; and she was mother enough not to predict its inevitable fate, nor audibly to detect the unconscious plagiarisms, but to be a better listener than even Aileen, who never could be withheld from unfeeling laughter at the touching fate of the wounded warriors who were tied to stakes that they might die fighting.

Tom was a more ordinary youth, even more lazy and quiet in the house, though out of it he amazed Frank and Charlie by his dash, fire, and daring, and witched all the stable-world with noble horsemanship. Hunting was prevented, however, by a frost, which filled every one with excitement as to the practicability of skating.

The most available water was a lake between Sirenwood and Compton; and here, like eagles to the slaughter, gathered, by a sort of instinct, the entire skating population of the neighbourhood on the first day that the ice was hard enough. Rosamond was there, of course, with both her brothers, whom she averred, by a bold figure of speech, to have skated in Canada before they could walk. Anne was there, studying the new phenomena of ice and snow under good-natured Charlie's protection, learning the art with unexpected courage and dexterity. Cecil was there but not shining so much, for her father had been always so nervous about his darling venturing on the ice, that she had no skill in the art; and as Raymond had been summoned to some political meeting, she had no special squire, as her young brother-in-law eluded the being enlisted in her service; and she began to decide that skating was irrational and unwomanly; although Lady Tyrrell had just arrived, and was having her skates put on; and Eleonora was only holding back because she was taking care of the two purple-legged, purple-faced, and purple-haired little Duncombes, whom she kept sliding in a corner, where they could hardly damage themselves or the ice.

Cecil had just thanked Colonel Ross for pushing her in a chair, and on his leaving her was deliberating whether to walk home with her dignity, or watch for some other cavalier, when the drag drew up on the road close by, and from it came Captain and Mrs. Duncombe, with two strangers, who were introduced to her as 'Mrs. Tallboys and the Professor, just fetched from the station.'

The former was exquisitely dressed in blue velvet and sealskin, and had the transparent complexion and delicate features of an American, with brilliant eyes, and a look of much cleverness; her husband, small, sallow, and dark, and apparently out of health. "Are you leaving off skating, Cecil?" asked Mrs. Duncombe; "goodness me, I could go on into next year! But if you are wasting your privileges, bestow them on Mrs. Tallboys, for pity's sake. We came in hopes some good creature had a spare pair of skates. Gussie Moy offered, but hers were yards too long."

"I hope mine are not too small," said Cecil, not quite crediting that an American foot could be as small as that of a Charnock; but she found herself mistaken, they were a perfect fit; and as they were tried, there came a loud laugh, and she saw a tall girl standing by her, whom, in her round felt hat and thick rough coat with metal buttons, she had really taken for one of the Captain's male friends.

"I wouldn't have such small feet," she said; "I shouldn't feel secure of my understanding."

"Mrs. Tallboys would not change with you, Gussie," said Captain Duncombe. "I'd back her any day—"

"What odds will you take, Captain—"

But Mrs. Duncombe broke in. "Bless me, if there aren't those little dogs of mine! Lena Vivian does spoil them. Send them home, for pity's sake, Bob."

"Poor little kids, they are doing no harm."

"We shall have them tumbling in, and no end of a row! I can't stand a swarm of children after me, and they are making a perfect victim of Lena. Send them home, Bob, or I shall have to do it."

The Captain obeyed somewhat ruefully. "Come, my lads, Bessie says you must go home, and leave Miss Vivian in peace."

"O, Bob, please let us stay; Lena is taking care of us—"

"Indeed I like nothing so well," protested Lenore; but the Captain murmured something about higher powers, and cheerfully saying he would give the boys a run, took each by an unwilling hand, and raced them into a state of frightened jollity by a short cut, by which he was able to dispose of them in the drag.

The Professor, meanwhile, devoted himself to Mrs. Charnock Poyntsett, took her chair for a whirl on the ice; described American sleighing parties; talked of his tour in Europe. He was really a clever, observant man, and Cecil had not had any one to talk Italy to her for a long time past, and responded with all her full precision. The Professor might speak a little through his nose, but she had seldom met any one more polite and accomplished.

Meantime, a quadrille was being got up. Such a performance and such partners had never been seen in light that shone on water or on land, being coupled by their dexterity in the art. They were led off by Mrs. Duncombe and the Reverend James Bindon. Mrs. Tallboys paired with Terry De Lancey, Lady Tyrrell with Herbert Bowater, Lady Rosamond with one of the officers. Tom was pounced on by the great 'Gussy Moy,' who declared, to his bitter wrath, that she preferred little boys, turning her back on Mr. Strangeways and two or three more officers, as she saw them first solicitous to engage Eleonora Vivian—who, however, was to skate with Charlie.

A few wistful glances were cast towards the Wil'sbro' road, for Frank had been obliged by the cruel exigencies of the office to devote this magnificent frosty day to the last agonies of cram. This, however, had gone on better for the last fortnight—owing, perhaps, to some relaxation of Eleonora's stern guard over her countenance in their few meetings since Jenny's departure.

"And after all," as Charlie said, with the cheeriness of one who has passed his own ordeal, "a man who had taken such a degree as Frank could not depend on a few weeks of mere cramming."

Frank did come speedily up the road just as the quadrille was in full force; and perhaps the hindrance had stood him in good stead; for when the performance ceased in the twilight, and voices were eagerly talking of renewing it as a *fackel-tanz* in the later evening, and only yielding at the recollection of dinner engagements, it was not Charlie who was taking off Eleonora's skates; and when, after fixing grand plans for the morrow, Lady Tyrrell mounted her pony-carriage and looked for her sister, she heard that Miss Vivian was walking home.

Yes, Miss Vivian was walking home; and there was a companion by her side feeling as if that dark, hard gravelled road were the pebbly beach of Rockpier.

"When do you go to London?" she asked.

"To-morrow afternoon. Wish me well through, Lenore."

"Indeed I do."

"Say it again, Lenore! Give me the elixir that will give me power to conquer everything."

"Don't say such exaggerated things."

"Do you think it is possible to me to exaggerate what a word from you is to me?" said Frank, in a low voice of intense feeling.

"O Frank! it is wiser not to say such things."

"Wise! what is that to me? It is true, and you have known it—and why will you not allow that you do, as in those happy old days—"

"That's what makes me fear. It would be so much better for you if all this had never begun."

"It has begun, then!" murmured Frank, with joy and triumph in the sound. "As long as you allow that, it is enough for me."

"I must! It is true; and truth must be somewhere!" was whispered in a strange, low, resolute whisper.

"True! true that you can feel one particle of the intensity—Oh! what words can I find to make you understand the glow and tenderness the very thought of you has been!"



"Hush, hush!—pray, Frank. Now, if I do own it—"

"It—what? Let me hear! I'm very stupid, you know!" said Frank, in a voice of exulting comprehension, belying his alleged stupidity.

"What you have been to me—"

"Have been—eh?" said this cruel cross-examiner.

"Do not let us waste time," said Eleonora, in a trembling voice; "you know very well."

"Do I?"

"Now, Frank!"

"If you only knew what it would be worth to me to hear you say it!"

"I'm afraid it would be only worth pain and grief to you, and anger from every one," said she, in a low dejected voice, "far more than I am worth."

"You? Trust me to judge of that, Lenore. Would not you be worth all, and more than all, that flesh or spirit could feel! I could face it all for one look from you!" said Frank, with fervour from his heart of hearts.

"You make me more and more afraid. It is all too wretched to lead any one into. Since I knew the whole truth, I have tried to spare you from it."

"That is why you have been so cold, and held so cruelly aloof all this time, so that if I had not caught one ray now and then, you would have broken my heart, Lenore; as it is, I've been wretched beyond description, hardly able to sleep by night or speak rationally by day. How had you the heart to serve me so, like a stony Greek statue?"

"I thought it must be right. It seemed to break my own heart too."

"That's the woman's way of showing a thing is right; but why I can't see. If you did hate me, it might be all very well to throw me over; but if not, why torture two as well as one? Are you afraid of my people? I'll manage them."

"You little know—"

"Know what?"

"All that made it cruel in Camilla to throw us together."

"Cruel! when it was the crowning joy of my past life, and is to be the crowning joy of the future?"

"How can it? Frank, you must know the causes your mother has for abhorring any connection with our unhappy family."

"My mother has too much sense to think a little extravagance among the men of a family can affect the daughters. I know the outer world is afraid of her, but she is the tenderest and most indulgent of mothers to us. No fear of her!"

"Ah! but that's not all."

"You mean that she has not taken much to your sister. I know; and I'm very sorry; but bring them together, and it would soon be got over. Besides, it is not your sister, but you. What do you mean?" rather disconcerted.

"Then you really did not know of the old engagement between Camilla and your eldest brother?"

"Oh, oh! So she consented once! Then she will do so again."

"Listen! Camilla broke it off because your mother could not resign her position to her."

He gave a whistle of dismay, then recovering himself with a laugh, said, "Fourth sons don't have such expectations founded on them. Don't fear, dearest; that can't be all the story, though no doubt it was part of it. My mother would rather go into a hermitage than stand in the way of Raymond's happiness. Some one must have made mischief."

"It was not all," said the girl; "it was Lord Tyrrell's coming in the way. Yes, my father told me so; he held it up to me as an example of what one ought to do for one's family."

"Then she was coerced?"

"I don't know; but such a marriage for me, with some one who would redeem the property, is their scheme for me. Even if your mother and brother could tolerate the thought of one of us, my poor dear father will never dare to consent as long as she is with him."

"Nay, Lenore; have I not often heard her say she prefers happiness to ambition? Whatever she may have done, she has come to think differently. She has well-nigh told me so."

"Yes, at Rockpier," sighed Eleonora. "Hark!" The sound of the ponies' bells and hoofs was heard; Lenore put her hand on his arm, and drew him aside on the grass, behind a clump of trees, hushing him by a silent pressure as he tried to remonstrate. He clasped her hand, and felt her trembling till the tinkling and tramp were gone by.

"You frightened darling!" were his first words, when she let him speak. "Who would have thought you would be so shy? But we'll have it out, and—"

"It is not that," interrupted Lenore, "not maidenly shyness. That's for girls who are happy and secure. No; but I don't want to have it all overthrown at once—the first sweetness—"

"It can't be overthrown!" he said, holding arm and hand in the intense grasp.

"Not really, never; but there is no use in attempting anything till I am of age—next autumn, the 7th of November."

"Say nothing till then!" exclaimed Frank, in some consternation.

"We are only where we were before! We are sure of each other now. It will be only vexation and harass," said she, with the instinct of a persecuted creature.

"I couldn't," said Frank. "I could not keep it in with mother! It would not be right if I could, nor should I feel as if I were acting fairly by your father."

"You are right, Frank. Forgive me! You don't know what it is to have to be always saving one's truth only by silence. Speak when you think right."

"And I believe we shall find it far easier than you think. I'm not quite a beggar—except for you, my Lena. I should like to go home this minute, and tell mother and Charlie and Rose, that I'm—I'm treading on air; but I should only be fallen upon for thinking of anything but my task-work. So I'll take a leaf out of your book, you cautious Lenore, and wait till I come down victorious, happy and glorious—and I shall now. I feel as if you had given me power to scale Olympus, now I know I may carry your heart with me. Do you remember this, Lena?" He guided her hand to the smooth pebble on his chain. She responded by putting her own into his.

"My talisman!" he said. "It has been my talisman of success many a time. I have laid my hand on it, and thought I was working for you. Mine! mine! mine! Waters cannot quench love—never fear."

"Hush!" as the light of the opening hall door was seen, and Lady Tyrrell's voice was heard, saying, "I thought we passed her; I am sure she was near."

Eleonora withdrew her arm, patted Frank back, waved him into silence, and went forward, saying, "Here I am, Camilla; I walked home."

Her voice was calm and self-contained as ever—the unassailable dignity just as usual. The hall was full of officers, standing about the fire and drinking tea, and Eleonora's well-worn armour was instantly on, as her sister asked where she had been, since others had walked home and had not overtaken her.

"I came by the lower road," said she.

"Indeed! I never saw you."

"I saw you pass—or rather heard you."

"And did not let me pick you up! Did you hide yourself?"

"It was much warmer to walk."

"So you seem to have found it, to judge by your cheeks," said Lady Tyrrell.

And Mr. Strangeways and one or two others could not restrain a murmured exclamation on the exceeding loveliness of that deepened colour and brightened eye; but Lenore only knew that an equally bright and keen eye was watching her heedfully, and knew that she was suspected, if not read through and through.

She mingled in the discussion of the skating, with those outward society-senses that she learnt to put on, and escaped as soon as possible to her own room.

Again she almost fell on the ground in her own little oratory chamber, in a tumult of gladness that was almost agony, and fear that was almost joy.

She wanted to give thanks that Frank had become so wholly and avowedly hers, and for that deep intense affection that had gone on, unfed, uncherished, for years; but the overflow of delight was checked with foreboding—there was the instinctive terror of a basilisk eye gazing into her paradise of joy—the thanksgiving ran into a half-despairing deprecation.

And she knew that Frank was under Camilla's spell, and admired and trusted her still; nor had she been able to utter a word of caution to undeceive him. Should she have the power on the morrow? Camilla really loved skating, and surrounded as she was sure to be, there was hope of escaping her vigilant eye once more. To-morrow there would be another meeting with Frank! perhaps another walk with him!

That anticipation was soothing enough to bring back the power of joyful gratitude, and therewith of hopeful prayer.

## CHAPTER XV

### Plot and Counterplot

A lady a party of pleasure made,  
And she planned her scheme full well,  
And day and night the party filled  
The head of the demoiselle.—FABER

Though Frank had no reason to expect that the tidings of his success would be hailed with much satisfaction at home, yet his habit of turning to his mother for sympathy would have been too much for his prudence, but for the fact that Terry De Lancey had dragged into her room a massive volume of prints from the Uffizi Gallery, and was looking it over with her, with a zest she had not seen since the days when her father gloried in his collection.

His victory could only be confided to Charlie, who might laugh, but fully appreciated the repose of mind with which he could now encounter the examiners, and promised to do his part to cover the meetings of the lovers the next day. But even then the chances of another performance on the lake, or of a walk among the icicles afterwards, were departing. Thaw was setting in and by breakfast-time there was a down-pouring rain. Frank lingered about Cecil in hopes of a message to serve as an excuse for a rush to Sirenwood; but she proved to be going to drive to the working-room, and then to lunch at Mrs. Duncombe's, to meet the Americans and the ladies from Sirenwood, according to a note sent over in early morning at first sight of the wet.

Thereupon Frank found he had a last reference to make to his tutor, and begged for a lift. A touch of warmth in Cecil would have opened the flood-gates of his confidence, but she was exercised about a mistake in the accounts, and claimed his aid in tracking a defective seven-pence. When she heard him utter the monstrous statement that a hundred and five farthings were almost nine shillings, she looked at him with withering compassion, as sure to fail, and a small loss to Her Majesty; nor would she listen to any of his hints that he was very curious to see her working-room.

His question to the tutor judiciously lasted till twelve, when he dropped in to consult Captain Duncombe about horse-hire in London; and that gentleman, who had been undergoing a course of political economy all the morning, eagerly pounced on him for a tour of his stables, which lasted till luncheon was due, and he could casually enter the dining-room, where Lady Tyrrell held out her hand good-naturedly to him, laughing at the blankness he could not entirely conceal. "Only me!" she said. "It can't be helped! Poor Lenore caught such a dreadful sore throat last night, that I have shut her up in her room with a mustard poultice."

"Indeed! I am very sorry."

"You may well look horrified! You were the guilty party, I suspect. Taking her all across the park under those dank trees!"

He coloured up to the eyes, little expecting to be thus convicted; but Mrs. Duncombe came to his aid. "My impartiality would impute the damage to her standing about with those wretched little dogs of mine."

"It is your climate," said Mrs. Tallboys. "In our dry atmosphere there would be no risk with a far lower temperature."

"I hope it is nothing serious," said Frank, anxiously.

"I hope so too," said Lady Tyrrell, looking archly into his face, which had not learnt such impenetrability as poor Lenore's.

"No; but really?" he said, in anxiety that would not be rallied away.

"This is the way," said Lady Tyrrell. "Young gentlemen persuade young ladies to do the most imprudent things—saunter about in the cold after skating, and dawdle under trees, and then wonder when they catch cold.—Do they do such things in your country, Mrs. Tallboys, and expect the mammas and elder sisters to be gratified?"

"Mammas and elder sisters are at a discount with you, are not they?" said Mrs. Duncombe.

"Our young women are sufficient to protect themselves without our showing tacit distrust, and encumbering them with guardianship," returned the Professor.

"Mr. Charnock wishes we had reached that point," said Lady Tyrrell.

She had put him completely out of countenance. He had not supposed her aware of his having been Lenore's companion, and was not certain whether her sister had not after all confided in her, or if he himself had not been an unconscious victim. The public banter jarred upon him; and while Cecil was making inquiries into the extent of the young ladies' privileges in America, he was mentally calculating the possibilities of rushing up to Sirenwood, trying to see Lenore in spite of her throat, and ascertaining her position, before his train was due; but he was forced to resign the notion, for Raymond had made an appointment for him in London which must not be missed; and before luncheon was over the dog-cart, according to agreement with Charlie, called

for him.

"Good-bye, Mr. Frank," said Mrs. Duncombe; "will you have an old shoe thrown after you for luck?"

"The time is not come for that yet," said Cecil, gravely.

"Tending in that direction. Eh, Charnock?" said the Captain. "Here's to your success—now, and in what's to come!"

"Thank you, Captain," said Frank, shaking his hand, liking the hearty voice. "Lady Tyrrell, won't you give me your good wishes?" he asked, half diffidently.

"For the examination—yes, certainly," she replied. "It is safer not to look too far into your wishing-well."

"And—and will you give my—my best regards to Le—to Miss Vivian, and say I grieve for her cold, and trust to her—to her good wishes—" he uttered, quick and fast, holding her hand all the time.

"Yes, yes," she said quickly; "but last messages won't do when trains are due."

"Not due yet," said Frank; "but I must go home. I've not seen my mother to-day, and I shall not have a moment.—Good-bye, Cecil; have you any commands for Raymond?"

"No, thank you," said Cecil, gravely; and with a bow to the Americans, he was gone.

"That is one of your products of the highest English refinement?" said Mrs. Tallboys, whom in his preoccupation he had scarcely noticed.

"How does he strike you?" said Cecil. "He is my brother-in-law, but never mind that."

"He looks fitted for the hero of a vapid English novel. I long to force him to rough it, and to rub off that exquisite do-nothing air. It irritates me!"

"Frank Charnock has done a good deal of hard work, and is not to lead the life of an idle man," said Captain Duncombe. "I know I should not like to be in his shoes if he succeeds—grinding away in an office ten months out of the twelve."

"In an office! I should like to set him to work with an axe!"

"Well, those dainty-looking curled darlings don't do badly in the backwoods," said Lady Tyrrell.

"Ah! I understand! You stand up for him because there's a little *tendresse* for your sister," said the plain-spoken American.

"Poor fellow! I am afraid he is far gone. It is an impossible thing, though, and the sooner he can be cured of it the better," said Lady Tyrrell. "I am sorry that walk took place yesterday.—Did he mention it at home, Cecil?"

"You are a very inconsistent woman, Lady Tyrrell," broke in Mrs. Duncombe in her abrupt way. "Here you are come to uphold the emancipation of woman, and yet, when we come to your own sister taking one poor walk—"

"I beg your pardon, Bessie," said Lady Tyrrell, with her most courteous manner. "I never said I was come to uphold the emancipation of woman; only to subject myself to Mrs. Tallboys' influence—she has to make a convert of me."

For, of course, Lady Tyrrell was only drawn into the controversy as a matter of amusement, and possibly as something specially distasteful to the house of Charnock Poyntsett; and Cecil was a good deal influenced by the fascination of her example, as well as by the eagerness of Mrs. Duncombe and the charms of the Americans; and above all, they conspired in making her feel herself important, and assuming that she must be foremost in all that was done. She did not controvert the doctrines of Dunstone so entirely as to embrace the doctrines of emancipation, but she thought that free ventilation was due to every subject, most especially when the Member's wife was the leading lady in bringing about such discussion. The opposition made in the town to Mrs. Duncombe's sanitary plans, and the contempt with which they had been treated as ladies' fancies, had given a positive field of battle, with that admixture of right and wrong on either side which is essential to championship. And in truth Cecil was so much more under the influence of Camilla Tyrrell and Bessie Duncombe than under that of any other person, that she was ready to espouse any cause that they did.

How to arrange for the intended instruction was the difficulty, since Wil'sbro' was without a town-hall, and, moreover, the inhabitants were averse to all varieties of change, either as to the claims of women, the inequality of social laws, the improvement of education, or the comprehension of social science—the regular course which Mrs. Clio W. Tallboys was wont to lecture.

The matter could only be managed by arranging a series of *soirées* at different houses. Mrs. Duncombe's rooms were far too small; but if some person of more note—'some swell' as she said—would make the beginning, there would be no difficulty in bringing others to follow suit.

"You must do it, Lady Tyrrell," said Mrs. Duncombe.

"I! If there's nobody else; but it would come much better from another quarter," nodding at Cecil.

"Don't you wish you may get it?" muttered the slang-loving Bessie.

"That's one point in which we leave you far behind," said Mrs. Tallboys. "We issue our invitations quite independently of the other members of the household. Each has a separate visiting list."

"There need be no difficulty," said Cecil; "all matters of visiting are in my hands. It is necessary in our position; and if Lady Tyrrell thinks it proper that I should give the first party, I will do so."

"Bravo, what fun!" cried Mrs. Duncombe, clapping her hands. "You won't get into a jolly row, though?" she added, anxiously.

"I am perfectly sure of my ground," said Cecil, with the dignity of one to whom a 'row' was unheard of. "It is the simple duty of a Member to come forward in promoting free discussion of opinions."

"You are a public-spirited woman, Cecil," said Lady Tyrrell. "When you have made the first move, I'll follow. Then whom shall we ask next?"

"Mrs. Moy," said Bessie. "She is a nonentity herself, but if Gussie were to be strongly bitten she could do more than any one else, and make her father reform that nest of horrors in Water Lane!"

"I'm afraid the freedom side will bite her more than the sanitary side," said Lady Tyrrell.

"She is capital fun, though, and a great ally of ours," said Mrs. Duncombe; "and the rooms at Proudfoot Lawn are worth anything!"

Other details were fixed, even to the day of Cecil's opening party, which must take place on the first practicable day; but there was none to be found till the Wednesday week, the day before Raymond would return home. Cecil did not recollect this till the day had been unanimously agreed on, and it was with a little alarm; but after what she had asserted about her freedom of action, she could not retract before the eyes of the American lady; and, as she said to herself, she could receive her own ladies' party, without interfering with any one else, in the library, so that no one had a right to object. However, she had a certain anticipation of opposition, which caused her to act before announcing her intention; and thus it was that Rosamond found her dropping a number of notes through the slit in the lid of the post-box. "Another dinner?" was the question.

"No, this is a *soirée* in the library, entirely for ladies; Mrs. Tallboys is to explain her views in the evenings at the Principal houses in the neighbourhood. She will begin here on Wednesday week."

"Why, that's before Raymond comes back!"

"This is entirely for women."

"Women! women's rights! How have you got Mrs. Poyntsett to consent?"

"I have *carte blanche* in these matters."

"Do you mean that you have not consulted her? Does Raymond know? Oh! Yes, I see I have no right to ask; but, Cecil, for your own sake, I entreat you to consider what you are about, before running into such a frightful scrape!" and Rosamond impulsively caught the hand that was still putting in a letter; but Cecil stood still, not withdrawing or moving a muscle, perfectly impassive. Rosamond went on more eagerly, "Oh yes, I know you don't like me—I'm only a poor battered soldier's daughter, quite an unworthy associate for a Charnock of the Charnocks; but I can't help begging you to consider the consequences of sending out invitations to hear this strange woman hold forth in Mrs. Poyntsett's own house, in your husband's absence."

"Thank you for your solicitude," said Cecil, dropping in her envelope the instant the obstructive hand was removed, and going on her way with dignified self-possession; while Rosamond, in a tumult of indignation, which made her scarcely comprehensible, rushed up to her husband at his writing, and poured out her story.

Clio advocating female supremacy in Mrs. Poyntsett's own house, without notice to her! Should she be warned in time to stop the letters? Should Raymond be written to? Rosamond was for both, Julius for neither. He said that either way would begin a system that could never be forgiven; and that they had better consider themselves as practically at the Rectory, and not interfere.

"How can you be so cold-blooded?" cried she.

"I do not want to do worse harm. My mother will learn what is to happen sooner or later; and then she can put a stop to it in any way she chooses."

"I wish she would send in Mrs. Crabtree with her tawse!" said Rosamond. "But is it right by Raymond to let his wife bring this Yankee muse to talk her nonsense in his very rooms?"

"You have argued with her?"

"Or with a block—a stock—a stone!" raved Rosamond.

"Then depend upon it, to inform against her would be far worse than letting any amount of absurdity be talked. I should like to know how you would get over being so served!"

"Don't make comparisons, sir! Poor things! they would not be the worse for a little of our foolishness!"

Things settled themselves according to Julius's prediction; for Mr. Bowater, coming up with his son Herbert to see his old friend, said, "What grand doings are you having here? What is Raymond's wife up to? Ladies' *conversazione*—that's a new thing in these parts!"

"I gave such matters up to her," said Mrs. Poyntsett. "Young people like a little freedom of action; and there are changes in the neighbourhood since I was laid up." It was a temporizing speech, to avoid showing her total ignorance.

Mr. Bowater cleared his throat. "Young folk may like freedom of action, but it don't always follow that it is good for them. I hope she won't get Raymond into a scrape, that's all—committing him and herself to a course of lectures by that Yankee woman on woman's rights."

"It does not commit him; it is before he comes home, on Wednesday," said Herbert.

"Never mind that; what a woman does her husband does. Look here, Mrs. Poyntsett, I brought over Jenny's note in my pocket; see, here are two—one to accept, and one to refuse, just as you choose."

"Oh! accept, by all means," cried Mrs. Poyntsett; "don't leave the wrong one!"

Then she changed the conversation, so decidedly, that Mr. Bowater could not resume his warning; but after taking leave of her, he met Rosamond in the avenue, and could not help saying, "Pray, was my old friend aware of Mrs. Raymond's doings?"

"Have you told her? Oh! I am so glad!"

"Then it is as you said, Herbert. Mrs. Raymond had left her in ignorance! The impudent baggage! That's what the world is coming to!"

"But what regular game Mrs. Poyntsett was!" said Herbert. "You could not make out in the least that she had been left in the lurch; and I'm sure she has a plan, by the way in which she desired Jenny and Edie to come."

"Only make her understand that the Wil'sbro' folks are in a ticklish state," said Mr. Bowater; "they are sulking already, because they say the ladies have been stirring him up to put them to expense about the drains."

"Wil'sbro' isn't sweet," said Herbert.

"There's been nothing amiss in my time," returned his father. "Perfectly healthy in all reason! Ay! you may laugh, young folks, but I never heard of any receipt to hinder people from dying; and let well alone is a safe maxim."

"If it be well," said Rosamond. "However, Raymond says whatever is done must be by general consent, and that small private attempts do more harm than good."

"He had better take care what he says. If they fancy he is in league with that ridiculous Duncombe woman against their pockets, Moy is on the watch to take advantage of it; and all the old family interest will not save his seat."

When Rosamond reached home she found Anne beside her mother-in-law, provided with a quire of note-paper and pile of envelopes. "My dear, I want your help," she said. "Till my accident I always had a children's party at Christmas; and now I have so many young people to manage it for me, I think we might try again, and combine it with Cecil's ladies' party, on Wednesday."

"Hurrah!" cried Rosamond. "You mean that we should have plenty of fun—and, in fact, drum out the rights of woman."

"At any rate, present a counter attraction. You and Charlie and your brothers, with the Bowaters, might do something?"

"Trust me!" cried Rosamond. "Oh! I am so thankful to Mr. Bowater. Julius and I had our blood boiling; and I said as much or more to Cecil than woman could, but she minded me no more than the old white cockatoo; and Julius said our telling would only make more mischief."

"He was quite right," said his mother. "Let there not be one word of opposition, you know; only swamp it. You could get up some charades, and have something going on all the evening."

"Trust me for that! Oh! if my darling Aileen were but here! But Tom is the very model of an actor, and Terry is grand, if only we can keep him out of the high tragedy line. King Lear is the mildest thing he condescends to!"

"Could you manage a Christmas-tree? The taking up a room beforehand is inconvenient; but I should like to offer some little substantial bait, even to the grown-up;" and her eyes twinkled merrily.

"I know a better thing," said Rosamond; "an enchanted grove with a beneficent witch. We did it

at St. Awdry's, with bon-bons and trumpery, in a little conservatory, hardly large enough to turn round in. If I may have the key of the conservatory, I'll manage."

"You shall have what you please; and perhaps you would kindly go and choose the things at Backsworth. There is a very good fancy shop there."

"Thank you, thank you! How sweet!—Now, Anne, you will see what you shall see!"

"Is there to be dancing?" asked Anne, humbly yet resolutely.

"There shall not be, my dear, if it will spoil the evening for you," said Mrs. Poynsett.

"I promised," said Anne.

At that moment the servants came in with the preparations for the afternoon tea, closely followed by the ever punctual Cecil.

Mrs. Poynsett asked her whether she would require the barouche on the morrow, since Rosamond and Anne would want it to go to Backsworth, to obtain requisites for a children's entertainment to take place on Wednesday.

"Some friends of mine are coming on Wednesday," said Cecil

"Indeed! In Raymond's absence?"

"This is not a dinner, but a ladies' party."

"Then it will combine the better."

"Certainly not," replied Cecil. "Mine is simply intellectual—only a few intelligent women to meet Mrs. Tallboys in the library. It will be quite apart from any amusements Rosamond may like to have for the children in the drawing-room."

"Pray, will they require nothing but this feast of reason and flow of soul?—for the housekeeper will need warning."

"They will have dined. Nothing but coffee will be wanted."

"For how many?"

"About twelve or fourteen, thank you. Excuse me—I have something to finish in my own room."

They were very glad to excuse her, and the following note was concocted to serve both for those she might have invited and those she might not; and it was copied by the two daughters for all the acquaintance who had young folks in their houses. An appearance of want of unanimity was carefully avoided, and it stood thus:—

"I am desired by Mrs. Poynsett to say that the ladies' party already proposed for the 3rd is to undergo a little expansion, and that she much hopes to see you and ---, at 7 p.m., disposed for a few Christmas amusements."

## **CHAPTER XVI**

### **The Drive To Backsworth**

She was betrothed to one now dead,  
Or worse, who had dishonoured fled.—SCOTT

The party set out for Backsworth early in the day. It included Julius, who had asked for a seat in the carriage in order to be able to go on to Rood House, where lived Dr. Easterby, whom he had not seen since he had been at Compton.

"The great light of the English Church," said Rosamond, gaily; while Anne shuddered a little, for Miss Slater had told her that he was the great fountain-head of all that distressed her in Julius and his curates. But Julius merely said, "I am very glad of the opportunity;" and the subject dropped in the eager discussion of the intended pastimes, which lasted beyond the well-known Wil'sbro' bounds, when again Julius startled a Anne by observing, "No dancing? That is a pity."

"There, Anne!" exclaimed Rosamond.

"It was out of kindness to me," said Anne: and then, with a wonderful advance of confidence, she added, "Please tell me how you, a minister, can regret it?"

"Because I think it would be easier to prevent mischief than when there has to be a continual invention of something original. There is more danger of offence and uncharitableness, to speak plainly."

"And you think that worse than dancing?" said Anne, thoughtfully.

"Why is dancing bad at all, Anne?" asked Rosamond.

Anne answered at once, "It is worldly."

"Not half so worldly as driving in a carriage with fine horses, and liveries, and arms, and servants, and all," said Rosamond from her comfortable corner, nestling under Miles's racoon-skin rug; "I wonder you can do that!"

"The carriage is not mine," said Anne.

"The worldliness would be in sacrificing a duty to the luxury and ostentation of keeping one," said Julius. "For instance, if I considered it due to my lady in the corner there to come out in this style, and put down a curate and a few such trifles with that object. To my mind, balls stand on the same ground; they are innocent as long as nothing right is given up for them."

"You would not dance?" said Anne.

"Wouldn't he?" said Rosamond. "I've seen him. It was at St. Awdry's at a Christmas party, in our courting days. No, it wasn't with me. Oh no! That was the cruel cut! It was with little Miss Marks, whose father had just risen from the ranks. Such a figure she was, enough to set your teeth on edge; when, behold! this reverend minister extracts her from the wall-flowers, and goes through the Lancers with her in first-rate style, I assure you. It had such an effect, do you know, that what does my father do but go and ask her next; and I heard an old lady remarking that there were only two gentlemen in the room, Mr. Charnock and Lord Rathforlane. So you see it was all worldliness after all, Anne."

"I suppose it was good-nature," said Anne.

"Indignation, I fancy," said Julius.

"Now, was he very wicked for it, Anne?"

"N—no, if dancing be not wrong."

"But why should it?"

"All the bad people danced in the Bible."

"Miriam—King David, eh?"

"That was part of their religious service."

"The welcome to the prodigal son?" further suggested Julius. "Does not this prove that the exercise is not sinful in itself?"

"But you would not do it again?" repeated Anne.

"I certainly should not make a practice of it, nor go to balls any more than I would be a sportsman or a cricketer, because I am bound to apply my whole self to the more direct service; but this does not show that there is evil necessarily connected with these amusements, or that they may not safely be enjoyed by those who have time, and who need an outlet for their spirits, or by those who wish to guard these pleasures by presiding over them."

"Don't persuade me!" exclaimed Anne. "I gave my word to Mr. Pilgrim that nothing should induce me to dance or play at cards."

"Mr. Pilgrim had no right—" began Rosamond; but Julius hushed her, saying, "No one wishes to persuade you, Anne. Your retirement during Miles's absence is very suitable and becoming."

"Till we live in the Bush, out of the way of it all," said Anne.

"I wish you could have seen one of our real old Christmas parties; but those can never be again, without mother herself or Mrs. Douglas."

"Do tell me about those Douglasses," said Rosamond. "Cecil hinted at some romance, but seemed to think you had suppressed the connection because he was an attorney."

"Not exactly," said Julius, smiling; "but it is a sad story, though we have no doubt he bore the guilt of others."

"Something about two thousand pounds!"

"Yes. It was the year that my mother and Raymond were abroad. She had been buying some property near, and sent home an order from Vevay. It did not come, and was inquired for; but as it was an order, not a draft, it was not stopped at the bank; and in about a fortnight more it was presented by a stranger, and paid without hesitation, as it was endorsed "Proudfoot and Moy." Old Proudfoot was away at Harrogate, and came home to investigate; young Proudfoot denied all knowledge of it, and so did his brother-in-law Moy; but Raymond, working at the other end, found that the waiter at the hotel at Vevay had forgotten to post the letter for more than a week, and it was traced through the post to Wil'sbro', where the postman remembered delivering a foreign-looking letter to Archie Douglas at the door of the office. It came alone by the afternoon post. His account was this: They were all taking it rather easy in old Proudfoot's absence; and when a sudden summons came to take the old farmer's instructions for his will, Archie, as the junior, was told off to do it. He left George Proudfoot and Moy in a private room at the office, with Tom Vivian leaning over the fire talking, as he had a habit of doing in old Proudfoot's absence. As he



opened the office door the postman put the letter into his hand; and recognizing the writing, he ran back, and gave it in triumph to George Proudfoot, exclaiming that there it was at last, but he was in danger of being late for the train, and did not wait to see it opened; and when he came back he was told that it had been merely a letter of inquiry, with nothing in it, and destroyed at once. That was his account; but Proudfoot, Moy, and Vivian all denied any knowledge of this return of his, or of the letter. The night of this inquiry he was missing. Jenny Bowater, who was with an aunt in London, heard that a gentleman had called to see her while she was out for a couple of days; and a week later we saw his name among the passengers lost in the *Hippolyta* off Falmouth."

"Poor Jenny! Was she engaged to him?"

"On sufferance. On her death-bed Mrs. Douglas had wrung from Mr. Bowater a promise that if Archie did well, and ever had means enough, he would not refuse consent; but he always distrusted poor Archie, because of his father, and I believe he sent Jenny away to be out of his reach. If any of us had only been near, I think we could have persuaded him to face it out, and trust to his innocence; but Raymond was abroad, Miles at sea, I at Oxford, and nothing like a counsellor was near. If Jenny had but seen him!"

"And has nothing happened to clear him?"

"No. Raymond hurried home, and did his best, but all in vain. George Proudfoot was indeed known to have been in debt to Vivian; but Moy, his brother-in-law, an older man, was viewed as a person whose word was above all question, and they both declared the signature at the back of the order not to be genuine. Archie's flight, you see, made further investigation impossible; and there was no putting on oath, no cross-examination."

"Then you think those three had it?"

"We can think nothing else, knowing Archie as we did. Raymond showed his suspicions so strongly, that old Proudfoot threw up all agencies for our property, and there has been a kind of hostility ever since. Poor Vivian, as you know, came to his sad end the next year, but he had destroyed all his papers; and George Proudfoot has been dead four or five years, but without making any sign. Moy has almost risen above the business, and—see, there's Proudfoot Lawn, where he lives with the old man. He claims to compete with the county families, and would like to contest Wils'bro' with Raymond."

"And Jenny?" asked Anne. "Did she bear it as a Christian? I know she would."

"She did indeed—most nobly, most patiently. Poor girl! at her own home she knew she stood alone in her faith in Archie's innocence; but they were kind and forbearing, and kept silence, and the knowledge of our trust in him has bound her very close to us."

"Was that call, when she did not see him, all she ever heard of him?"

"All! except that he left a fragment of paper with the servant, with the one pencil scrawl, 'A Dieu!'—a capital D to mark the full meaning. She once showed it to me—folded so as to fit into the back of a locket with his photograph."

"Dear Jenny! And had you traced him on board this ship?"

"No, but his name was in the list; and we knew he had strong fancy for South Africa, whither the *Hippolyta* was bound. In fact he ought to have been a sailor, and only yielded to his mother's wishes."

"We knew a Mr. Archibald Douglas once," said Anne; "he came and outspanned by us when he was going north after elephants. He stayed a fortnight, because his wagon had to be mended."

"O, Julius! if we could but find him for her again!" cried Rosamond.

"I am afraid Archibald Douglas is not much more individual a name than John Smith," said Julius, sadly.

"That tells as much against the *Hippolyta* man," said Rosamond.

"Poor Archie would not be difficult to identify," said Julius; "for his hair was like mine, though his eyes were blue, and not short-sighted."

"That is all right, then," cried Anne; "for we had a dispute whether he were young or old, and I remember mamma saying he had a look about him as if his hair might have turned white in a single night."

"Julius! Now won't you believe?" cried Rosamond.

"Had he a Scotch accent?" said Julius.

"No; I recollect papa's telling him he never should have guessed him to be a Scot by his tongue; and he said he must confess that he had never seen Scotland."

"Now, Julius!" pleaded Rosamond, with clasped hands, as if Jenny's fate hung on his opinion.

"How long ago was this?" asked he.

"Four years," said Anne, with a little consideration. "He came both in going and returning, and Alick was wild to join him if he ever passed our way again. My father liked him so much that he was almost ready to consent; but he never came again. Ivory hunters go more from Natal now."

"You will trace him! There's a dear Anne!" exclaimed Rosamond.

"I will write to them at home; Alick knows a good many hunters, and could put Miles into the way of making inquiries, if he touches at Natal on his way home."

"Miles will do all he can," said Julius; "he was almost broken-hearted when he found how Archie had gone. I think he was even more his hero than Raymond when we were boys, because he was more enterprising; and my mother always thought Archie's baffled passion for the sea reacted upon Miles."

"He will do it! He will find him, if he is the Miles I take him for! How old was he—Archie, I mean?"

"A year older than Raymond; but he always seemed much younger, he was so full of life and animation—so unguarded, poor fellow! He used to play tricks with imitating hand-writing; and these, of course, were brought up against him."

"Thirty-four! Not a bit too old for the other end of the romance!"

"Take care, Rosie. Don't say a word to Jenny till we know more. She must not be unsettled only to be disappointed."

"Do you think she would thank you for that, you cold-blooded animal?"

"I don't know; but I think the suspense would be far more trying than the quiet resigned calm that has settled down on her. Besides, you must remember that even if Archie were found, the mystery has never been cleared up."

"You don't think that would make any difference to Jenny?"

"It makes all the difference to her father; and Jenny will never be a disobedient daughter."

"Oh! but it will—it must be cleared! I know it will! It is faithless to think that injustice is not always set right!"

"Not always here," said Julius, sadly. "See, there's the Backsworth race-ground, the great focus of the evil."

"Were racing debts thought to have any part in the disaster?"

"That I can't tell; but it was those races that brought George Proudfoot under the Vivian influence; and in the absence of all of us, poor Archie, when left to himself after his mother's death, had become enough mixed up in their amusements to give a handle to those who thought him unsteady."

"As if any one must be unsteady who goes to the races!" cried Rosamond. "You were so liberal about balls, I did expect one little good word for races; instead of which, you are declaring a poor wretch who goes to them capable of embezzling two thousand pounds, and I dare say Anne agrees with you!"

"Now, did I ever say so, Anne?"

"You looked at the course with pious horror, and said it justified the suspicion!" persisted Rosamond.

"That's better," said Julius; "though I never even said it justified the suspicion, any more than I said that balls might not easily be overdone, especially by *some* people."

"But you don't defend races?" said Anne.

"No; I think the mischief they do is more extensive, and has less mitigation than is the case with any other public amusement."

"H'm!" said Rosamond. "Many a merry day have I had on the top of the regimental drag; so perhaps there's nothing of which you would not suspect me."

"I'll tell you what I more than suspect you of," said Julius, "of wearing a gay bonnet to be a bait and a sanction to crowds of young girls, to whom the place was one of temptation, though not to you."

"Oh, there would be no end to it if one thought of such things."

"Or the young men who—"

"Well," broke in Rosamond, "it was always said that our young officers got into much less mischief than where there was a straight-laced colonel, who didn't go along with them to give them a tone."

"That I quite believe. I remember, too, the intense and breathless sense of excitement in the hush and suspense of the multitude, and the sweeping by of the animals—"

"Then you've been!" cried his wife.

"As a boy, yes."

"Not since you were old enough to think it over?" said Anne eagerly.

"No. It seemed to me that the amount of genuine interest in the sport and the animals was infinitesimal compared with the fictitious excitement worked up by betting."

"And what's the harm of betting when you've got the money?"

"And when you haven't?"

"That's another question."

"Do you approve it at the best?"

"It's a man's own concern."

"That's arguing against your better sense."

"Can't be helped, with two such solemn companions! There would be no bearing you if I didn't take you down sometimes, when you get so didactic, and talk of fictitious excitement, indeed! And now you are going to Rood House, what will you be coming back?"

Rood House stood about two miles on the further side of Backsworth. It was an ancient almshouse, of which the mastership had been wisely given to Dr. Easterby, one of the deepest theological scholars, holiest men, and bravest champions of the Church, although he was too frail in health to do much, save with his pen, and in council with the numerous individuals who resorted to him from far and wide, and felt the beautiful old fragment of a monastic building where he dwelt a true court of peace and refreshment, whence they came forth, aided by prayer and counsel, for their own share of the combat.

Julius Charnock had, happily for himself, found his way thither when his character and opinions were in process of formation, and had ever since looked to Rood House for guidance and sympathy. To be only fourteen miles distant had seemed to him one great perfection of Compton Poyntsett; but of course he had found visits there a far more possible thing to an unoccupied holiday son of the great house than to a busy parish priest, so that this opportunity was very valuable to him.

And so it proved; not so much for the details as for the spirit in which he was aided in looking at everything, from the mighty questions which prove the life of the Church by the vehement emotion they occasion, down to the difficulties of theory and practice that harassed himself—not named, perhaps, but still greatly unravelled.

Those perpetual questions, that have to be worked out again and again by each generation, were before him in dealing with his parish; and among them stood in his case the deeper aspects of the question that had come forward on the drive, namely, the lawfulness and expedience of amusement.

Granting the necessity of pastimes and recreation for most persons, specially the young, there opened the doubtful, because ever-varying, question of the kind and the quantity to be promoted or sanctioned, lest restraint should lead to reaction, and lest abstinence should change from purity and spirituality to moroseness or hypocrisy. And if Julius found one end of the scale represented by his wife and his junior curate, his sister-in-law and his senior curate were at the other. Yet the old recluse was far more inclined to toleration than he had been in principle himself, though the spur of the occasion had led him to relaxations towards others in the individual cases brought before him, when he had thought opposition would do more harm than the indulgence. His conscience had been uneasy at this divergence, till he could discuss the subject.

The higher the aspiration of the soul, the less, of course, would be the craving for diversion, the greater the shrinking from those evil accompaniments that soon mar the most innocent delights. Some spirits are austere in their purity, like Anne; some so fervent in zeal, as to heed nothing by the way, like Mr. Bindon; but most are in an advanced stage of childhood, and need play and pleasure almost as much as air or food; and these instincts require wholesome gratification, under such approval as may make the enjoyment bright and innocent; and yet there should be such subduing of their excess, such training in discipline, as shall save them from frivolity and from passing the line of evil, prevent the craving from growing to a passion, and where it has so grown, tone it back to the limits of obedience and safety.

Alas! perhaps there lay the domestic difficulty of which Julius could not speak; yet, as if answering the thought, Dr. Easterby said, "After all, charity is the true self-acting balance to many a sweet untaught nature. Self-denials which spring out of love are a great safeguard, because they are almost sure to be both humble and unconscious."

And Julius went away cheered as he thought of his Rosamond's wells of unselfish affection, confident that all the cravings for variety and excitement, which early habit had rendered second nature, would be absorbed by the deeper and keener feelings within, and that these would mount higher as time went on, under life's great training.

Pleasant it was to see the triumphant delight of the two sisters over their purchases. Such a

day's English shopping was quite a new experience to Anne; and she had not been cautioned against it, so her enjoyment was as fresh and vivid as a child's; and they both chattered all the way home with a merriment in which Julius fully shared, almost surprised to see Anne so eager and lively, and—as her cheeks glowed and her eyes brightened—beginning to understand what had attracted Miles.

Mrs. Poyntsett had not had quite so pleasant a day, for Cecil knocked at her door soon after luncheon with an announcement that Lady Tyrrell wished for admission. Expecting an exposition of the Clio scheme, she resigned herself, looking with some curiosity at the beautiful contour of face and drooping pensive loveliness, that had rather gained than lost in grace since the days when she had deemed them so formidable.

"This is kind, dear Mrs. Poyntsett," said the soft voice, while the hand insisted on a pressure. "I have often wished to come and see you, but I could not venture without an excuse."

"Thank you," was the cold reply.

"I have more than an excuse—a reason, and I think we shall be fully agreed; but first you must let me have the pleasure of one look to recall old times. It is such a treat to see you so unchanged. I hope you do not still suffer."

"No, thank you."

"And are you always a prisoner here? Ah! I know your patience."

"What was the matter on which you wanted to speak to me?" said Mrs. Poyntsett, fretted beyond endurance by the soft, caressing tone.

"As I said, I should hardly venture if I did not know we agreed—though perhaps not for the same reasons. We do agree in our love and high opinion of your dear Frank!"

"Well!" repressing a shudder at the 'dear.'

"I am afraid we likewise agree that, under all circumstances, our two young people are very unfortunately attached, and that we must be hard-hearted, and let it go no further."

"You mean your sister?"

"My dear Lena! I cannot wonder! I blame myself excessively, for it was all through my own imprudence. You see, when dear Frank came to Rockpier, it was so delightful to renew old times, and they both seemed such children, that I candidly confess I was off my guard; but as soon as I had any suspicion, I took care to separate them, knowing that, in the state of my poor father's affairs, it would be most unjustifiable to let so mere a youth be drawn into an attachment."

"Frank is no prize," said his mother with some irony.

"I knew you would say that, dear Mrs. Poyntsett. Pecuniarily speaking, of course, he is not; though as to all qualities of the heart and head, he is a prize in the true sense of the word. But, alas! it is a sort of necessity that poor Lena, if she marry at all, should marry to liberal means. I tell you candidly that she has not been brought up as she ought to have been, considering her expectations or no expectations. What could you expect of my poor father, with his habits, and two mere girls? I don't know whether the governess could have done anything; but I know that it was quite time I appeared. I tell you in confidence, dear Mrs. Poyntsett, there was a heavy pull on my own purse before I could take them away from Rockpier; and, without blaming a mere child like poor dear Lena you can see what sort of preparation she has had for a small income."

It is hard to say which tried Mrs. Poyntsett's patience most, the 'dears' or the candour; and the spirit of opposition probably prompted her to say, "Frank has his share, like his brothers."

"I understand, and for many girls the provision would be ample; but poor Lena has no notion of economizing—how should she? I am afraid there is no blinking it, that, dear children as they both are, nothing but wretchedness could result from their coming together; and thus I have been extremely sorry to find that the affair has been renewed."

"It was not an unnatural result of their meeting again."

"Ah! there I was to blame again; but no one can judge whether an attachment be real between such children. I thought, too, that Frank would be gone out into the world, and I confess I did not expect to find that he had absolutely addressed her, and kept it secret. That is what my poor father feels so much. Eleonora is his special darling, and he says he could have overlooked anything but the concealment."

Maternal affection assumed the defensive; and, though the idea of concealment on the part of one of her sons was a shock, Mrs. Poyntsett made no betrayal of herself, merely asking, "How did it come to light?"

"I extorted the confession. I think I was justified, standing in a mother's position, as I do. I knew my vigilance had been eluded, and that your son had walked home with her after the skating; and you know very well how transparent young things are."

The skating! The mother at once understood that Frank was only postponing the explanation till after his examination; and besides, she had never been ignorant of his attachment, and could not

regard any display thereof more or less as deception towards herself. The very fact that Lady Tyrrell was trying to prejudice her beforehand, so as to deprive him of the grace of taking the initiative towards his own mother, enlisted her feelings in his defence, so she coldly answered, "I am sorry if Sir Harry Vivian thinks himself unfairly treated; but I should have thought my son's feelings had been as well known in the one family as in the other."

"But, *dear* Mrs. Poyntsett," exclaimed Lady Tyrrell, "I am sure you never encouraged them. I am quite enough aware—whatever I may once have been—of the unfortunate contrast between our respective families."

Certainly there was no connection Mrs. Poyntsett less wished to encourage; yet she could not endure to play into Camilla's hands, and made reply, "There are many matters in which young men must judge for themselves. I have only once seen Miss Vivian, and have no means of estimating my son's chance of happiness with her."

Her impenetrability ruffled Lady Tyrrell; but the answer was softer than ever. "Dear Mrs. Poyntsett, what a happy mother you are, to be able so freely to allow your sons to follow their inclinations! Well! since you do not object, my conscience is easy on that score; but it was more than I durst hope."

To have one's approval thus stolen was out of the question and Mrs. Poyntsett said, "Regret is one thing, opposition another. Sir Harry Vivian need not doubt that, when my son's position is once fixed, he will speak openly and formally, and it will then be time to judge."

"Only," said Lady Tyrrell, rising, "let this be impressed on your son. Eleonora cannot marry till she is of age, and my father cannot sanction any previous entanglement. Indeed it is most unfortunate, if her affections have been tampered with, for me, who have outgrown romance, and know that, in her position, a wealthy match is a necessity. I have spoken candidly," she repeated; "for I like Frank too well to bear that he should be trifled with and disappointed."

"Thank you!"

The ladies parted, liking one another, if possible, less than before.

Mrs. Poyntsett's instinct of defence had made her profess much less distaste to the marriage than she really felt; she was much concerned that another son should be undergoing Raymond's sad experiences, but she had no fear that Lady Tyrrell would ever allow it to come to a marriage, and she did not think Frank's poetical enthusiasm and admiration for beauty betokened a nature that would suffer such an enduring wound as Raymond's had done.

So she awaited his return, without too much uneasiness for amusement in Rosamond's preparations. One opening into the conservatory was through her room, so that every skilful device, or gay ornament, could be exhibited to her; and she much enjoyed the mirth that went on between the queen of the revels and her fellow-workers.

Cecil did not interfere, being indeed generally with her friends at Sirenwood, Aucuba Villa, or the working-room, in all of which she had the pleasure of being treated as a person of great consideration, far superior to all her natural surroundings, and on whom hinged all the plans for the amelioration of Willansborough.

Sometimes, however, it happens that the other side of a question is presented; and thus it was on the day before the entertainment, when Rosamond had taken her brother Tom to have his hair cut, and to choose some false moustaches, and the like requisites for their charades.

They went first to Pettitt's, the little hair-dresser, where Tom was marvellously taken with the two Penates, and could hardly be dragged into the innermost recesses, where in the middle of a sheet, with a *peignoir* on his shoulders, he submitted to the clipping of his raven-black locks, as Mr. Pettitt called them, on the condition of his sister looking on.

Presently they heard some feet enter the outer shop, and Mrs. Duncombe's voice asking for Mr. Pettitt; while his mother replied that he would wait on her immediately, but that he was just now engaged with the Honourable Mr. De Lancey. "Could she show them anything?"

"Oh no, thank you, we'll wait! Don't let us keep you, Mrs. Pettitt, it is only on business."

"Ay!" said the other voice—female, and entirely untamed. "He's your great ally about your gutters and drains, isn't he?"

"The only landowner in Wil'sbro' who has a particle of public spirit!" said Mrs. Duncombe.

Whereat good-natured Lady Rosamond could not but smile congratulation to the hair-cutter, who looked meekly elevated, while Tom whispered, "Proverb contradicted."

But the other voice replied, "Of course—he's a perfumer, learned in smells! You'd better drop it, Bessie! you'll never make anything of it."

"I'll never drop what the health and life of hundreds of my fellow-creatures depend on! I wish I could make you understand, Gussie!"

"You'll never do anything with my governor, if that's your hope—you should hear him and the mum talking! 'It's all nonsense,' he says; 'I'm not going to annoy my tenants, and make myself unpopular, just to gratify a fashionable cry.' 'Well,' says mumsey, 'it is not what was thought the

thing for ladies in my time; but you see, if Gussie goes along with it, she will have the key to all the best county society.' 'Bother the county society!' says I. 'Bessie Duncombe's jolly enough—but such a stuck-up set as they all are at Compton, I'll not run after, behaving so ill to the governor, too!' However—"

"There's a proverb about listeners!" said Rosamond, emerging when she felt as if she ought to hearken no longer, and finding Mrs. Duncombe leaning with her back to the counter, and a tall girl, a few degrees from beauty, in a riding-habit, sitting upon it.

They both laughed; and the girl added, "If you had waited a moment, Lady Rosamond, you would have heard that you were the only jolly one of all the b'iling!"

"Ah! we shall see where you are at the end of Mrs. Tallboys' lectures!" said Mrs. Duncombe.

"On what?" asked Rosamond. "Woman's rights, or sanitary measures? for I can't in the least understand why they should be coupled up together."

"Nor I!" said Miss Moy. "I don't see why we shouldn't have our own way, just as well as the men; but what that has to do with drains and gutters, I can't guess."

"I'm the other way," said Rosamond. "I think houses and streets ought to be made clean and healthy; but as for woman's rule, I fancy we get more of it now than we should the other way."

"As an instance," said Mrs. Duncombe, "woman is set on cleansing Wil'sbro'. Man will not stir. Will it ever be done till woman has her way?"

"Perhaps, if woman would be patient, man would do it in the right way, instead of the wrong!" quoth Rosamond.

"Patient! No, indeed! Nothing is to be done by that! Let every woman strive her utmost to get the work done as far as her powers go, and the crusade will be accomplished for very shame!"

Just then Tom, looking highly amused, emerged, followed by Mr. Pettitt, the only enlightened landlord on whom Mrs. Duncombe had been able to produce the slightest impression. He had owned a few small tenements in Water Lane, which he was about to rebuild, and which were evidently the pivot of operations.

At the door they met Cecil, and Rosamond detained her a moment in the street to say, "My dear Cecil, is *that* Miss Moy coming on Wednesday?"

"Of course she is. We greatly want to move her father. He has the chief house property there."

"It is too late now," said Rosamond; "but do you think it can be pleasant to Jenny Bowater to meet her?"

"I know nothing of the old countrified animosities and gossipings, which you have so heartily adopted," replied Cecil, proudly. "Firstly, I ignore them as beneath me; secondly, I sacrifice them all to a great cause. If Miss Bowater does not like my guests, let her stay away."

Here Mrs. Duncombe stood on the step, crying out, "Well, Cecil, how have you sped with Mrs. Bungay?"

"Horrid woman!" and no more was heard, as Cecil entered Mr. Pettitt's establishment.

"That might be echoed," said Tom, who was boiling over at the speech to his sister. "I knew that ape was an intolerable little prig of a peacock, but I didn't think she could be such a brute to you, Rosie! Is she often like that, and does your parson stand such treatment of you?"

"Nonsense, Tom!" said Rosamond; "it doesn't often happen, and breaks no bones when it does. It's only the ignorance of the woman, and small blame to her—as Mrs. M'Kinnon said when Corporal Sims's wife threw the red herring's tail at her!"

"But does Julius stand it?" repeated Tom, fiercely, as if hesitating whether to call out Julius or Mrs. Charnock Poynsett.

"Don't be so ridiculous, Tom! I'd rather stand a whole shower of red herrings' tails at once than bother Julius about his brother's wife. How would you and Terry like it, if your wives took to squabbling, and setting you together by the ears? I was demented enough to try it once, but I soon saw it was worse than anything."

"What? He took her part?"

"No such thing! Hold your tongue, Tommy, and don't talk of married folk till you're one yourself!"

"Papa never meant it," repeated the indignant Tom. "I've a great mind to write and tell him how you are served!"

"Now, Tom," cried Rosamond, stopping short, "if you do that, I solemnly declare I'll never have you here again! What could papa do? Do you think he could cure Raymond's wife of being a ridiculous little prig? And if he could—why, before your letter got to Meerut, she will be gone up to London; and by the time she comes back we'll be safe in our own Rectory. Here, come in, and get our string and basket at Mrs. Bungay's."

"I'll pay her out!" muttered Tom, as he followed his sister into Mrs. Bungay's shop, one of much smaller pretensions, for the sale of baskets, brushes, mats, &c.

The mistress, a stout, red-faced woman, looked as if she had been 'speaking a bit of her mind,' and was at first very gruff and ungracious, until she found they were real customers; and moreover, Tom's bland Irish courtesy perfectly disarmed her, when Rosamond, having fixed her mind on a box in the very topmost pigeon-hole, they not only apologized for the trouble they were giving, but Tom offered to climb up and bring it down, when she was calling for the errand-boy in vain.

"It's no trouble, sir, thank you; I'd think nothing of that for you, my lady, nor for Mr. Charnock—which I'm sure I'll never forget all he did for us at the fire, leading my little Alferd out like a lamb! I beg your ladyship's pardon, ma'am, if I seemed a bit hasty; but I've been so put about—and I thought at first you'd come in on the same matter, which I'm sure a lady like you wouldn't ever do—about the drains, and such like, which isn't fit for no lady to speak of! As if Water Lane weren't as sweet and clean as it has any call to be, and as if we didn't know what was right by our tenants, which are a bad lot, and don't merit no money to be laid out on them!"

"So you have houses in Water Lane, Mrs. Bungay? I didn't even know it!"

"Yes, Lady Rosamond! My husband and I thought there was no better investment than to buy a bit of land, when the waste was inclosed, and run 'em up cheap. Houses always lets here, you see, and the fire did no damage to that side. But of course you didn't know, Lady Rosamond; a real lady like you wouldn't go prying into what she's no call to, like that fine decked-out body Duncombe's wife, which had best mind her own children, which it is a shame to see stravaging about the place! I know it's her doing, which I told young Mrs. Charnock Poyntsett just now, which I'm right sorry to see led along by the like of her, and so are more of us; and we all wish some friend would give her a hint, which she is but young—and 'tis doing harm to Mr. Charnock Poyntsett, Lady Rosamond, which all of us have a regard for, as is but right, having been a good customer, and friend to the town, and all before him; but we can't have ladies coming in with their fads and calling us names for not laying out on what's no good to nobody, just to satisfy them! As if Wil'sbro' hadn't been always healthy!"

Tom was wicked enough to put in a good many notes of sympathy, at the intervals of the conjunctive *whiches*, and to end by declaring, "Quite right, Mrs. Bungay! You see how much better we've brought up my sister! I say—what's the price of that little doll's broom?"

"What do you want of it, Tom?"

"Never you mind!"

"No mischief, I hope?"

## CHAPTER XVII The Enchantments

"It seems a shame," the Walrus said,  
"To play them such a trick,  
After we've brought them out so far,  
And made them trot so quick."  
The carpenter said nothing, but  
"The butter's spread too thick."—LEWIS CARROLL

A telegram arrived from Frank, in the midst of the preparations on Wednesday, announcing that 'he was all right, and should be at Hazlitt's Gate at 8.10 p.m.'

At 6.30 children of all sizes, with manes of all colours, were arriving, and were regaled in the dining-room by Anne, assisted by Jenny and Charlie. Anne had a pretty pink colour in her cheeks, her flaxen locks were bound with green ribbons, and green adorned her white dress, in which she had a gracious, lily-like look of unworldly purity. She thoroughly loved children, was quite equal to the occasion, and indeed enjoyed it as much as the recent Christmas-tree in the village school.

Such of Cecil's guests as were mothers for the most part came with their children; but Lady Tyrrell, her sister, and others, who were unattached, arrived later, and were shown to the library, where she entertained them on the specified refreshment, biscuits and coffee, and enthroned Mrs Tallboys in the large arm-chair, where she looked most beautiful and gorgeous, in a robe of some astonishing sheeny sky-blue, edged with paly gold, while on her head was a coronal of sapphire and gold, with a marvellous little plume. The cost must have been enormous, and her delicate and spirituelle beauty was shown to the greatest advantage; but as the audience was far too scanty to be worth beginning upon, Cecil, with a sigh at the folly of maternal idolatry, went to hunt up her ladies from gazing at the babyish amusements of their offspring; and Miss Moy, in spite of her remonstrance, jumped up to follow her; while Mrs. Duncombe, the only *good* mother in this new sense, remained, keeping guard lest curiosity, and the echo of piano music, which now began to be heard, should attract away any more of the ladies.

Cecil was by no means prepared for the scene. The drawing-room was crowded—chiefly indeed with ladies and children, but there was a fair sprinkling of gentlemen—and all had their faces turned towards the great glass doors opening into the conservatory, which was brilliantly lighted and echoing with music and laughter. Cecil tried to summon some of the ladies of her own inviting, announcing that Mrs. Tallboys was arrived; but this appeared to have no effect. “Yes, thank you,” was all she heard. Penetrating a little farther, “Mrs. Tallboys is ready.” “Thank you, I’ll come; but my little people are so anxious to have me with them.”—“Mrs. Tallboys is waiting!” to the next; who really did not hear, but only responded, “Did you ever see anything more charming?”

By this time Cecil could see over the heads of the front rank of children. She hardly knew the conservatory. All the veteran camellia and orange-trees, and a good many bay and laurel boughs besides, were ranged along the central alley, gorgeous with fairy lamps and jewels, while strains of soft music proceeded from some unseen quarter. “Very pretty!” said Cecil, hastily, trying another of her intended guests with her intelligence. “Really—yes, presently, thank you,” was the absent answer. “There is some delightful mystery in there.”

Cecil found her attempts were vain, and was next asked, as one of the household, what delicious secret was going on there; and as it hurt her feelings to be left out, she pressed into the conservatory, with some vague intention of ordering Anne, if not Rosamond, to release her grown-up audience, and confine their entertainment to the children; but she found herself at once caught by the hand by a turbaned figure like a prince in the *Arabian Nights*, who, with a low salaam, waved her on.

“No, thank you. I’m looking for—”

But retreat was impossible, for many were crowding up in eager curiosity; moreover, a muslin bandage descended on her eyes. “Don’t!” she expostulated; “I’m not at play—I’m—” but her words were lost.

“Hush! the Peri’s cave is near,  
No one enters scatheless here;  
Lightly tread and lowly bend,  
Win the Peri for your friend,”

sung a voice to the mysterious piano accompaniment; and Cecil found both hands taken, and was forced to move on, as she guessed the length of the conservatory, amid sounds of suppressed laughter that exceedingly annoyed her, till there was a pause and repetition of the two last lines with an attempt to make her obey them. She was too impatient and angry to perceive that it would have been much better taste to enter into the humour of the thing; and she only said with all her peculiar cold petulance, just like sleet, “Let me go, if you please; I am engaged. I am waited for.”

“Peri gracious,  
She’s contumacious;  
Behold, every hair shall bristle  
When she hears the magic whistle!”

and a whistle, sharp, long, and loud, sounded behind her, amid peals of merriment. She turned sharply round, but still the whistle was behind her, and rang out again and again, till she was half deafened, and wholly irate; while the repetition of

“Bend, bend, lowly bend,  
Win the Peri for your friend,”

forced on her the conviction that on no other condition should she be set free, though the recognition of Terry’s voice made the command doubly unpalatable, and as she made the stiffest and most reluctant of courtesies, a voice said,

“Homage done, you may be  
Of this merry company;”

and with a last blast of the whistle the bandage was removed, and she found herself in the midst of a half circle of laughing children and grown people; in front of her a large opening, like a cavern, hung with tiny lamps of various colours, in the midst of which stood the Peri, in a Persian pink robe, white turban, and wide white trousers, with two oriental genies attendant upon her.

A string was thrust into Cecil’s hand, apparently fastened to her, and accounting for some sharp pulls she had felt during the whistling. She drew it in front in sharp haste, to be rid of the obnoxious instrument; but instead of a whistle, she found in her hand a little dust-pan and brush, fit for a baby-house, drawn through a ring, while the children eagerly cried, “What have you got? What have you got?”

“Some nonsense. I do not approve of practical jokes,” began Cecil; but the song only replied,

“Away, away,  
In the cave no longer stay;  
Others come to share our play;”



and one of the genies drew her aside, while another blindfolded victim was being introduced with the same rites, only fare more willingly. The only way open to her was that which led to the window of the dining-room, where she found Anne with the children who had had their share, and were admiring their prizes. Anne tried to soothe her by saying, "You see every one is served alike. They thought it would be newer than a tree."

"Did you mean to *give me this?*" asked a little girl, in whose hands Cecil had thrust her dust-pan, without a glance at it.

"Oh the ring!" said Anne. "You must keep that, Mrs. Poynter thought you would like it. It is a gem—some Greek goddess, I think."

"Is this her arrangement?" asked Cecil, pointing to the dust-pan.

"Oh no! she knew nothing about that, nor I; but you see every one has something droll. See what Mr. Bowater has!"

And Herbert Bowater showed that decidedly uncomplimentary penwiper, where the ass's head declares "There are two of us;" while every child had some absurdity to show; and Miss Moy's shrieks of delight were already audible at a tortoise-shell pen-holder disguised as a hunting-whip.

"I must go to my friends," said Cecil, vouchsafing no admiration of the ring, though she had seen enough to perceive that it was a beautifully engraved ruby; and she hurried back to the library, but only to find all her birds flown, and the room empty! Pursuing them to the drawing-room, she saw only the backs of a few, in the rearmost rank of the eager candidates for admission to the magic cave.

Lady Tyrrell alone saw her, and turned back from the eager multitude, to say in her low, modulated voice, "Beaten, my dear. Able strategy on *la belle mère's* part."

"Where's Mrs. Tallboys?"

"Don't you see her blue feather, eagerly expectant? Just after you were gone, Edith Bowater came in, and begged us to come and see the conservatory lighted up; and then came a rush of the Brenden children after their aunt, exclaiming wildly it was delicious—lights, and a fairy, and a secret, and every one got something, if they were ever so old. Of course, after that there was nothing but to follow the stream."

"It is a regular plot for outwitting us! Rosamond is dressed up for the fairy. They are all in league."

"Well, we must put a good face on it for the present," said Lady Tyrrell. "Don't on any account look as if you were not in perfect accordance. You can show your sentiments afterwards, you know."

Cecil saw she must acquiesce, for Mrs. Tallboys was full in the midst. With an infinitely better grace than her hostess, she yielded herself to the sports, bowed charmingly to the Peri, whirled like a fairy at the whistling, and was rewarded with a little enamel padlock as a brooch, and two keys as ear-rings; indeed she professed, with evident sincerity, that she was delighted with these sports of the old country, and thought the two genies exquisite specimens of the fair, useless, gentle English male aristocracy.

Mrs. Duncombe, too, accepted the inevitable with considerable spirit and good-humour, though she had a little passage-at-arms with Julius; when showing him the ivory card-case that had fallen to her lot, she said, "So this is the bribe! Society stops the mouth of truth."

"That is as you choose to take it," he said.

"Exactly. When we want to go deep into eternal verities you silence us with frivolous din and dainty playthings for fear of losing your slaves."

"I don't grant that."

"Then why hinder an earnest discussion by all this hubbub?"

"Because this was not the right place or time."

"It never is the right time for the tyrants to let their slaves confer, or to hear home-truths."

"On the contrary, my curiosity is excited. I want to hear Mrs. Tallboys' views."

"Then when will you dine with us? Next Wednesday?"

"Thank you. Wednesday has an evening service."

"Ah! I told you it was never the right time! Then Thursday? And you'll trust your wife with us?"

"Oh yes, certainly."

"It is a bargain, then? Seven o'clock, or there will be no time."

Julius's attention suddenly wandered. Was not a whisper pervading the room of a railway accident? Was not Frank due by that night's train?

There were still so many eager to visit the magic cave, that Julius trusted his wife would remain

there sheltered from the report; Jenny Bowater was behind a stand of trees, acting orchestra; but when Terry came to the outskirts of the forest in search of other knights of the whistle, Julius laid a hand on him, and gave instructions in case any rumour should reach Rosamond to let her know how vague it was, tell her that he was going to ascertain the truth, and beg her to keep up the game and cause no alarm.

Next encountering Anne, he begged her to go to his mother and guard her from any alarm, until there was some certainty.

"Can't we send all these people away?" she asked.

"Not yet. We had better make no unnecessary disturbance. There will be time enough if anything be amiss. I am going down to Hazlitt's Gate."

Anne was too late. Charlie had not outgrown the instinct of rushing to his mother with his troubles; and he was despairingly telling the report he had heard of a direful catastrophe, fatal to an unknown quantity of passengers, while she, strong and composed because he gave way, was trying to sift his intelligence. No sooner did he hear from Anne that Julius was going to the station, than he started up to accompany him—the best thing he could do in his present state. Hardly, however, had he closed the door, before he returned with fresh tears in his eyes, leading in Eleonora Vivian, whom he had found leaning against the wall outside, white and still, scarce drawing her breath.

"Come," he said; and before she knew what he was doing, she was at Mrs. Poyntsett's side. "Here, mother," he said, "take her." And he was gone.

Mrs. Poyntsett stretched out her arms. The hearts of the two women who loved Frank could not help meeting. Eleonora sank on her knees, hiding her face on the mother's breast, with two tender arms clasped round her.

Anne was kneeling too, but she was no longer the meek, shy stranger. Now, in the hour of trouble, she poured forth, in a voice fervent and sweet, a prayer for protection and support for their beloved one, so that it might be well with him, whatever might be his Heavenly Father's Will.

As she paused, Mrs. Poyntsett, in a choked voice, said, "Thank you, dear child;" when there were steps in the hall. Anne started up, Lenore buried her face on Mrs. Poyntsett's bosom, the mother clasped her hands over her convulsively, then beheld, as the door opened, a tall figure, with a dark bright face full of ineffable softness and joy. Frank himself, safe and sound, with his two brothers behind him. They stayed not to speak, but hastened to spread the glad tidings; while he flung himself down, including both his mother and Lenore in one rapturous embrace, and carrying his kiss from one to the other—conscious, if no one else was, that this first seal of his love was given in his mother's arms.

Lenore did indeed extricate herself, and stand up as rosy red as she had been pale; but she had no room for any thought beyond his mother's trembling "Not hurt, my dear?"

"Not hurt! Not a scratch! Thank God! Oh! thank God!" answered Frank, quivering all over with thankfulness, though probably far more at the present joy than the past peril.

"Yes—oh, thanks for His mercy!" echoed Anne, giving fervent hand and tearful cheek to the eager salutation, which probably would have been as energetic to Clio or old Betty at that moment!

"But there's blood on your wristband," cried the mother. "You are hurt!"

"No; it's not mine. I didn't know it. It is from the poor fellow I helped to carry into the public-house at Knoll, just this side Backsworth, a good deal hurt, I'm afraid. Something had got on the lines, I believe. I was half asleep, and knew nothing till I found ourselves all crushed up together in the dark, upside-down, my feet above my head. There was but one man in my carriage, and we didn't get foul of one another, and found we were all right, when we scrambled out of the window. So we helped out the others, and found that, besides the engineer and stoker—who I don't suppose can live, poor fellows!—there was only this man much damaged. Then, when there seemed no more to be done, I took my bag and walked across country, to reach home before you heard. But oh, this is worth anything!"

He had to bend down for another embrace from his mother whose heart was very full as she held his bright young healthful face between her hands, though all she said was, "You have walked eleven miles and more! You must be half starved!—Anne, my dear, pray let him have something. He can eat it here."

"I'll see," said Anne, hastening away.

"Oh, don't go, Lenore," cried Frank, springing up. "Stay, I've not seen you!—Mother, how sweet of you! But I forgot! You don't know! I was only waiting till I was through."

"I understand, my dear boy."

"But how? How did you find out? Was it only that you knew she was the precious darling of my heart? and now you see and own why," cries Frank, almost beside himself with excitement and delight.

"It was Lady Tyrrell who told me," said Mrs. Poyntsett, sympathizing too much with the lovers to

perceive that her standpoint of resistance was gone from her.

"Yes," said Lenore. "She knew of our walk, and questioned me so closely that I could not conceal anything without falsehood."

"After she met me at Aucuba Villa?" asked Frank.

"Yes. Did you tell her anything?"

"I thought she knew more than I found afterwards that she did," said Frank; "but there's no harm done. It is all coming now."

"She told my father," said Eleonora, sadly, "and he cannot understand our delay. He is grieved and displeased, and thinks I have not been open with him."

"Oh! that will be all right to-morrow," said Frank. "I'll have it out with a free heart, now there's no fear but that I have passed; and I've got the dearest of mothers! I feel as if I could meet him if he were a dozen examiners rolled into one, instead of the good old benevolent parent that he is! Ha! Anne—Susan—Jenkins—thank you—that's splendid! May I have it here? Super-excellent! Only here's half the clay-pit sticking to me! Let me just run up and make myself decent. Only don't let her run away."

Perhaps Clio would have scorned the instinct that made a Charnock unable to enjoy a much-needed meal in the presence of mother and of love till the traces of the accident and the long walk had been removed. His old nurse hurried after—ostensibly to see that his linen was at hand, but really to have her share of the petting and congratulation; and Lenore stood a little embarrassed, till Mrs. Poyntsett held out her arms, with the words, "My dear child!" and again she dropped on her knee by the couch, and nestled close in thankful joy.

Presently however, she raised herself, and said sadly, almost coldly, "I am afraid you have been surprised into this."

"I must love one who so loves my boy," was the ardent answer.

"I couldn't help it!" said the maiden, again abandoning herself to the tenderness. "Oh! it is so good of you!"

"My dear, dear daughter!"

"Only please give me one mother's kiss! I have so longed for one."

"Poor motherless child! My sweet daughter!"

Then after a pause Eleonora said, "Indeed, I'll try to deserve better; but oh! pray forgive me, if I cost him much more pain and patience than I am worth."

"He thinks you well worth anything, and perhaps I do," said Mrs Poyntsett, who was conquered, won over, delighted more than by either of the former brides, in spite of all antecedents.

"Then will you always trust me?" said Eleonora, with clasped hands, and a wondrous look of earnest sincerity on her grave open brow and beautiful pensive dark blue eyes.

"I *must*, my dear."

"And indeed I don't think I could help holding to *him*, because he seems my one stay and hope here; and now I know it is all right with you, indeed it is such happiness as I never knew."

She laid her head down again in subdued joy and rest: but the pause was broken by Frank's return; and a moment after, in darted the Peri in her pink cashmere costume, with a glow transforming her usually colourless face. "Dear, dear Frank, I'm so glad!" she cried, bestowing her kiss; while he cried in amazement, "Is it Rose? Is there a fancy ball?"

"Only Aladdin's Cave. I'm just out of it; and while Jenny is keeping up games, and Edith is getting up a charade, I could dash in to see that Frank was all there, and more too. The exam, is safe, eh?"

"I trust so," said Frank; "the list will not come just yet; but I am told I am certain of a pass—indeed, that I stand high as to numbers."

"That's noble!—Now, Mrs. Poyntsett, turn him out as soon as he has eaten his dinner. We want any one who can keep up a respectable kind of a row. I say, will you two do Ferdinand and Miranda playing at chess? You look just like it."

"Must we go?" asked Frank, reluctantly; and there was something in the expression of his face, a little paler than usual, that reminded his mother that the young man had for the first time seen sudden and violent death that day, and that though his present gladness was so great, yet that he had gone through too much in body and mind for the revels of the evening not either to jar, or to produce a vehement reaction, if he were driven into them. So she answered by pleading the eleven miles' walk; and the queen of the sports was merciful, adding, "But I must be gone, or Terry will be getting up his favourite tableau of the wounded men of Clontarf, or Rothesay, or the Black Bull's Head, or some equally pleasing little incident."

"Is it going on well?" asked Mrs. Poyntsett.

"Sweetly! Couldn't be better. They have all amalgamated and are in the midst of the 'old family coach,' with Captain Duncombe telling the story. He is quite up to the trick, and enjoys turning the tables on his ladies."

"And Camilla?" asked Lenore, in a hesitating, anxious tone

"Oh! she's gone in for it. I think she is the springs! I heard her ask where you were, and Charley told her; so you need not be afraid to stay in peace, if you have a turn that way. Good-bye; you'd laugh to see how delighted people are to be let off the lecture." And she bent over Lenore with a parting kiss, full of significance of congratulation.

She returned, after changing her dress, to find a pretty fairy tableau, contrived by the Bowater sisters, in full progress, and delighting the children and the mothers. Lady Vivian contrived to get a word with her as she returned.

"Beautifully managed, Lady Rosamond. I tell Cecil she should enjoy a defeat by such strategy."

"It is Mrs. Poyntsett's regular Christmas party," said Rosamond, not deigning any other reply.

"I congratulate her on her skilful representatives," said Lady Tyrrell. "May I ask if we are to see the hero of the day? No? What! you would say better employed? Poor children, we must let them alone to-night for their illusion, though I am sorry it should be deepened; it will be only the more pain by and by."

"I don't see that," said Rosamond, stoutly.

"Ah! Lady Rosamond, you are a happy young bride, untaught what is *l'impossible*." Rosamond could not help thinking that no one understood it better than she, as the eldest of a large family with more rank and far more desires than means; but she disliked Lady Tyrrell far too much for even her open nature to indulge in confidences, and she made a successful effort to escape from her neighbourhood by putting two pale female Fullers into the place of honour in front of the folding doors into the small drawing-room, which served as a stage, and herself hovered about the rear, wishing she could find some means of silencing Miss Moy's voice, which was growing louder and more boisterous than ever.

The charade which Rosamond had expected was the inoffensive, if commonplace, *Inspector*, and the window she beheld, when the curtain drew up, was, she supposed, the bar of an inn. But no; on the board were two heads, ideals of male and female beauty, one with a waxed moustache, the other with a huge chignon, vividly recalling Mr. Pettitt's Penates. Presently came by a dapper professor, in blue spectacles and a college cap, who stood contemplating, and indulging in a harangue on entities and molecules, spirit and matter, affinities and development, while the soft deep brown eyes of the chignoned head languished, and the blue ones of the moustached one rolled, and the muscles twitched and the heads turned till, by a strong process of will explained by the professor, they bent their necks, erected themselves, and finally started into life and the curtain fell on them with clasped hands!

It rose to show the newly-animated pair, Junius Brutus and Barberina his wife, at the breakfast table, with a boar's head of brawn before them, while the Lady Barberina boldly asserted her claims to the headship of the house. Had she not lately been all head?

The pathetic reply was, "Would it were so still, my dear. All head and no tongue, like our present meal."

The lady heaved up the boar's head to throw at him, and the scene closed.

Next, Brutus was seen awkwardly cleaning his accoutrements, having enlisted, as he soliloquized, to escape from woman.

Enter a sergeant with a rich Irish brogue, and other recruits, forming the awkward squad. The drill was performed with immense spirit, but only one of the soldiers showed any dexterity; but while the sergeant was upholding him as 'the very moral of a pattern to the rest,' poor Brutus was seized with agonizing horror at the recognition of Barberina in this disguise!

"Why not?" she argued. "Why should not woman learn to use the arms of which man has hitherto usurped the use?"

Poor Brutus stretched out his arms in despair, and called loudly for the professor to restore him to his original state of silent felicity in the barber's window.

"Ye needn't do that, me boy," quoth the sergeant with infinite scorn. "Be ye where ye will, ye'll never be aught but a blockhead."

Therewith carriages were being announced to the heads of families; and with compliments and eager thanks, and assurances that nothing could have been more delightful, the party broke up.

Captain Duncombe, while muffling his boys, declared that he never saw a cleverer hit in his life, and that those two De Lancey brothers ought to be on the stage; while Miss Moy loudly demanded whether he did not feel it personal; and Mrs. Tallboys, gracefully shaking hands with Anne and Rosamond, declared it a grand challenge where the truth had been unconsciously hit off. Cecil was nowhere to be seen.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### Demonstrations

Nursing her wrath to keep it warm.—BURNS

The hours of the *soirée* had been early; but the breakfast was so irregular and undecided as to time, that no one took much notice of an intimation which Jenkins had received from the grim Mrs. Grindstone that Mrs. Charnock Poyntsett would take breakfast in her own room. Indeed, they all felt glad that her views of etiquette did not bind them to their places; for Frank was burning to be off to Sirenwood, forgetting that it was far easier to be too early than too late for Sir Harry Vivian, who was wont to smoke till long after midnight, and was never visible till the midday repast.

And thus it was Lady Tyrrell who came to Frank alone. "Early afoot," she said; "you foolish, impatient fellow! You *will* outrun my best advice."

"Ah! but I'm armed. I always told you we might trust to my mother, and it is all right. She loves Lenore with all her heart, and consents freely and gladly."

"Indeed! Well, the dear child has made her conquest!"

"I always knew she would when once reserve was broken down."

"Did you get up the alarm on purpose?"

"Really, one would think I had done so. One such moment was worth years of ordinary meetings! Half the battle is won!"

"Have you seen your mother this morning?"

"No; but she knew I was coming."

"Then you do not know what her feelings are on cooler reflection?"

"My mother would never retract what she has once assured me of," said Frank, haughtily.

"Forgive me—of what has she assured you?"

"That she regards Eleonora as a dear daughter, and that implies doing the same for me as for my brothers. If Sir Harry would but be so good as to come and see her—"

"Stay, Frank, you have not come that length. You forget that if you have, as you say, gained half the battle, there is another half; and that my father very reasonably feels hurt at being the last to be favoured with the intelligence."

"Dear Lady Tyrrell, you can see how it was. There was no helping it when once I could speak to Lenore; and then no one would have let me utter a word till I had gone through the examination. We never meant to go on a system of concealment; but you know how every one would have raved and stormed if I had betrayed a thought beyond old Driver, and yet it was only being at rest about Lenore that carried me through without breaking down. Can't you see?"

"You special pleader! May you win over my father; but you must remember that we are a fallen house, unable to do all we wish."

"If I might see Sir Harry! I must make him forgive me."

"I will see whether he is ready."

Could Frank's eyes have penetrated the walls, he would have seen Lady Tyrrell received with the words, "Well, my dear, I hope you have got rid of the young man—poor fellow!"

"I am afraid that cannot be done without your seeing him yourself."

"Hang it! I hate it! I can't abide it, Camilla. He's a nice lad, though he is his mother's son; and Lenore's heart is set on him, and I can't bear vexing the child."

"Lena cares for him only because she met him before she knew what life is like. After one season she will understand what five hundred a year means."

"Well, you ought to know your sister best; but if the lad has spoken to her, Lena is not the girl to stand his getting his *congé* so decidedly."

"Exactly; it would only lead to heroics, and deepen the mischief."

"Hang it! Then what do you want me to say?"

"Stand up for your rights, and reduce him to submission by displeasure at not having been consulted. Then explain how there can be no engagement at once; put him on his honour to leave her free till after her birthday in November."

"What! have him dangling after her? That's no way to make her forget him."

"She never will under direct opposition—she is too high-spirited for that; but if we leave it alone, and they are unpledged, there is a fair chance of her seeing the folly both for her and for him."

"I don't know that. Lena may be high-flown; but things go deep with the child—deeper than they did with you, Camilla!"

Perhaps this was a stab, for there was bitterness in the answer. "You mean that she is less willing to give up a fancy for the family good. Remember, it is doubly imperative that Lena should marry a man whose means are in his own power, so that he could advance something. This would be simply ruin—throwing up the whole thing, after all I have done to retrieve our position."

"After all, Camilla, I am growing an old man, and poor Tom is gone. I don't know that the position is worth so much to me as the happiness to her, poor child!" said Sir Harry, wistfully.

"Happiness!" was the scornful answer. "If you said 'her own way,' it would be nearer the truth. A back street in London—going about in a cab—and occasional holidays on sufferance from Mrs. Poyntsett."

However little happiness either father or daughter had derived from their chosen ways, this idea was abhorrent to both; and Lady Tyrrell pressed her advantage. "If we keep him waiting much longer he will be rushing after Lena, and if you show the least sign of relenting he will insist on dragging you to an interview with his mother."

The threat was effectual; for Sir Harry had had passages-at arms enough with Mrs. Poyntsett to make him dread her curt dry civility far more than either dun or bailiff, and he was at once roused to the determination to be explicit.

Frank met him, with crimson face and prepared speech. "Good morning, Sir Harry! I am afraid you may think that you have reason to complain of my not having spoken to you sooner; but I trusted to your previous knowledge of my feelings, and I was anxious to ascertain my position before laying it before you, though I don't believe I should have succeeded unless my mind had been set at rest."

Soft-hearted Sir Harry muttered, "I understand, but—"

The pause at that 'but' was so long that Frank ventured on going on. "I have not had an official communication, but I know privately that I have passed well and stand favourably for promotion, so that my income will go on increasing, and my mother will make over to me five thousand pounds, as she has done to Miles and Julius, so that it can be settled on Eleonora at once."

"There, there, that's enough!" said Sir Harry, coerced by his daughter's glances; "there's plenty of time before coming to all that! You see, my dear boy, I always liked you, and had an immense respect for your—your family; but, you see, Eleonora is young, and under the circumstances she ought not to engage herself. She can't any way marry before coming of age, and—considering all things—I should much prefer that this should go no further."

"You ought both to be free!" said Lady Tyrrell.

"That I can never be!"

"Nor do you think that she can—only it sounds presumptuous," smiled Lady Tyrrell. "Who can say? But things have to be proved; and considering what young untried hearts are, it is safer and happier for both that there should be perfect freedom, so that no harm should be done, if you found that you had not known your own minds."

"It will make no difference to me."

"Oh yes, we know that!" laughed Sir Harry. "Only suppose you changed your mind, we could not be angry with you."

"You don't think I could!"

"No, no," said Lady Tyrrell; "we think no such thing. Don't you see, if we did not trust your honour, we could not leave this in suspense. All we desire is that these matters may be left till it is possible to see our way, when the affairs of the estate are wound up; for we can't tell what the poor child will have. Come, don't repeat that it will make no difference. It may not to you; but it must to us, and to your mother."

"My mother expects nothing!" said Frank, eagerly; but it was a false step.

Sir Harry bristled up, saying, "Sir, my daughter shall go into no family that—that has not a proper appreciation of—and expectations befitting her position."

"Dear papa," exclaimed Lady Tyrrell, "he means no such thing. He is only crediting his mother with his own romantic ardour and disinterestedness.—Hark! there actually is the gong. Come and have some luncheon, and contain yourself, you foolish boy!"

"I am sorry I said anything that seemed unfitting," said Frank, meekly. "You know I *could* not mean it!"

"Yes, yes, yes, I bear no malice; only one does not like to see one's own child courted without a voice in the matter, and to hear she is to be taken as a *favour*, expecting nothing. But, there,

we'll say no more. I like you, Frank Charnock! and only wish you had ten thousand a year, or were any one else; but you see—you see. Well, let's eat our luncheon."

"Does she know this decision?" asked Frank, aside, as he held open the door for Lady Tyrrell.

"Yes, she knows it can go no further; though we are too merciful to deny you the beatific vision, provided you are good, and abstain from any more little *tendresses* for the present.—Ah!"—enter Cecil—"I thought we should see you to-day, my dear!"

"Yes; I am on my way to meet my husband at the station," said Cecil, meeting her in the hall, and returning her kiss.

"Is Raymond coming home to-day?" said Frank, as he too exchanged greetings. "Ah! I remember; I did not see you at breakfast this morning."

"No!" and there was signification in the voice; but Frank did not heed it, for coming down-stairs was Eleonora, her face full of a blushing sweetness, which gave it all the beauty it had ever lacked.

He could do no more than look and speak before all the rest; the carriage was ordered for the sisters to go out together, and he lingered in vain for a few words in private, for Sir Harry kept him talking about Captain Duncombe's wonderful colt, till Cecil had driven off one way, and their two hostesses the other; and he could only ride home to tell his mother how he had sped.

Better than Rosamond, better even than Charlie, was his mother as a confidante; and though she had been surprised into her affectionate acceptance of Eleonora, it was an indescribable delight to mother and son to find themselves once more in full sympathy; while he poured out all that had been pent up ever since his winter at Rockpier. She almost made common cause with him in the question, what would Raymond say? And it proved to be news to her that her eldest son was to be immediately expected at home. Cecil had not come to see her, and had sent her no message; but ungracious inattention was not so uncommon as to excite much remark from one who never wished to take heed to it; and it was soon forgotten in the praise of Eleonora.

Cecil meanwhile was receiving Raymond at the station. He was pleased to see her there in her pony-carriage, but a little startled by the brief coldness of her reply to his inquiry after his mother, and the tight compression of her lips all the time they were making their way through the town, where, as usual, he was hailed every two or three minutes by persons wanting a word with him. When at last there was a free space, she began: "Raymond, I wish to know whether you mean me to be set at naught, and my friends deliberately insulted?"

"What?"

A gentleman here hurried up with "I'll not detain you a minute."

He did, however, keep them for what seemed a great many, to the chafing spirit which thought a husband should have no ears save for his wife's wrongs; so she made her preface even more startling—"Raymond, I cannot remain in the house any longer with Lady Rosamond Charnock and those intolerable brothers of hers!"

"Perhaps you will explain yourself," said Raymond, almost relieved by the evident exaggeration of the expressions.

"There has been a conspiracy to thwart and insult me—a regular conspiracy!"

"Cecil! let me understand you. What can have happened?"

"When I arranged an evening for my friends to meet Mrs. Tallboys, I did not expect to have it swamped by a pack of children, and noisy nonsensical games, nor that both she and I should be insulted by practical jokes and a personal charade."

"A party to meet Mrs. Tallboys?"

"A ladies' party, a *conversazione*."

"What—by my mother's wish?"

"I was given to understand that I had *carte blanche* in visiting matters."

"You did not ask her consent?"

"I saw no occasion."

"You did not?"

"No."

"Then, Cecil, I must say that whatever you may have to complain of, you have committed a grave act of disrespect."

"I was told that I was free to arrange these things!"

"Free!" said Raymond, thoroughly roused; "free to write notes, and order the carriage, and play lady of the house; but did you think that made you free to bring an American mountebank of a woman to hold forth absurd trash in my mother's own drawing-room, as soon as my back was

turned?"

"I should have done the same had you been there."

"Indeed!" ironically; "I did not know how far you had graduated in the Rights of Women. So you invited these people?"

"Then the whole host of children was poured in on us, and everything imaginable done to interrupt, and render everything rational impossible. I know it was Rosamond's contrivance, she looked so triumphant, dressed in an absurd fancy dress, and her whole train doing nothing but turning me into ridicule, and Mrs. Tallboys too. Whatever you choose to call her, you cannot approve of a stranger and foreigner being insulted here. It is that about which I care—not myself; I have seen none of them since, nor shall I do so until a full apology has been made to my guest and to myself."

"You have not told me the offence."

"In the first place, there was an absurd form of Christmas-tree, to which one was dragged blindfold, and sedulously made ridiculous; and I—I had a dust-pan and brush. Yes, I had, in mockery of our endeavours to purify that unhappy street."

"I should have taken it as a little harmless fun," said Raymond. "Depend on it, it was so intended."

"What, when Mrs. Tallboys had a padlock and key? I see you are determined to laugh at it all. Most likely they consulted you beforehand."

"Cecil, I cannot have you talk such nonsense. Is this all you have to complain of?"

"No. There was a charade on the word Blockhead, where your brother Charles and the two De Lanceys caricatured what they supposed to be Mrs. Tallboys' doctrines."

"How did she receive it?"

"Most good-humouredly; but that made it no better on their part."

"Are you sure it was not a mere ordinary piece of pleasantry, with perhaps a spice of personality, but nothing worth resenting?"

"You did not see it. Or perhaps you think no indignity towards me worth resentment?"

"I do not answer that, Cecil; you will think better of those words another time," said Raymond, sternly. "But when you want your cause taken up, you have to remember that whatever the annoyance, you brought it upon yourself and her, by your own extraordinary proceeding towards my mother—I will not say towards myself. I will try to smooth matters. I think the De Lanceys must have acted foolishly; but the first step ought to be an expression of regret for such conduct towards my mother."

"I cannot express regret. I ought to have been told if there were things forbidden."

"Must I forbid your playing Punch and Judy, or dancing on the tight-rope?" cried Raymond, exasperated.

Cecil bit her lip, and treated the exclamation with the silent dignity of a deeply injured female; and thus they reached home, when Raymond said, "Come to your senses, Cecil and apologize to my mother. You can explain that you did not know the extent of your powers."

"Certainly not. They all plotted against me, and I am the person to whom apology is due."

Wherewith she marched up-stairs, leaving Raymond, horribly perplexed, to repair at once to his mother's room, where Frank still was; but after replying about his success in the examination, the younger brother retreated, preferring that his story should be told by his mother; but she had not so much as entered on it when Raymond demanded what had so much disturbed Cecil.

"I was afraid she would be vexed," said Mrs. Poyntsett; "but we were in a difficulty. We thought she hardly knew what she had been led into, and that as she had invited her ladies, it would do less harm to change the character of the party than to try to get it given up."

"I have no doubt you did the best you could," said Raymond, speaking with more like censure of his mother than he had ever done since the hot days of his love for Camilla Vivian; "and you could have had nothing to do with the personalities that seem to have been the sting."

Mrs. Poyntsett, true boy-lover that she was, had been informed of the success of Tom's naughtiness—not indeed till after it was over, when there was nothing to be done but to shake her head and laugh; and now she explained so that her son came to a better understanding of what had happened.

As to the extinguishing Women's Rights in child's play, he saw that it had been a wise manoeuvre of his mother, to spare any appearance of dissension, while preventing what she disapproved and what might have injured his interests; but he was much annoyed with the De Lanceys for having clogged the measure with their own folly; and judging of cause by effect, he would hear of no excuse for Rosamond or her brothers, and went away resolved that though nothing should induce him to quarrel with Julius, yet he should tell him plainly that he must restrain his wife and her



brothers from annoying Cecil by their practical jokes. He was, as usual, perfectly gentle to his mother, and thanked her for her arrangement. "It was not her fault that it had not turned out better," he said; and he did not seem to hear her exoneration of Rosamond.

He had scarcely gone when Rosamond came in from the village, asking whether he had arrived, as she had seen his hat in the hall.

"Yes, Rosamond. You did not tell me of Cecil's vexation!"

"Cecil? Have I seen her since? No, I remember now. But is she angry? Was it the dust-pan? Oh! Tom, Tom!"

"That and the Blockhead. Did Tom say anything very cutting?"

"Why it was an old stock charade they acted two years ago! I had better tell her so."

"If you would it would be an immense relief, my dear. Raymond is very much annoyed; she says she will speak to nobody till she has had an apology."

"Then she can be as great a goose as I! Why, the Yankee muse and Mrs. Duncombe took all in good part; but Cecil has not atom of fun in her. Don't you think that was the gift the fairies left out at the christening of the all-endowed princess?"

Mrs. Poyntsett laughed, but anxiously. "My dear, if you can make peace, it will be a family blessing."

"I! I'll eat any dirt in the world, and make Tom eat it too, rather than you should be vexed, or make discord in the house," cried Rosamond, kissing her, and speeding away to Cecil's door.

It was Raymond who opened it, looking perturbed and heated, but a good deal amazed at seeing his intended scapegoat coming thus boldly to present herself.

"Let me in," she breathlessly said. "I am come to tell Cecil how sorry I am she was so much vexed; I really did not know it before."

"I am ready to accept any proper apology that is offered me," said Cecil, with cold dignity; "but I cannot understand your profession that you did not know I was vexed. You could have intended nothing else."

"But, Cecil, you misunderstood—" began Rosamond.

"I never misunderstand—"

"No human creature can say that!" interposed Raymond, immensely thankful to Rosamond—whatever her offence—for her overtures, and anxious they should be accepted.

"I could not," continued Cecil, "misunderstand the impertinent insults offered to my friends and to myself; though if Lady Rosamond is willing to acknowledge the impropriety I will overlook it."

Raymond's face and neck crimsoned, but Raymond's presence helped her to rein in her temper; and she thought of Julius, and refrained from more than a "Very well. It was meant as a harmless joke, and—and if you—you did not take it so, I am very sorry."

Raymond saw the effort, and looked at his wife for softening; but as he saw none, he met the advance by saying kindly, "I am sure it was so meant, though the moment was unfortunate."

"Indeed it was so," cried Rosamond, feeling it much easier to speak to him, and too generous to profess her own innocence and give up Tom. "It was just a moment's idle fancy—just as we've chaffed one another a hundred times; and for the Blockhead, it is the boys' pet old stock charade that they've acted scores of times. It was mere thoughtlessness; and I'll do or say anything Cecil pleases, if only she won't bother Julius or Mrs. Poyntsett about our foolishness." And the mist of tears shone in the dark lashes as she held out her hand.

"I cannot suppose it mere thoughtlessness—" began Cecil; but Raymond cut her short with angry displeasure, of which she had not supposed him capable. "This is not the way to receive so kind an apology. Take Rosamond's hand, and respond properly."

To respond *properly* was as little in Cecil's power as her will; but she had not been an obedient daughter for so large a proportion of her life without having an instinct for the voice of real authority, and she did not refuse her hand, with the words, "If you express regret I will say no more about it."

And Rosamond, thinking of Julius and his mother, swallowed the ungraciousness, and saying "Thank you," turned to go away.

"Thank you most heartily for this, my dear Rosamond," said Raymond, holding out his hand as he opened the door for her; "I esteem it a very great kindness."

Rosamond, as she felt the strong pressure of his hand, looked up in his face with a curious arch compassion in her great gray eyes. He shut the door behind her, and saw Cecil pouting by the mantelpiece, vexed at being forced into a reconciliation, even while she knew she could not persist in sending all the family except Frank to Coventry. He was thoroughly angry at the dogged way in which she had received this free and generous peace-making, and he could not

but show it. "Well," he said, "I never saw an apology made with a better grace nor received with a worse one."

Cecil made no reply. He stood for a minute looking at her with eyes of wondering displeasure, then, with a little gesture of amazement, left the room.

Cecil felt like the drowning woman when she gave the last scissor-like gesture with her fingers. She was ready to fall into a chair and cry. A sense of desolation was very strong on her, and that look in his dark eyes had seemed to blast her.

But pride came to her aid. Grindstone was moving about ready to dress her for dinner. No one should see that she was wounded, or that she took home displeasure which she did not merit. So she held up her head, and was chilling and dignified all dinner-time; after which she repaired to Lady Tyrrell's *conversazione*.

## **CHAPTER XIX**

### **The Monstrous Regiment of Women**

Descend, my muse!

Raymond had been invited by one of his fellow-guests to make a visit at his house, and this was backed up on the morning after his return by a letter containing a full invitation to both himself and his wife. He never liked what he called "doing nothing in other people's houses," but he thought any sacrifice needful that might break up Cecil's present intimacies, and change the current of her ideas; and his mother fully agreed in thinking that it would be well to being a round of visits, to last until the Session of Parliament should have begun. By the time it was over Julius and Rosamond would be in their own house, and it might be easier to make a new beginning.

The friends whom he could reckon on as sure to welcome him and his bride were political acquaintances of mark, far above the Dunstone range, and Cecil could not but be gratified, even while Mrs. Duncombe and her friend declared that they were going to try to demoralize her by the seductions of the aristocracy.

After all, Cecil was too much of an ingrained Charnock to be very deeply imbued with Women's Rights. All that she wanted was her own way, and opposition. Lady Tyrrell had fascinated her and secured her affection, and she followed her lead, which was rather that of calm curiosity and desire to hear the subject ventilated than actual partisanship, for which her ladyship was far too clever, as well as too secure in her natural supremacy. They had only seemed on that side because other people were so utterly alien to it, and because of their friendship with the really zealous Mrs. Duncombe.

The sanitary cause which had become mixed with it was, however, brought strongly before their minds by Mrs. Tallboys' final lecture, at which she impressed on the ladies' minds with great vehemence that here they might lead the way. If men would not act as a body, the ladies should set the example, and shame them, by each doing her very utmost in the cleansing of the nests of disease that reeked in the worn-out civilization of the cities of the old country. The ladies listened: Lady Tyrrell, with a certain interest in such an eager flow of eloquence; Eleonora, with thoughts far away. Bessie Duncombe expressed a bold practical determination to get one fragment, at least, of the work done, since she knew Pettitt, the hair-dresser, was public-spirited enough to allow her to carry out her ideas on his property, and Cecil, with her ample allowance, as yet uncalled for, in the abundance of her trousseau, promised to supply what the hair-dresser could not advance, as a tangible proof of her sincerity.

She held a little council with Mrs. Duncombe at the working society, when she resigned her day into that lady's hands on going away. "I shall ask Mrs. Miles Charnock," said that lady. "You don't object?"

"Oh no, only don't ask her till I'm gone, and you know she will only come on condition of being allowed to expound."

"We must have somebody, and now the thing has gone on so long, and will end in three months, the goody element will not do much harm, and, unluckily, most women will not act without it."

"You have been trying to train Miss Moy."

"I shall try still, but I can't get her to take interest in anything but the boisterous side of emancipation."

"I can't bear the girl," said Cecil; "I am sure she comes only for the sake of the horses."

"I'm afraid so; but she amuses Bob, and there's always a hope of moving her father through her, though she declares that the Three Pigeons is his tenderest point, and that he had as soon meddle with it as with the apple of his eye. I suppose he gets a great rent from that Gadley."

"Do you really think you shall do anything with her?" said Cecil, who might uphold her at home,

but whose taste was outraged by her.

"I hope so! At any rate, she is not conventional. Why, when I was set free from my school at Paris, and married Bob three months later, I hadn't three ideas in my head beyond horses and balls and soldiers. It has all come with life and reading, my dear."

And a very odd 'all' it was, so far; but there was this difference between Bessie Duncombe and Cecil Charnock Poyntsett, that the 'gospel of progress' was to the one the first she had ever really known, and became a reaching forward to a newly-perceived standard of benevolence and nobleness: to the other it was simply retrograding, and that less from conviction than from the spirit of rivalry and opposition.

Lady Tyrrell with her father and sister were likewise going to leave home, to stay among friends with whom Sir Harry could hunt until the London campaign, when Eleonora was to see the world. Thus the bazaar was postponed until the return of the ladies in the summer, when the preparations would be more complete and the season more suitable. The church must wait for it, for nothing like a sufficient amount of subscription had been as yet promised.

There was still, however, to come that select dinner-party at Mrs. Duncombe's, to which Julius, moved by her zeal and honesty, as well as by curiosity, had promised his presence with Rosamond, "at his peril," as she said.

They were kept so long at the door of Aucuba Villa that they had begun to doubt if they had not mistaken the day, until the Sirenwood carriage crashed up behind them; and after the third pull at the bell they were admitted by an erect, alert figure,—a remnant of Captain Duncombe's military life.

He marshalled them into the drawing-room, where by dim firelight they could just discern the Professor and a certain good-natured horsey friend of the Captain's, who sprang up from easy-chairs on the opposite sides of the fire to greet them, while the man hastily stirred up the fire, lighted the gas, dashed at the table, shutting up an open blotting-book that lay on it, closing an ink-bottle, and gathering up some torn fragments of paper, which he would have thrown into the scrap-basket but that it was full of little books on the hundred ways of dressing a pumpkin. Then he gave a wistful look at the *ami de la maison*, as if commending the guests to him, and receiving a nod in return, retired.

"I fear we are too early," said Lady Tyrrell.

"Fact is," said the familiar, whose name Julius was trying to remember, "there's been a catastrophe; cook forgot to order the turkey, went to bed last night in hysterics, and blew out the gas instead of turning it off. No, no"—as the guests expecting fatal consequences, looked as if they thought they had better remove themselves: "she came round, and Duncombe has driven over to Backsworth to bring home the dinner. He'll soon be back."

This not appearing greatly to reassure the visitors, the Professor added, "No, no, ladies. Mrs. Duncombe charged me to say that she will be perfectly fixed in a short time, and I flatter myself that my wife is equal to any emergency."

"It is very kind in her," said Lady Tyrrell.

"I confess," said Professor Tallboys, "that I am not sorry that such an occasion should occur of showing an American lady's domestic powers. I flatter myself they do not discredit her cause."

Just then were heard the wheels of the drag, and in rushed one of the boys, grasping Eleonora's skirts, and proclaiming, "We've got the grub! Oysters and a pie! Oh my!"

"Satisfactory!" said the friend. "But let go, Ducky, you are rumpling Miss Vivian."

"She's coming to see the quarion! You promised, Lena! Here's a jolly crayfish! He'll pinch!"

There was a small conservatory or glazed niche on one side of the room, into which the boy dragged Lenore, and Julius followed, dimly sensible of what the quarion might be, and hoping for a word with the young lady, while he trusted to his wife to occupy her sister.

The place contained two desolate camellias, with leaves in the same proportion as those on trees in the earlier ages of illumination, and one scraggy, leafless geranium, besides a green and stagnant tank, where a goldfish moved about, flapping and gasping, as the boy disturbed it in his search for the crayfish. He absorbed all the conversation, so that Julius could only look back into the room, where an attempt at artistic effect was still dimly visible through accumulated litter. The Venus of Milo stood on a bracket, with a riding-whip in her arms, and a bundle of working society tickets behind her, and her *vis-à-vis*, the Faun of Praxiteles, was capped by a glove with one finger pointing upwards, and had a ball of worsted tangled about his legs; but further observation was hindered by the man-servant's voice at the outer door, "Master Ducky, where are you? Your ma says you are to go to bed directly."

"No, no, I'll put myself to bed!"

"Come, sir, please do, like a good boy—Master Pinney won't go without you, and I must put him to bed while they are dishing up. Come, sir, I've got a mince-pie for you."

"And some oysters—Bobby said I should have some oysters!"

"Yes, yes; come along, sir."

And Master Ducky submitted to his fate, while Julius looked his wonder, and asked, "Is he nursery-maid?"

"Just now, since the *bonne* went," said Lenore. "He is a most faithful, attached servant, who will do anything for them. *She* does attach people deeply when the first shock is over."

"I am coming to believe so," he answered. "There seem to me to be excellent elements."

"I am so glad!" said Lenore; "she is so thorough, so true and frank; and much of this oddness is really an inconsistent struggle to keep out of debt."

"Well! at any rate I am thankful to her for this opportunity of seeing you," said Julius. "We have both been longing to speak our welcome to you."

"Thank you. It is so kind," she fervently whispered; "all the kinder for the state of things that is insisted on—though you know that it can make no real difference," she added, apparently addressing the goldfish.

"Frank knows it," said Julius, in a low voice.

"I trust he does, though I cannot see him to assure him—you will?" she added, looking up at him with a shy brightness in her eye and a flush on her cheek.

"Yes, indeed!" he said, laying his hand on hers for a moment. "I fear you may both have much to pull through, but I think you are of a steadfast nature."

"I hope so—I think I am, for none of my feelings seem to me ever to change, except that I get harder, and, I am afraid, bitterer."

"I can understand your feeling that form of trial."

"Oh, if you could, and would help me!"

"As a brother; if I may."

Again she laid a hand on his, saying, "I have longed to talk openly to you ever since we met in the cow-shed; but I could not make any advance to any of you, because," she whispered in haste, "I thought it my duty to hold back from Frank. And now, till we go away, Camilla watches me and occupies me every minute, will not even let me ride out with papa. I wonder she lets me talk to you now."

"We know each other," said Julius, shortly.

It was so. Once, in the plain-spoken days of childhood, Miles and Julius had detected Camilla Vivian in some flagrant cheating at a game, and had roundly expressed their opinion. In the subsequent period of Raymond's courtship, Miles had succumbed to the fascination, but Julius had given one such foil, that she had never again attempted to cajole him.

"I have seen that you did from the first," said Lenore. "And it would make it much easier to talk to you than to any outsider, who would never understand, even if it were possible for me to explain, how hard it is to see which way my duty lies—especially filial."

"Do you mean in general, or in this special matter?"

"Both. You see, in her hands he is so different from what he was before she came home, that I don't feel as if I was obeying him—only her; and I don't think I am bound to do that. Not in the great matter, I am clear. Nobody can meddle with my real sincere pledge of myself to Frank, nobody!" she spoke as if there was iron in her lips. "But as far as overt acts go, they have a right to forbid me, till I am of age at least, and we must bear it."

"Yes, you are right there."

"But there are thousands of other little cases of right and wrong, and altogether I have come to such a spirit of opposition that I find it easier to resist than to do anything with a good grace."

"You cannot always tell when resistance is principle, and when temper or distaste."

"There's distaste enough always," said poor Lenore.

"To gaieties?" he said, amazed as one habituated to his wife's ravenous appetite for any sort of society or amusement.

"Of course," she answered sadly. "A great deal of trouble just for a little empty babble. Often not one word worth remembering, and a general sense of having been full of bad feelings."

"No enjoyment?" he asked in surprise.

"Only by the merest chance and exception," she answered, surprised at his surprise; "what is there to enjoy?"

The peculiar-looking clergyman might have seemed more likely to ask such a question than the beautiful girl, but he looked at her anxiously and said, "Don't nourish morbid dislike and contempt, my dear Lena, it is not a safeguard. There are such things as perilous reactions. Try

to weigh justly, and be grateful for kindness, and to like what is likeable."

At that moment, after what had been an interval of weary famine to all but these two, host and hostess appeared, the lady as usual, picturesque, though in the old black silk, with a Roman sash tied transversely, and holly in her hair; and gaily shaking hands—"That's right, Lady Rosamond; so you are trusted here! Your husband hasn't sent you to represent him?"

"I'm afraid his confidence in me did not go so far," said Rosamond.

"Ah! I see—Lady Tyrrell, how d'ye do—you've brought Lena? Well, Rector, are you prepared?"

"That depends on what you expect of me."

"Have you the convinceable spot in your mind?"

"We must find it. It is very uncommon, and indurates very soon, so we had better make the most of our opportunity," said the American lady, who had entered as resplendent as before, though in so different a style that Rosamond wondered how such a wardrobe could be carried about the world; and the sporting friend muttered, "Stunning! she has been making kickshaws all day, and looks as if she came out of a bandbox! If all women were like that, it might pay."

It was true. Mrs. Tallboys was one of those women of resource whose practical powers may well inspire the sense of superiority, and with the ease and confidence of her country.

The meal was a real success. That some portion had been procured, ready dressed, at Backsworth, was evident, but all that had been done at home had a certain piquant Transatlantic flavour, in which the American Muse could be detected; and both she and her husband were polished, lively, and very agreeable, in spite of the twang in their voices. Miss Moy, the Captain and his friend, talked horses at one end of the table, and Rosamond faltered her woman's horror for the rights of her sex, increased by this supposed instance.

When the ladies rose at dessert, Mrs. Duncombe summoned him: "Come, Rector!—come, Professor! you're not to sit over your wine."

"We rise so far above the ordinary level of manhood!" said Julius, obediently rising.

"Once for all, Mr. Charnock," said Mrs. Duncombe, turning on him with flashing eyes and her Elizabethan majesty, "if you come prepared to scoff, we can have nothing to do with you."

Rosamond's eyes looked mischievous, and her brow cocked, but Julius answered in earnest, "Really, I assure you I have not come in a spirit of sarcasm; I am honestly desirous of hearing your arguments."

"Shall I stay in your stead?" added Miss Moy. "They'll be much more amusing here!"

"Come, Gussie, you're on your good behaviour," said Mrs. Duncombe. "Bob kept you to learn the right way of making a sensation."

As they entered the drawing-room two more guests arrived, namely, Joanna Bowater, and Herbert, who walked in with a kind of grim submission, till he saw Lady Tyrrell, when he lighted up, and, on a little gracious gesture with her hand, he sat down on the sofa beside her; and was there solaced by an occasional remark in an undertone; for indeed the boy was always in a trance wherever she was, and she had a fair amount of by-play wherewith to entertain herself and him during the discussion.

"You are just in time, Jenny," said Rosamond; "the great question is going to be started."

"And it is—?"

"The Equality of the Sexes," pronounced Mrs. Duncombe.

"*Ex cathedrâ?*" said Julius, as the graceful Muse seated herself in a large red arm-chair. "This scene is not an easy one in which to dispute it."

"You see, Bessie," said Mrs. Tallboys, "that men are so much afraid of the discussion that they try to elude it with empty compliment under which is couched a covert sneer."

"Perhaps," returned Julius, "we might complain that we can't open our lips without compliments and sneers being detected when we were innocent of both."

"Were you?" demanded Mrs. Tallboys.

"Honestly, I was looking round and thinking the specimens before us would tell in your favour."

"What a gallant parson!" cried Miss Moy.

But a perfect clamour broke out from others.

"Julius, that's too bad! when you know—"

"Mr Charnock, you are quite mistaken. Bob is much cleverer than I, in his own line—"

"Quite true, Rector," affirmed Herbert; "Joan has more brains than all the rest of us—for a woman, I mean."

"For a woman!" repeated Mrs. Tallboys. "Let a human being do or be what she will, it is disposed of in a moment by that one verdict, 'Very well for a woman!'"

"How is it with the decision of posterity?" said Jenny. "Can you show any work of woman of equal honour and permanence with that of men?"

"Because her training has been sedulously inferior."

"Not always," said Jenny; "not in Italy in the cinque cento, nor in England under Elizabeth."

"Yes, and there were names—!"

"Names, yes, but that is all. The lady's name is remembered for the curiosity of her having equalled the ordinary poet or artist of her time, but her performances either are lost or only known to curious scholars. They have not the quality which makes things permanent."

"What do you say to Sappho?"

"There is nothing of her but a name, and fragments that curious scholars read."

"Worse luck to her if she invented Sapphics," added Herbert.

"One of womankind's torments for mankind, eh?" said his neighbour.

"And there are plenty more such," asserted Mrs. Duncombe, boldly (for these were asides). "It is only that one can't recollect—and the men have suppressed them."

"I think men praised them," said Jenny, "and that we remember the praise, not the works. For instance, Roswitha, or Olympia Morata, or Vittoria Colonna. Vittoria's sonnets are extant, but we only value them as being hers, more for what she *was* than for their intrinsic merit."

"And," added Eleonora, "men did not suppress Hannah More, or Joanna Baillie. You know Scott thought Miss Baillie's dramas would rank with Shakespeare's."

Mrs. Tallboys was better read in logic and mathematics than in history, and did not follow Jenny, but she turned her adversary's argument to her own advantage, by exclaiming, "Are the gentlemen present familiar with these bright lights?"

"I confess my ignorance of some of them," said Julius.

"But my youngest brother knows all that," said Rosamond at a brave venture.

"Macaulay's school-boy," murmured Lady Tyrrell, softly.

"Let us return to the main point," said Mrs. Tallboys, a little annoyed. "It is of the present and future that I would speak, not of the past."

"Does not the past give the only data on which to form a conclusion?" said Julius.

"Certainly not. The proposition is not what a woman or two in her down-trodden state may have exceptionally effected, but her natural equality, and in fact superiority, in all but the physical strength which has imposed an unjust bondage on the higher nature."

"I hardly know where to meet you if you reject all arguments from proved facts," said Julius.

"And the Bible. Why don't you say the Bible?" exclaimed his wife in an undertone; but Mrs. Tallboys took it up and said, "The precepts of Scripture are founded on a state of society passed away. You may find arguments for slavery there."

"I doubt that," said Julius. "There are practical directions for an existing state of things, which have been distorted into sanction for its continuance. The actual precepts are broad principles, which are for all times, and apply to the hired servant as well as to the slave. So again with the relations of man and wife; I can nowhere find a command so adapted to the seclusion and depression of the Eastern woman as to be inapplicable to the Christian matron. And the typical virtuous woman, the valiant woman, is one of the noblest figures anywhere depicted."

"I know," said Mrs. Tallboys, who had evidently been waiting impatiently again to declaim, "that men, even ministers of religion, from Paul if you like downwards, have been willing enough to exalt woman so long as they claim to sit above her. The higher the oppressed, so much higher the self-exaltation of the oppressor. Paul and Peter exalt their virtuous woman, but only as their own appendage, adorning themselves; and while society with religious ministers at the head of it call on woman to submit, and degrade the sex, we shall continue to hear of such disgraces to England as I see in your police reports—brutal mechanics beating their wives."

"I fear while physical force is on the side of the brute," said Julius, "no abstract recognition of equality would save her."

"Society would take up her cause, and protect her."

"So it is willing to do now, if she asks for protection."

"Yes," broke in Rosamond, "but nothing would induce a woman worth sixpence to take the law against her husband."

"There I think Lady Rosamond has at once demonstrated the higher nature of the woman," said

Mrs. Tallboys. "What man would be capable of such generosity?"

"No one denies," said Julius, "that generous forbearance, patience, fortitude, and self-renunciation, belong almost naturally to the true wife and mother, and are her great glory; but would she not be stripped of them by self-assertion as the peer in power?"

"Turning our flank again with a compliment," said Mrs. Duncombe. "These fine qualities are very convenient to yourselves, and so you praise them up."

"Not so!" returned Julius, "because they are really the higher virtues!"

"Patience!" at once exclaimed the American and English emancipators with some scorn.

"Yes," said Julius, in a low tone of thorough earnest. "The patience of strength and love is the culmination of virtue."

Jenny knew what was in his mind, but Mrs. Tallboys, with a curious tone, half pique, half triumph, said, "You acknowledge this which you call the higher nature in woman—that is to say, all the passive qualities,—and you are willing to allow her a finer spiritual essence, and yet you do not agree to her equal rights. This is the injustice of the prejudice which has depressed her all these centuries."

"Stay," broke in Jenny, evidently not to the lady's satisfaction. "That does not state the question. Nobody denies that woman is often of a higher and finer essence, as you say, than man, and has some noble qualities in a higher degree than any but the most perfect men; but that is not the question. It is whether she have more force and capacity than man, is in fact actually able to be on an equality."

"And, I say," returned Mrs. Tallboys, "that man has used brute force to cramp woman's intellect and energy so long, that she has learnt to acquiesce in her position, and to abstain from exerting herself, so that it is only where she is partially emancipated, as in my own country, that any idea of her powers can be gained."

"I am afraid," said Julius, "that more may be lost to the world than is gained! No; I am not speaking from the tyrant point of view. I am thinking whether free friction with the world way not lessen that sweetness and tender innocence and purity that make a man's home an ideal and a sanctuary—his best earthly influence."

"This is only sentiment. Innocence is worthless if it cannot stand alone and protect itself!" said Mrs. Tallboys.

"I do not mean innocence unable to stand alone. It should be strong and trustworthy, but should have the bloom on it still, not rubbed off by contact or knowledge of evil. Desire of shielding that bloom from the slightest breath of contamination is no small motive for self-restraint, and therefore a great preservative to most men."

"Women purify the atmosphere wherever they go," said the lady.

"Many women do," returned Julius; "but will they retain that power universally if they succeed in obtaining a position where there will be less consideration for them, and they must be exposed to a certain hardening and roughening process?"

"If so," exclaimed Mrs. Tallboys, "if men are so base, we would soon assert ourselves. We are no frail morning glories for you to guard and worship with restraint, lest forsooth your natural breath should wither us away."

As she spoke the door opened, and, with a strong reek of tobacco, in came the two other gentlemen. "Well, Rector, have you given in?" asked the Captain. "Is Lady Rosamond to mount the pulpit henceforth?"

"Ah! wouldn't I preach you a sermon," returned Rosamond.

"To resume," said Mrs. Tallboys, sitting very upright. "You still go on the old assumption that woman was made for you. It is all the same story: one man says she is for his pleasure, another for his servant, and you, for—for his refinement. You would all have us adjectives. Now I defy you to prove that woman is not a substantive, created for herself."

"If you said 'grewed,' Mrs. Tallboys, it would be more consistent," said Jenny. "Her creation and her purpose in the world stand upon precisely the same authority."

"I wonder at you, Miss Bowater," said Mrs. Tallboys. "I cannot understand a woman trying to depreciate her sex."

"No," thrust in Gussie Moy; "I want to know why a woman can't go about without a dowager waddling after her" ("Thank you," breathed Lady Tyrrell into Herbert's ear), "nor go to a club."

"There was such a club proposed in London," said Captain Duncombe, "and do you know, Gussie, the name of it?"

"No!"

"The Middlesex Club!"

"There! it is just as Mrs. Tallboys said; you will do nothing but laugh at us, or else talk sentiment about our refining you. Now, I want to be free to amuse myself."

"I don't think those trifling considerations will be great impediments in your way," said Lady Tyrrell in her blindest tone. "Is that actually the carriage? Thank you, Mrs. Tallboys. This is good-bye, I believe. I am sorry there has not been more time for a fuller exposition to-night."

"There would have been, but I never was so interrupted," said Mrs. Tallboys in an undertone, with a displeased look at Jenny at the other end of the room.

Declamation was evidently more the Muse's forte than argument, but her aside was an aside, and that of the jockey friend was not. "So you waited for us to give your part of the lecture, Miss Moy?"

"Of course. What's the use of talking to a set of women and parsons, who are just the same?"

Poor Herbert's indignant flush infinitely amused the party who were cloaking in the hall. "Poor Gussie; her tongue runs fast," said Mrs. Duncombe.

"Emancipated!" said Jenny. "Good-bye, Mrs. Duncombe. Please let us be educated up to our privileges before we get them."

"A Parthian shot, Jenny," said Julius, as they gave her a homeward lift in the carriage. "You proved yourself the fittest memberess for the future parliament to-night."

"To be elected by the women and parsons," said Jenny, with little chuckle of fun. "Poor Herbert!"

"I only wish that girl was a man that I might horsewhip her," the clerical sentiment growled out from Herbert's corner of the carriage. "Degradation of her sex! She's a standing one!"

## CHAPTER XX

### Vivienne

Of all the old women that ever I saw,  
Sweet bad luck to my mother in law.—Irish Song

The Parliamentary Session had reached the stage that is ended by no power save that of grouse, and the streets were full of vans fantastically decorated with baths, chairs, bedsteads, and nursery gear.

Cecil could see two before different house-doors as she sat behind her muslin curtains, looking as fresh and healthful as ever, and scarcely more matronly, except that her air of self-assertion had become more easy and less aggressive now that she was undisputed mistress of the house in London.

There was no concern on her part that she was not the mother of either of the two latest scions of the house of Charnock. Certainly she did not like to be outdone by Rosamond; but then it was only a girl, and she could afford to wait for the son and heir; indeed, she did not yet desire him at the cost of all the distinguished and intellectual society, the concerts, *soirées*, and lectures that his non-arrival left her free to enjoy. The other son and heir interested her nearly, for he was her half-brother. There had been something almost ludicrous in the apologies to her. His mother seemed to feel like a traitor to her, and Mr. Charnock could hardly reconcile his darling's deposition with his pride in the newcomer. Both she and Raymond had honestly rejoiced in their happiness and the continuance of the direct line of Dunstone, and had completed the rejoicing of the parents by thorough sympathy, when the party with this unlooked-for addition had returned home in the spring. Mrs. Charnock had insisted on endowing his daughter as largely as he justly could, to compensate for this change in her expectations, and was in doubt between Swanmore, an estate on the Backsworth side of Willansborough, and Sirenwood itself, to purchase and settle on her. Raymond would greatly have preferred Sirenwood, both from its adjoining the Compton property and as it would be buying out the Vivians; but there were doubts about the involvements, and nothing could be done till Eleonora's majority. Mr. Charnock preferred Swanmore as an investment, and Raymond could, of course, not press his wishes.

A short visit had been made at Dunstone to join in the festivities in honour of the little heir, but Cecil had not been at Compton since Christmas, though Raymond had several times gone home for a Sunday when she had other companionship. Charlie had been with them preparing his outfit for India whither he had been gone about a month; and Frank, though living in lodgings, was the more frequently at his sister-in-law's service, because wherever she was the Vivian sisters might be looked for.

No sooner had Raymond taken the house in --- Square than Lady Tyrrell had engaged the opposite one, so that one household could enjoy evening views of the other's interior, and Cecil had chiefly gone into society under her friend's auspices. Her presentation at Court had indeed been by the marchioness; she had been staying with an old friend of Mrs. Poynsett's, quite prepared to be intimate with Raymond Poynsett's wife, if only Cecil would have taken to her. But



that lady's acceptance of any one recommended in this manner was not to be thought of, and besides, the family were lively, merry people, and Cecil was one of those who dislike and distrust laughter, lest it should be at themselves. So she remained on coldly civil terms with that pleasant party, and though to a certain degree following her husband's lead as to her engagements, all her ways were moulded by her friend's influence. Nor was the effect otherwise than becoming. Nothing could be in better taste than all in Mrs. Charnock Poyntsett's establishment, and London and Lady Tyrrell together had greatly improved her manners. All her entertainments went off well, and she filled her place in the world with grace and skill, just as she had always figured herself doing.

Yet there was a sense of disappointment and dissatisfaction, which increased upon her as the time drew nearer for returning to be again only a guest in her married home. It was a tangible grievance on which her mind could fix itself. Surely it was hard on her that her husband should require it of her, and yet she perceived that he could not avoid it, since his mother was mistress. She knew too that he was unfailingly kind, attentive, and indulgent, except on that one occasion when he had sharply reproved her for her behaviour in the Tallboys matter; and strange to say, a much stronger feeling towards him had been setting in ever since that one time when she had seen him thoroughly angry. She longed and craved to stir that even, gentle courtesy to frowns or smiles; and yet there was a perversity in her nature that seem to render it impossible to her to attempt to win a smile from him, far more so to lay aside any device or desire of her own to gratify him. All she did know was, that to be all that her ambition had sought, a Charnock by marriage as well as birth, and with a kind, considerate husband, was not enough to hinder a heartsickness she had never known or supposed possible.

Presently, through the flowers in her balcony, Cecil saw the opening and closing of the opposite house-door, and a white parasol unfurled, and she had only time to finish and address her letter to Mrs. Duncombe before Lady Tyrrell was announced.

"Here I am after a hard morning's work, winding up accounts, &c."

"You go to-morrow?"

"Yes, trusting that you will soon follow; though you might be a cockney born, your bloom is town-proof."

"We follow as soon as the division on the Education Question is over, and that will not be for ten days. You are come to look at my stores for the bazaar; but first, what are you going to do this afternoon?"

"What are your plans?"

"I must leave cards at half-a-dozen people's at the other end of the park. Will you come with me? Where is Lenore?"

"She is gone to take leave of the Strangeways' party; Lady Susan insisted on having her for this last day. Poor Frank! I confess impartially that it does not look well for him."

"Poor Frank!" repeated Cecil, "he does look very forlorn when he hears where she is."

"When, after all, if the silly boy could only see it, it is the most fortunate thing that could happen to him, and the only chance of keeping his head above water. I have made Lady Susan promise me two of her daughters for the bazaar. They thoroughly know how to make themselves useful. Oh, how pretty!"

For Cecil was producing from the shelves of various pieces of furniture a large stock of fancy articles—Swiss carvings, Spa toys, Genevese ornaments, and Japanese curiosities, which, as Lady Tyrrell said, "rivalled her own accumulation, and would serve to carry off the housewives and pen-wipers on which all the old maids of Wil'sbro' were employed."

"We must put out our programmes," Cecil added; "people will not work in earnest till the day is fixed and they know the sellers."

"Yes, the lady patronesses are most important," said Lady Tyrrell, writing them down: "Mrs. Raymond Charnock Poyntsett; Lady Rosamond, eh?"

"Oh no, Julius won't hear of it."

"And opposition is sweet: so we lose her romantic name, and the stall of the three brides. Mrs. Miles Charnock is too much out of the world to be worth asking. Then myself—Mrs. Duncombe, Mrs. Fuller, as a matter of necessity, Mrs. Moy."

"Oh!"

"Needful, my dear, to propitiate that set. Also that mayoress, Mrs. Truelove, isn't she? Six. We'll fill up with country people!"

Six more distinguished names were soon supplied of ladies who would give their patronage, provided neither toil nor care was required of them; and still consulting, the two friends took their seats in the carriage. The time of the bazaar was to be fixed by the opening of the town-hall, which was to take place on the 12th of September—a Thursday, the week before the races; and the most propitious days appeared to be the Tuesday and Wednesday before the Great Backsworth Cup Day, since the world would then be in an excited, pleasure-seeking state,

favourable to their designs.

"I shall have a party in the house," said Lady Tyrrell: "shall you be able?"

"I can't tell; you know it does not depend on me, and I certainly shall not ask it as a favour. Camilla, did I tell you that I tried to make my father understand the state of things, and speak to Raymond? But he would only say, that while I am so young and inexperienced, it is a great advantage for me to live with Mrs. Poyntsett, and that I must be the greatest comfort to her. Papa is an intense believer in Mrs. Poyntsett, and when he once has taken up a notion nothing will convince him."

"You can't even make capital of this purchase of a house of your own?"

"I don't like to do that."

"My dear, I see your delicacy and forbearance, and I would not urge you, if I did not see how deeply your happiness is concerned. Of course I don't mean merely the authority over the *wirthschaft*, though somehow the cares of it are an ingredient in female contentment; but forgive me, Cecil, I am certain that you will never take your right place—where you care for it more—till you have a home of your own."

"Ah!" The responsive sound burst from the very depths of Cecil's heart, penetrated as they had never been before; but pride and reserve at once sprang up, and she answered coldly, "I have no reason to complain."

"Right, my dear Cecil, I like you the better;" and she pressed her hand.

"It is quite true," said Cecil, withdrawing hers.

"Quite, absolutely true. He would die rather than give you any reason for the slightest murmur; but, Cecil, dearest, that very heedfulness shows there is something he cannot give you."

"I don't know why you should say so," answered a proud but choked voice.

"I say so," replied the clear tones, firmly, though with a touch of pity, "because I see it. Cecil, poor child, they married you very young!"

"I missed nothing," exclaimed Cecil; but she felt that she could only say so in the past, and her eyes burnt with unshed tears.

"No, my dear, you were still a girl, and your deeper woman's heart had not grown to perceive that it was not met."

"He chose me," she faintly said.

"His mother needed a daughter. It was proper for him to marry, and you were the most eligible party. I will answer for it that he warned you how little he could give."

"He did," cried Cecil. "He did tell me that he could not begin in freshness and warmth, like a young man; but I thought it only meant that we were too sensible to care about nonsense, and liked him for it. He always must have been staid and reserved—he could never have been different, Camilla. Don't smile in that way! Tell me what you mean."

"My dear Cecil, I knew Raymond Poyntsett a good many years before you did."

"And—well? Then he had a first love?" said Cecil, in a voice schooled into quiet. "Was he different then? Was he as desperate as poor Frank is now?"

"Frank is a very mild copy of him at that age. He overbore every one, wrung consent from all, and did everything but overcome his mother's calm hostility and self-assertion."

"Did that stop it? She died of course," said Cecil. "She could not have left off loving him."

"She did not die, but her family were wearied out by the continual objections to their overtures, and the supercilious way of treating them. They thought it a struggle of influence, and that he was too entirely dominated for a daughter-in-law to be happy with her. So they broke it off."

"And she—" Cecil looked up with searching eyes.

"She had acutely felt the offence, the weakness, the dutifulness, whatever you may choose to call it, and in the rebound she married."

"Who is she?" gasped Cecil.

"It is not fair to tell you," was the gentle answer, with a shade of rebuke. "You need not look for her. She is not in the county."

"I hope I shall never see her!"

"You need not dread doing so if you can only have fair play, and establish the power that belongs rightly to you. She would have no chance with you, even if he had forgiven her."

"Has not he?"

"Never!"

"And he used up all his heart?" said Cecil in a low, musing tone.

"All but what his mother absorbed. She was a comparatively young and brilliant woman, and she knew her power. It is a great ascendancy, and only a man's honest blindness could suppose that any woman would be content under it."

Cecil's tongue refused to utter what oppressed her heart—those evenings beside the sofa, those eager home expeditions for Sunday, the uniform maintenance of his mother's supremacy.

"And you think absence from her would lessen her influence?"

"I am sure of it. There might be a struggle, but if I know Mr. Charnock Poyntsett rightly, he is too upright not to be conscious of what is due to you, and be grieved not to be able to give you more—that is, when his mother is not holding him in her grasp. Nor can there be any valid objection, since Mrs Miles Charnock is always at her service."

"She will return to Africa. I don't know why she and Rosamond have been always so much more acceptable."

"They are not her rivals; besides, they have not your strength. She is a woman who tries to break whatever she cannot bend, and the instant her son began to slip from her grasp the contest necessarily began. You had much better have it over once and for ever, and have him on your side. Insist on a house of your own, and when you have made your husband happy in it, then—Ah! Good morning—Sir George!"

She had meant to say, "Then you win his heart," but the words would not come, and a loathing hatred of the cold-hearted child who had a property in Raymond so mastered her that she welcomed the interruption, and did not return to the subject.

She knew when she had said enough, and feared to betray herself; nor could Cecil bear to resume the talk, stunned and sore as she was at the revelation, though with no suspicion that the speaker had been the object of her husband's affection. She thought it must have been the other sister, now in India, and that this gave the key to many allusions she had heard and which she marvelled at herself for not having understood. The equivocation had entirely deceived her, and she little thought she had been taking counsel with the rival who was secretly triumphing in Raymond's involuntary constancy, and sowing seeds of vengeance against an ancient enemy.

She could not settle to anything when she came home. Life had taken a new aspect. Hitherto she had viewed herself as born to all attention and deference, and had taken it as a right, and now she found herself the victim of a *mariage de convenance* to a man of exhausted affections, who meant her only to be the attendant of his domineering mother. The love that was dawning in her heart did but add poignancy to the bitterness of the revelation, and fervour to her resolve to win the mastery over the heart which was her lawful possession.

She was restless till his return. She was going to an evening party, and though usually passive as to dress, she was so changeable and difficult to satisfy that Grindstone grew cross, and showed it by stern, rigid obedience. And Cecil well knew that Grindstone; who was in authority in the present house, hated the return to be merely the visitor of Alston and Jenkins.

In the drawing-room Cecil fluttered from book to window, window to piano again, throwing down her occupation at every sound and taking up another; and when at last Raymond came in, his presence at first made her musings seem mere fancies.

Indeed it would have been hard to define what was wanting in his manner. He lamented his unavoidable delay, and entertained her with all the political and parliamentary gossip he had brought home, and which she always much enjoyed as a tribute to her wisdom, so much that it had been an entire, though insensible cure for the Rights of Woman. Moreover, he was going with her to this 'drum,' though he would greatly have preferred the debate, and was to be summoned in case of a division. She knew enough of the world to be aware that such an attentive and courteous husband was not the rule. But what was courtesy to one who longed for unity?

"Is Frank to be there this evening?" he asked.

"Yes, I believe so."

"I thought he was to have gone with us."

"He told me not to depend on him. He had made an engagement to ride into the country with Sir Harry Vivian." And she added, though the proud spirit so hated what seemed to her like making an advance that it sounded like a complaint, "So you can't avoid going with me?"

"I should any way have gone with you, but I may have to leave you to Frank to see you away," he said. "And I had rather have Frank here than with that set."

"Breaking up one of our few *tête-à-tête* evenings, and they are becoming few enough!"

This murmur gratified him, and he said, "We shall be more alone together now. The Rectory is almost ready, and Julius means to move in another week, and I suppose Miles will carry Anne off before the year is over."

"Yes, we are the only ones with no home."

"Rather, we hold fast to the old home."

"Not my old home."

"Does not mine become yours?"

"Not while—." She paused and started afresh. "Raymond, could we not live at Swanslea, if it is bought for us?"

"Swanslea! Five miles off! Impossible."

Cecil was silent.

"My dear Cecil," he said, after a few moments' consideration, "I can understand that you felt unfortunately crowded last year, but all that is over, and you must see that we are necessary to my mother, and that all my duties require me to live at home."

"You could attend to the property from Swanslea."

"The property indeed! I meant my mother!"

"She has Anne."

"Anne will soon be in Africa—even if she were more of a companion. I am sorry it is a trial to you; for my proper place is clearly with my mother, the more in her helpless state, and with my brothers gone out into the world. Now that the numbers are smaller, you will find it much easier to take the part that I most earnestly wish should be yours."

"I cannot get on with her."

"Do not say so! Do not think so! To have Rosamond there with her Irish ease, and her reserve, kept you in the background before; I say it, but I could not help it; and now there will be no hindrance to your drawing together. There is nothing I so desire."

If the carriage had not stopped as he spoke Cecil would not have uttered the thought that smote her, namely, that his desire was on behalf, not of his wife, but of his mother, to whom he was ready to sacrifice her happiness without a pang. She did not see that he could imagine no greater happiness for her than a thorough love of his mother.

They certainly were not the happiest couple present as they walked up-stairs, looking like a model husband and wife, with their name echoing from landing to landing.

If any expression savouring of slang could possibly be applied to Raymond, he might be said to be struck all of a heap by his wife's proposition. He had never even thought of the possibility of making a home anywhere but at Compton Poyntsett, or of his wife wishing that he should do so; and proverbial sayings about the incompatibility of relatives-in-law suddenly assumed a reasonableness that he could not bear to remember.

But his courtesy and sense of protection, trained by a woman of the old school, would not suffer him to relax his attention to his wife. Though he was very anxious to get back to the house, he would not quit her neighbourhood till he had found Frank and intrusted her to him.

He was not happy about Frank. The youth was naturally of an intellectual and poetical temperament, and had only cared for horses and field-sports as any healthy lad growing up in a country house must enjoy them; and Raymond had seen him introduced to the style of men whom he thought would be thoroughly congenial to him, and not unlikely to lead him on to make a mark in the world.

But that unfortunate Vivian attachment stood in the way; Sir Harry and his elder daughter ignored it entirely, but did not forbid Frank the house; though Lady Tyrrell took care, as only she could do, that Eleonora should never have ten minutes private conversation with him, either at home or abroad. Even in a crowd, a ball, or garden-party, the vigilant sister had her means of breaking into any kind of confidence; and Frank was continually tantalized by the pursuit. It could not but unsettle him, and draw him into much more gaiety than was compatible with the higher pursuits his mother had expected of him; and what was worse, it threw him into Sir Harry Vivian's set, veteran *roués*, and younger men who looked up to their knowingness and listened to their good stories.

What amount of harm it was doing Raymond could not guess. He had known it all himself, and had escaped unscathed, but he did not fear the less for his younger brother, and he only hoped that the inducement to mingle with such society would be at an end before Frank had formed a taste for the habits that there prevailed.

Eleonora Vivian had been much admired at first, but her cold manner kept every one at a distance, and her reserve was hardly ever seen to relax. However, her one friendship with the Strangeways family gave Raymond hopes that her constancy was not proof against the flattering affection, backed by wealth, that seemed to await her there. The best he could wish for Frank was that the infatuation might be over as soon as possible, though he pitied the poor fellow sincerely when he saw him, as he did to-night, waiting with scarcely concealed anxiety while Miss Vivian stood listening to a long discourse about yachting from an eager pair of chattering girls.

Then some break occurred, and Frank moved up to her. "Your last evening! How little I have

seen of you!"

"Little indeed!"

"I called, but you were at the Strangeways'."

"They are very kind to me. When is your holiday?"

"Not till spring, but I may get a few days in the autumn: you will be at home?"

"As far as I know."

"If I thought for a moment you cared to see me; but you have shown few signs of wishing it of late."

"Frank—if I could make you understand—"

They were walking towards a recess, when Lady Tyrrell fastened upon Raymond. "Pray find my sister; she forgets that we have to be at Lady Granby's—Oh! are you there, Lenore! Will you see her down, Mr. Poyntsett? Well, Frank, did you get as far as you intended?"

And she went down on his arm, her last words being, "Take care of yourself till we meet at home. For this one year I call Sirenwood home—then!"

Raymond and Lenore said no more to one another. The ladies were put into the carriage. The elder brother bade Frank take care of Cecil, and started for Westminster with the poor lad's blank and disappointed face still before his eyes, hoping at least it was well for him, but little in love with life, or what it had to offer.

## CHAPTER XXI

### Awfully Jolly

When life becomes a spasm,  
And history a whiz,  
If that is not sensation,  
I don't know what it is.—LEWIS CARROLL

"Is Lady Rosamond at home?"

"No, ma'am."

"Nor Mrs. Charnock?"

"No, ma'am; they are both gone down to the Rectory."

"Would you ask whether Mrs. Poyntsett would like to see me?"

"I'll inquire, ma'am, if you will walk in," said Mr. Jenkins moved by the wearied and heated looks of Miss Vivian, who had evidently come on foot at the unseasonable visiting hour of 11.15 a.m.

The drawing-room was empty, but, with windows open on the shady side, was most inviting to one who had just become unpleasantly aware that her walking capacity had diminished under the stress of a London season, and that a very hampering one. She was glad of the rest, but it lasted long enough to be lost in the uncomfortable consciousness that hers was too truly a morning call, and she would have risen and escaped had not that been worse.

At last the door of communication opened, and to her amazement Mrs. Poyntsett was pushed into the room by her maid in a wheeled chair. "Yes, my dear," she said, in reply to Eleonora's exclamation of surprise and congratulation, "this is my dear daughters' achievement; Rosamond planned and Anne contrived, and they both coaxed my lazy bones."

"I am so very glad! I had no notion I should see you out of your room."

"Such is one's self-importance! I thought the fame would have reached you at least."

"Ah, you don't know how little I see of any one I can hear from! And now I am afraid I have disturbed you too early."

"Oh no, my dear; it was very good and kind, and I am only grieved that you had so long to wait; but we will make the most of each other now. You will stay to luncheon?"

"Thank you, indeed I am afraid I must not: papa would not like it, for no one knows where I am."

"You have taken this long walk in the heat, and are going back! I don't like it, my dear; you look fagged. London has not agreed with you."

Mrs. Poyntsett rang her little hand-bell, and ordered in biscuits and wine, and would have ordered the carriage but for Lenore's urgent entreaties to the contrary, amounting to an admission that she wished her visit to be unnoticed at home. This was hardly settled before there was a knock

at the door, announcing baby's daily visit; and Miss Julia was exhibited by her grandmamma with great satisfaction until another interruption came, in a call from the doctor, who only looked in occasionally, and had fallen on this unfortunate morning.

"Most unlucky," said Mrs. Poyntsett. "I am afraid you will doubt about coming again, and I have not had one word about our Frankie."

"He is very well. I saw him at a party the night before we left town. Good-bye, dear Mrs. Poyntsett."

"You will come again?"

"If I can; but the house is to be full of visitors. If I don't, you will know it is because I can't."

"I shall be thankful for whatever you can give me. I wish I could save you that hot walk in the sun."

But as Mrs. Poyntsett was wheeled into her own room some compensation befell Eleonora, for she met Julius in the hall, and he offered to drive her to the gates of Sirenwood in what he called 'our new plaything, the pony carriage,' on his way to a clerical meeting.

"You are still here?" she said.

"Till Tuesday, when we go to the Rectory to receive the two De Lancey boys for the holidays."

"How Mrs. Poyntsett will miss you."

"Anne is a very efficient companion," said Julius, speaking to her like one of the family; "the pity is that she will be so entirely lost to us when Miles claims her."

"Then they still mean to settle in Africa?"

"Her heart has always been there, and her father is in treaty for a farm for him, so I fear there is little hope of keeping them. I can't think what the parish will do without her. By the bye, how does Joe Reynolds get on with his drawings?"

"I must show them to you. He is really very clever. We sent him to the School of Art twice a week, and he has got on wonderfully. I begin to believe in my academican."

"So you don't repent?"

"I think not. As far as I can judge he is a good boy still. I make him my escort to church, so that I am sure of him there. Renville would have taken him for a boy about his studio, and I think he will go there eventually; but Camilla thinks he may be an attraction at the bazaar, and is making him draw for it."

"I was in hopes that the bazaar would have blown over, but the Bishop has been demanding of Fuller and his churchwardens how soon they mean to put the building in hand, and this seems to be their only notion of raising money."

"I am very glad of this opportunity of asking what you think I had better do about it. Your wife takes no part in it?"

"Certainly not; but I doubt whether that need be a precedent for you. I am answerable for her, and you could hardly keep out of it without making a divided household."

"I see the difference, and perhaps I have made myself quite unpleasant enough already."

"As the opposition?"

"And Camilla has been very kind in giving me much more freedom than I expected, and pacifying papa. She let me go every Friday evening to help Lady Susan Strangeways at her mothers' meeting."

"Lady Susan Strangeways! I have heard of her."

"She has been my comforter and help all this time. She is all kindness and heartiness,—elbow-deep in everything good. She got up at five o'clock to finish the decorations at St. Maurice's, and to-day she is taking five hundred school-children to Windsor forest."

"Is she the mother of the young man at Backsworth?"

"Yes," said Eleonora, in rather a different tone. "Perhaps she goes rather far; and he has flown into the opposite extreme, though they say he is improving, and has given up the turf, and all that sort of thing."

"Was he at home? I heard he was on leave."

"He was said to be at home, but I hardly ever saw him. He was always out with his own friends when I was there."

"I should not suppose Lady Susan's pursuits were much in his line. Is not one of the daughters a Sister?"

"Yes, at St. Faith's. She was my great friend. The younger ones are nice girls, but have not

much in them. Camilla is going to have them down for the bazaar."

"What, do they patronize bazaars?"

"Everything that is *doing* they patronize. I have known them be everywhere, from the Drawing-room to a Guild-meeting in a back slum, and all with equal appetite. That is one reason why I fear I shall not see much of your mother; they are never tired, and I shall never get out alone. The house is to be full of people, and we are to be very gay."

She spoke with a tone that betrayed how little pleasure she expected, though it strove to be uncomplaining; and Julius, who had learnt something of poor Frank's state of jealous misery, heartily wished the Strangeways family further, regarding the intimacy as a manœuvre of Lady Tyrrell's, and doubting how far all Eleonora's evident struggles would keep her out of the net; and though while talking to her he had not the slightest doubt of her sincerity, he had not long set her down at the lodge before he remembered that she was a Vivian.

Meantime Rosamond, carrying some medicament to old Betty Reynolds, found the whole clan in excitement at the appearance of Joe in all his buttons, looking quite as honest and innocent, though a good deal more civilized, than when he was first discovered among the swine.

"Only to think," said his great-grandmother, "that up in London all they could gie to he was a bad penny."

"It is the bronze medal, my lady," said Joshua, with a blush; "the second prize for crayons in our section."

"Indeed," cried Rosamond. "You are a genius, Joe, worthy of your namesake. There are many that would be proud to have the grandson you have, Betty."

"Tubby sure," added an aunt-in-law, "'tis cheap come by. Such things to make a young lad draught. They ought to be ashamed of themselves, they did oughter. Shut it up, Josh; don't be showing it to the lady—'tis nothing but the bare back of a sweep."

"My lady and Miss Vivian have seen it," said Joshua, blushing. "'Tis torso, my lady, from a cast from the museum."

"A black-looking draught," repeated the grandmother. "I tells Joe if he drawed like King Gearge's head up at Wil'sbro' on the sign, with cheeks like apples, and a gould crown atop, he'd arn his bread."

"All in good time, Betty. He can't colour till he can draw. I'm glad to see him looking so well."

"Yes, my lady, he do have his health torrablish, though he lives in a underground sort of a place; and they fine servants puts upon he shameful."

"Granny!" muttered Joshua, in expostulation.

"He's a brave boy, and does not mind roughing it, so he can get on," said Rosamond.

"And the ladies are very good to me," said the boy.

"Show Lady Rosamond the draught you did of Miss Vivian, like a hangel," suggested the aunt.

The rising artist coloured, saying, "Please, my lady, don't name it to no one. I would not have shown it, but little Bess, she pulled down all my things on the floor when I was not looking. It is from memory, my lady, as she looks when she's doing anything for Sir Harry."

It was a very lovely sketch—imperfect but full of genius, and wonderfully catching, the tender, wistful look which was often on Eleonora's face, as she waited on her father. Rosamond longed that Frank should see it; but the page was very shy about it, and his grandmother contrasted it with the performances of the painter 'who had draughted all the farmers' wives in gould frames for five pound a head; but satin gownds and gold chains was extry.'

But Joe had brought her a pound of tea, and an 'image' for her mantelpiece, which quite satisfied her, though the image, being a Parian angel of Thorwaldsen's, better suited his taste than its surroundings.

The whole scene served Rosamond for a narrative in her most lively style for Mrs. Poyntsett's amusement that evening. There was the further excitement of a letter from Miles, and the assurance that he would be at home in November. Anne had become far less chary of communications from his letters than she had at first been, but of this one she kept back so large a portion in public, that the instant Mrs. Poyntsett had bidden them good night and been wheeled away, Rosamond put a hand on each shoulder, and looking into her face, said, "Now, Anne, let us hear! Miles has found Archie Douglas. It is no use pretending. Fie, Mrs. Anne, why can't you tell me?"

"I was not to tell any one but Julius."

"Well, I'm Julius. Besides, wasn't I at the very bottom of the tracing him out? Haven't I the best right to know whether it is bad or good?"

"Not bad, I am sure," said Julius, quickly and anxiously.

"Oh, no, not bad," answered Anne. "He has seen him—had him on board for a night."

"Where?"

"Off Durban. But this whole sheet about it is marked 'Private—only for Julius,' so I could say nothing about it before your mother. I have hardly glanced at it myself as yet, but I think he says Mr. Douglas made him promise not to tell her or Joanna Bowater."

"Not tell Jenny!" cried Rosamond. "And you said it was not bad. He must have gone and married!"

"I do not think that is it," said Anne; "but you shall hear. Miles says:—'I have at last seen our poor Cousin Archie. I told you I was following up your brother Sandie's hint about the agents for the hunters; and at last I fell in with a merchant, who, on my inquiry, showed me an invoice that I could have sworn to as in Archie's hand, and described his white hair. It seems he has been acting as manager on an ostrich farm for the last three years, far up the country. So I lost no time in sending up a note to him, telling him, if he had not forgotten old times, to come down and see me while I was lying off Durban Bay. I heard no more for ten days, and had got in the stores and was to sail the next day, thinking he had given us all up, when a boat hailed us just come over the bar. I saw Archie's white head, and in ten minutes I had him on deck. 'For Heaven's sake—am I cleared, Miles?' was the first thing he said; and when I could not say that he was, it went to my heart to see how the eager look sank away, and he was like a worn-down man of fifty. Poor fellow, I found he had ridden two hundred miles, with the hope that I had brought him news that his innocence was proved, and the revulsion was almost more than he could bear. You see, he had no notion that we thought him dead, and so he took the entire absence of any effort to trace him as acquiescence in his guilt; and when he found out how it was, he laid me under the strongest injunctions to disclose to no one that he is living—not that he fears any results, but that he says it would only disturb every one and make them wretched—"

"He must have gone and married. The wretch!" broke in Rosamond.

"No, oh no!" cried Anne. "Only hear the rest. 'I told him that I could not see that at all, and that there was a very warm and tender remembrance of him among us all, and he nearly broke down and said, 'For Heaven's sake then, Miles, let them rest in that! There's more peace for them so.' I suppose I looked—I am sure I did not speak—as though I were a little staggered as to whether he were ashamed to be known; for he drew himself up in the old way I should have known anywhere, and told me there was no reason I should fear to shake hands with him; however his name might be blasted at home, he had done nothing to make himself unworthy of his mother and Jenny—and there was a sob again. So I let him know that up to my last letters from home Jenny was unmarried. I even remembered those descriptive words of yours, Nannie, 'living in patient peacefulness and cheerfulness on his memory.'"

"I was called on deck just then, so I gave him my home photograph-book, and left him with it. I found him crying like a child over it when I came back; I was obliged to strip it of all my best for him, for I could not move him. We went through the whole of the old story, to see if there were any hope; and when he found that Tom Vivian was dead, and George Proudfoot too, without a word about him, he seemed to think it hopeless. He believes that Proudfoot at least, if not Moy, was deeply in debt to Vivian, though not to that extent, and that Vivian probably incited them to 'borrow' from my mother's letter. He was very likely to undertake to get the draft cashed for them, and not to account for the difference. It may have helped to hasten his catastrophe. Moy I never should have suspected; Archie says he should once have done so as little; but he was a plausible fellow, and would do things on the sly, while all along appearing to old Proudfoot as a mentor to George. Archie seemed to feel his prosperity the bitterest pill of all—reigning like one of the squirearchy at Proudfoot Lawn—a magistrate forsooth, with his daughter figuring as an heiress. One thing worth note—Archie says, that when it was too late, he remembered that the under-clerk, Gadley, might not have gone home, and might have heard him explain that the letter had turned up."

"Gadley? Why that's the landlord of the 'Three Pigeons!'" exclaimed Rosamond. "It is Mr. Moy's house, and he supports him through thick and thin."

"Yes," said Julius, "the magistrates have been on the point of taking away his license, but Moy always stands up for him. There is something suspicious in that."

"I heard Miss Moy, with my own ears, tell Mrs. Duncombe that he was the apple of her father's eye," cried Rosamond.

"He's bribed! he's bribed! Oh, I see it all. Well, go on, Anne. If Archie isn't at home before he is a year older—"

Anne went on. "He allowed that he would have done more wisely in facing it out and standing his trial; but he said, poor fellow, that he felt as if the earth had given way under him. There was not a soul near who believed him; they brought his father's history against him, and moreover he had been at the races, and had been betting, though in fact he had won, and not lost, and the 20*l*. he had become possessed of was his capital, besides the little he could draw out of the bank

"If he could only have seen Jenny in London she would have turned him back. Indeed, that first stage was to consult her, but he fancied he saw the face of the Wil'sbro' Superintendent in a cab, and the instinct of avoiding arrest carried him to Southampton, where he got a steerage berth in



a sailing vessel, and came out to the Cape. He has lived hard enough, but his Scots blood has stood him in good stead, and he has made something as an ivory-hunter, and now has a partnership in an ostrich farm in the Amatongula country. Still he held to it that it was better he should continue dead to all here, since Mr. Bowater would never forgive him; and the knowledge of his existence would only hinder Jenny's happiness. You should have seen the struggle with which he said that! He left me no choice, indeed; forbade a word to any one, until I suggested that I had a wife, and that my said wife and Julius had put me on the scent. He was immensely struck to find that my sweet Nan came from Glen Fraser. He said the evenings he spent there had done more to renew his home-sickness, and made him half mad after the sight or sound of us, than anything else had done, and I got him to promise to come and see us when we are settled in the bush. What should you say to joining him in ostrich-hatching? or would it be ministering too much to the vanities of the world? However, I'll do something to get him cleared, if it comes to an appeal to old Moy himself, when I come home. Meantime, remember, you are not at liberty to speak a word of this to any one but Julius, and, I suppose, his wife. I hope—' There, Rose, I beg your pardon."

"What does he hope?" asked Rosamond.

"He only hopes she is a cautious woman."

"As cautious as his Nan, eh? Ah, Anne! you're a canny Scot, and maybe think holding your tongue as fine a thing as this Archie does; but I can't bear it. I think it is shocking, just wearing out the heart of the best and sweetest girl in the world."

"At any rate," said Julius, "we must be silent. We have no right to speak, however we may feel."

"You don't expect it will stay a secret, or that he'll go and pluck ostriches like geese, with Miles and Anne, and nobody know it? 'Twould be taking example by their ostriches, indeed!"

"I think so," said Julius, laughing; "but as it stands now, silence is our duty by both Miles and Archie, and Anne herself. We must not make her repent having told us."

"It's lucky I'm not likely to fall in with Jenny just yet," said Rosamond. "Don't leave me alone with her, either of you; if you do, it is at your peril. It is all very well to talk of honour and secrets, but to see the look in her eyes, and know he is alive, seems to me rank cruelty and heartlessness. It is all to let Miles have the pleasure of telling when he comes home."

"Miles is not a woman, nor an Irishwoman," said Julius.

"But he's a sailor, and he's got a feeling heart," said Rosamond; "and if he stands one look of Jenny, why, I'll disown him for the brother-in-law I take him for. By the bye, is not Raymond to know?"

"No," said Anne; "here is a postscript forbidding my telling him or Mrs. Poyntsett."

"Indeed! And I suppose Herbert knows nothing?"

"Nothing. He was a boy at school at the time. Say nothing to him, Rose."

"Oh, no; besides, his brain is all run to cricket."

It was but too true. When the sun shone bright in April, and the wickets were set up, Herbert had demonstrated that his influence was a necessity on the village green; and it was true that his goodly and animated presence was as useful morally to the eleven as it was conducive to their triumphs; so his Rector suppressed a few sighs at the frequency of the practices and the endless matches. Compton had played Wil'sbro' and Strawyers, Duddingstone and Woodbury; the choir had played the school, the single the married; and when hay and harvest absorbed the rustic eleven, challenges began among their betters. The officers played the county—Oxonians, Cantabs—Etonians, Harrovians—and wherever a match was proclaimed, that prime bowler, the Reverend Herbert Bowater, was claimed as the indispensable champion of his cause and country.

If his sister had any power to moderate his zeal, she had had little chance of exercising it; for Mrs. Bowater had had a rheumatic fever in March, and continued so much of an invalid all the summer that Jenny seldom went far from home, only saw her brother on his weekly visits to the sick-room, and was, as Rosamond said, unlikely to become a temptation to the warm heart and eager tongue.

\* \* \* \* \*

The week-day congregation were surprised one August morning at eight o'clock by the entrance of three ladies in the most recent style of fashionable simplicity, and making the most demonstrative tokens of reverence. As the Rector came out he was seized upon at once by the elder lady.

"Mr. Charnock! I must introduce myself; I knew your dear mother so well when we were both girls. I am so delighted to find such a church—quite an oasis; and I want to ascertain the best hour for calling on her. Quite an invalid—I was so shocked to hear it. Will the afternoon suit her? I am only here for three days to deposit these two girls, while I take the other on a round of visits. Three daughters are too great an affliction for one's friends, and Bee and Conny are so delighted to be near their brother and with dear Lena Vivian, that I am very glad above all, since I find there are real church privileges—so different from the Vicar of Wil'sbro'. Poor man; he is a

great trial.”

All this was said between the church and the lych-gate, and almost took Julius’s breath away; but Mrs. Poyntsett was prepared to welcome her old friend with some warmth and more curiosity.

Lady Susan Strangeways was a high-bred woman, but even high breeding could not prevent her from being overwhelming, especially as there was a great deal more of her than there had been at the last meeting of the friends, so that she was suggestive of Hawthorne’s inquiry, whether a man is bound to so many more pounds of flesh than he originally wedded. However, it was prime condition, and activity was not impeded, but rather received impetus. She had already, since her matutinal walk of more than a mile and back, overhauled the stores for the bazaar, inspected the town-hall, given her advice, walked through the ruins for the church, expressed herself strongly on the horrors of the plan, and begun to organize shilling cards, all before Sir Harry had emerged from his room.

She was most warm-hearted and good-natured, and tears glistened in her honest gray eyes as she saw her old friend’s helpless state. “You don’t know how much I have improved,” said Mrs. Poyntsett; “I feel quite at liberty in this chair, all owing to my good daughters-in-law.”

“Ah! I have so pitied you for having no girls! My dear daughters have been so entirely one with me—such a blessing in all I have gone through.”

Mrs. Poyntsett of course declared her complete comfort in her five sons, but Lady Susan was sure that if she had had as many boys, instead of one son and four daughters, she should have been worn out. Lorimer was a dear, affectionate fellow. Those he loved could guide him with a leash of gossamer, but young men in his position were exposed to so many temptations! There ensued a little sighing over the evils of wealth; and to see and hear the two ladies, no one would have thought that Julia Poyntsett had married a young man for love—Susan Lorimer an old man for independence.

Possibly with her present principles she would not have done so; but through the vista of a long and prosperous widowhood deficiencies in the courtship were easily forgotten; and perhaps there was the more romance and sentiment now because she had been balked of it in her youth. She had freely allowed her eldest daughter to enter a sisterhood from the purest, most unselfish motives, but there was compensation in talking of her Margaret as a Sister of Mercy.

And ere long she was anxiously inquiring Mrs. Poyntsett’s opinion of Eleonora Vivian, and making confidences somewhat trying to the mother of the young lady’s ardent lover.

She was quite aware that as to fortune there could hardly be a worse match than Miss Vivian; but she was sensible enough to see that her son had a sufficiency, and generous enough to like the idea of redeeming the old estate. Her husband had spent his latter years in a vain search for a faultless property, and his wealth was waiting for Lorimer’s settling down. She had always regretted the having no vassals rightfully her own, and had felt the disadvantages of being Lady Bountiful only by tenant right. To save an old estate from entirely passing out of a family, and relieve ‘a noble old wreck,’ like Sir Harry, seemed to her so grand a prospect that she could not but cast a little glamour over the manner of the shipwreck. Still, to do her justice, her primary consideration was the blessing such a woman as Lenore might be to her son.

She had not fathomed Lady Tyrrell. No woman could do so without knowing her antecedents, but she understood enough to perceive that Eleonora was not happy with her, and this she attributed to the girl’s deep nature and religious aspirations. Rockpier was an ecclesiastical paradise to Lady Susan, and a close bond with Lenore, to whom in London she had given all the facilities that lay in her power for persevering in the observances that were alien to the gay household at home. She valued this constancy exceedingly, and enthusiastically dilated on the young lady’s goodness, and indifference to the sensation she had created. “Lorimer allows he never saw her equal for grace and dignity.”

Allows! Fancy Frank *allowing* any perfection in his Lenore! Was it not possible that a little passing encomium on unusual beauty was being promoted and magnified by the mother into a serious attachment? But Lady Tyrrell was playing into her hands, and Lenore’s ecclesiastical proclivities were throwing her into the arms of the family!

It hardly seemed fair to feign sympathy, yet any adverse hint would be treason, and Mrs. Poyntsett only asked innocently whether her friend had seen her son Frank.

“Oh yes, often; the handsomest of all your sons, is he not?”

“Perhaps he is *now*.”

“My girls rave about his beautiful brown eyes, just as you used to do, Julia, five-and-thirty years ago.”

Mrs. Poyntsett was sure that whatever she had thought of Miles Charnock’s eyes five-and-thirty years ago, she had never raved about them to Susan Lorimer, but she only said, “All my boys are like their father except Charlie.”

“But Master Frank has no eyes for any one but Miss Vivian. Oh yes, I see the little jealousies; I am sorry for him; but you see it would be a shocking bad thing for a younger son like him; whereas Lory could afford it, and it would be the making of him.”

Mrs. Poyntsett held her peace, and was not sorry that her visitor was called away while she was still deliberating whether to give a hint of the state of the case.

Lady Susan was, however, more aware of it than she knew; Lady Tyrrell had 'candidly' given her a hint that there had been 'some nonsense about Frank Charnock,' but that he could never afford such a marriage, even if his mother would allow it, all which she never would. Besides, he had not fallen into a satisfactory set in London—why, it was not needful to tell.

When, after the drive, Lady Tyrrell, fairly tired out by her visitor's unflinching conversation and superabundant energy, had gone to lie down and recruit for the evening, Lady Susan pressed on Eleonora a warm invitation to the house in Yorkshire which she was renting, and where Lorimer would get as much shooting as his colonel would permit. The mention of him made Lenore blush to the ears, and say, "Dear Lady Susan, you are always so kind to me that I ought to be open with you. Don't fancy—"

"I understand, I understand, my dear," broke in Lady Susan. "You shall not be teased. Do not the girls and I care for you for your own sake?"

"I hope so."

The elder lady sprang up and embraced her. Affection was very pleasant to the reserved nature that could do so little to evoke caresses. Yet Eleonora clasped her Rockpier charm in her hand, and added, "I must tell you that so far as I can without disobedience, I hold myself engaged to Frank Charnock."

"To Frank Charnock?" repeated Lady Susan, startled at this positive statement. "My dear, are you quite sure of his ways?—since he has been in town I mean."

"I know him, and I trust him."

"I'm sure he is a fine-looking young man, and very clever, they say; dear Julia Poyntsett's son too, and they have all turned out so well," said honest Lady Susan; "but though you have been used to it all your life, my dear, a taste for horses is very dangerous in a young man who can't afford to lose now and then, you know."

"I have seriously made up my mind never to marry a man who has anything to do with the turf," said Eleonora.

"Ah, my poor dear, I can understand that," said Lady Susan, aware how ill this told for her Lory. "May I ask, does he know it?"

"It would insult him to say it. None of the Charnocks ever meddle with those things. Ah! I know your son saw him on the Derby-day; but he went down with his eldest brother and his wife—and *that* is a very different thing! I stayed at home, you remember—papa had a fit of the gout."

"My dear, I don't want to accuse him. Don't bristle up; only I am sorry, both for my own little plan of having you for my *very* own, and because I fear there is trouble in store for you. It can't be palatable." Here Eleonora shook her head, and her worn, wearied look went to the good-natured heart. "Dear child, you have gone through a great deal. You shan't be worried or fretted about anybody or anything at Revelrig."

"I should be very glad," said Lenore, who had no fears of Lory personally, though she could not be invited on false pretences.

"You had better come when Bee and Conny meet me. Let me see—will the retreat be over by that time? Are you going to it? You are an associate of St. Faith."

"Yes, but I don't see how I could go to the retreat. Oh, what a relief it would be to have such a week!"

"Exactly what I feel," said Lady Susan, somewhat to her surprise. "It strengthens and sets me right for the year. Dr. Easterby conducts this one. Do you not know him? Is not Rood House near Backsworth?"

"Yes on the other side, but he is utterly out of my reach. Julius Charnock looks up to him so much; but his name—even more than St. Faith's—would horrify my father."

"You could not go direct there," said Lady Susan; "but when once you are with me you are my charge, and I could take you."

She considered a little. Both she and her friend knew that all her religious habits were alien to Sir Harry, and that what he had freely permitted, sometimes shared at Rockpier, was now only winked at, and that if he had guessed the full extent of her observances he would have stormily issued a prohibition. Could it be wrong to spend part of her visit to Lady Susan with her hostess in a sisterhood, when she had no doubt as to attending services which he absolutely never dreamt of, and therefore did not forbid? The sacred atmosphere and holy meditations, without external strife and constant watchfulness, seemed to the poor girl like water to the thirsty; and she thought, after all the harass and whirl of the bazaar and race week, she might thus recruit her much-needed strength for the decisive conflicts her majority would bring.

Lady Susan had no doubts. The 'grand old wreck' was in his present aspect a hoary old persecutor, and charming Lady Tyrrell a worldly, scheming elder sister. It was as much an act of

charity to give their victim an opportunity of devotion and support as if she had been the child of abandoned parents in a back court in East London. Reserve to prevent a prohibition was not in such cases treachery or disobedience; and she felt herself doing a mother's part, as she told her daughters, with some enjoyment of the mystery. Eleonora made no promise, hoping to clear her mind by consideration, or to get Julius's opinion. He and his wife dined at Sirenwood, and found Joe Reynolds's drawings laid out for inspection, while Lady Susan was advising that, instead of selling them, there should be an industrial exhibition of all curiosities of art and nature to be collected in the neighbourhood, and promising her own set of foreign photographs and coloured costumes, which had served such purposes many and many a time.

After dinner the good dame tried to talk to Rosamond on what she deemed the most congenial subjects; but my Lady Rose had no notion of 'shop' at a dinner-party, so she made languid answer that she 'left all that to the curates,' and escaped to a frivolous young matron on the other side of the room, looking on while her husband was penned in and examined on his services, and his choir, and his system, and his decorations, and his classes, and his schools, for all or any of which Lady Susan pressed on him the aid of the two daughters she was leaving at Sirenwood; and on his hint that this was beyond his parish, she repeated her strong disapproval of the Vicar of Wil'sbro', whom she had met at dinner the night before, and besides, the school there had numerous Sunday teachers.

Julius assented, for he had no redundancy of the article, and his senior curate had just started on a vacation ramble with a brother; but a sort of misgiving crossed him as he heard Herbert Bowwater's last comic song pealing out, and beheld the pleasingly plain face of a Miss Strangeways on either side of him. Had he not fought the Eton and Harrow match over again with one of them at dinner? and had not a lawn tennis challenge already passed?

For Lady Tyrrell and Mrs. Charnock Poyntsett were to have garden-parties on alternate Wednesdays, and the whole neighbourhood soon followed suit.

"You'll find nobody at home, Jenny," said Julius, coming out of a cottage opposite, as she rode up to Mrs. Hornblower's, on one of the last days of August. "Nobody—that is, but my mother. Can you come up and see her?"

"With all my heart; but I must get down here; I'm sent for one of Herbert's shirts. The good boy lets mamma and aunty manage them still! I believe their hearts would break outright if he took to shop ones, like the rest of them. Hush, Tartar, for shame! don't you know me? Where's your master?"

"At a garden-party at Duddingstone. Your mother is better, I see."

"Yes, thank you—out driving with papa. Good Rollo!" as the dignified animal rose from the hearthrug to greet her, waving his handsome tail, and calmly expelled a large tabby cat from the easy-chair, to make room for his friends. "Well done, old Roll! Fancy a cat in such company."

"Herbert's dogs partake his good-nature."

"Mungo seems to be absent too."

"Gone with him no doubt. He is the great favourite with one of the Miss Strangeways."

"Which—Herbert or Mungo?"

"Both! I might say, I know the young ladies best by one being rapturous about Tartar and the other about Mungo. Rollo treats both with equally sublime and indifferent politeness, rather as Raymond does."

"What sort of girls are they? Herbert calls them 'awfully jolly.'"

"I'm sorry to say I never can think of any other epithet for them. For once it is really descriptive."

"Is it either of them in particular?"

"Confess, Joan, that's what brought you over."

"Perhaps so. Edith heard some nonsense at Backsworth, and mamma could not rest till she had sent me over to see about it; but would there be any great harm in it if it were true? Is not Lady Susan a super-excellent woman?"

"You've hit it again, Jenny. Couple the two descriptions."

"I gather that you don't think the danger great."

"Not at present. The fascination is dual, and is at least a counteraction to the great enchantress."

"That *is* well! It was not wholesome!"

"Whereas, these two are hearty, honest, well-principled girls, quite genuine."

"Yet you don't say it with all your heart."

"I own I should like to find something they had left undone."

"What, to reduce them to human nature's daily food?"

"Daily indeed! There's just no escaping them. There they are at matins and evensong."

"How shocking! What, gossip afterwards?"

"Ask Rollo whether Mungo and Tartar don't stand at the lych-gate, and if he finds it easy to put an end to the game at play."

"Oh! and he said they never missed a Sunday service, or the school. Do they distract him?"

"Whom would it not distract to see two figures walking in with hunches on their backs like camels, and high-heeled shoes, and hats on the back of their heads, and chains and things clattering all over them?"

"Aren't they lady-like?"

"Oh! they are quite that. Rose says it is all the pink of fashion—only coming it strong—I declare they are infectious!"

"I believe so. I never heard so many nibbles at slang from any of you five, as from the Rector of Compton in the last five minutes. I gather that he is slightly bothered."

"There's so much of it. We are forced to have them to all the meals on Sunday, and their lectures on functions have nearly scared poor Anne to the Pilgrim level again. They have set upon me to get up a choir-concert and a harvest-feast; but happily no one has time for the first at this season, and as to the other, I doubted whether to make this first start after such a rainy summer, and they decide me against it. To have them decorating the church!"

"Awfully jolly," suggested Jenny.

"Even so. They are, if you understand me, technically reverent; they have startled the whole place with their curtsies and crossings in church; but they gabble up to the very porch; and the familiarity with which they discuss High Mass, as they are pleased to call it! I was obliged to silence them, and I must say they took it nicely."

"How do they suit Lena?"

"She likes them. Lady Susan was a great help to her in London, and she feels the comfort of their honesty. They brought her to church with them one or two mornings, but it knocked her up to walk so early. Insensibly, I think they do Lady Tyrrell's work in shutting her up from any of us."

"Spite of croquet, which seems perpetual."

"Chronic and sporadic parties make it so. There are few days without that or something else. Cricket or the band at the barracks."

"People say the neighbourhood has never been so gay since Camilla Vivian's marriage. I sometimes wonder whether anything can be going to happen," said Jenny with a sigh, not guessing at what Julius was thinking of; then changing her tone: "Surely Herbert does not go to it all, and leave you alone? O, Julius! you should not let him."

"Never mind, Jenny, there's no more work now in the holidays than I am sufficient for; and for him, it is quite as guileless play as ever he had twenty years ago. It will soon be over, or I should take it more seriously."

"But it is at such a time!"

"Yes, that is the worst of it. I have thought it over; but while he is in this mood, the making him feel victimized and interfered with has a worse effect than the letting him have his swing."

"What is he doing now, I wonder? Here's his sermon-paper on the table, and a Greek Testament, and *Hints on Decorating Churches*, with 'Constance Strangeways' on the first leaf—no other book. How long will this saturnalia last?"

"Up to the Ordination, I fear. You know the good people have contrived to put bazaar, races, and ball, all into the Ember Week, and they are the great object of the young ladies' visit. Could you have him home for a quiet week first?"

"It would not be a quiet week; Edith is in the way of most of these affairs; besides, to open fire about these young ladies might just be putting nonsense into an innocent head. Now, I've not seen your Rectory!"

The said Rectory was in a decided state of fresh, not to say raw, novelty outside, though the old trees and garden a little softened its hard grays and strong reds; but it promised to look well when crumbling and weather-stain had done their work. At the door they met the pretty young nurse, with a delicate sea-green embroidered cashmere bundle in her arms.

"Little Lady Green Mantle," exclaimed Jenny.

"Erin-go-bragh," said Julius. "Rose clung to her colours in spite of all predictions about 'the good people.' Asleep of course," as Jenny took her and uncovered her face. "She won't exhibit her eyes, but they are quite *proper* coloured."

"Yes, I see she is like Raymond!"

"Do you? They all say she is a perfect Charnock, though how they know I can't guess. There," after a little more baby-worship, "you may take her Emma."

"Is that the under-nurse?" asked Jenny, rather surprised by her juvenility.

"The sole one. My mother and Susan are rather concerned, but Rose asserts that experience in that department is always associated with gin; and she fell in love with this girl—a daughter of John Gadley's, who is much more respectable than he of the 'Three Pigeons.' I suppose it is not in the nature of things for two women to have the same view of nursery matters, unless one have brought up the other."

"Or even if she have. Witness mamma's sighs over Mary's nurses."

"I thought it was the common lot. You've not seen the dining-room." And the full honours were done. They were pleasant rooms, still unpapered, and the furniture chiefly of amber-coloured varnished deal; the drawing-room, chiefly with green furniture, with only a few brighter dashes here and there, and a sociable amount of comfortable litter already. The study was full of new shelves and old books, and across the window-sill lay a gray figure, with a book and a sheet of paper.

"You here, Terry! I thought you were gone with Rose," said Julius, as the boy rose to greet Miss Bowater.

"She said I need not, and I hate those garden-parties," said Terry; and they relieved him of their presence as soon as Jenny had paid her respects to the favourite prints and photographs on the walls.

"He has a passion for the history of Poland just now," said Julius. "Sobieski is better company than he would meet at Duddingstone, I suspect—poor fellow! Lord Rathforlane has been so much excited by hearing of Driver's successes as a coach, as to desire Terry to read with him for the Royal Engineers. The boys must get off his hands as soon as possible, he says, and Terry, being cleverest, must do so soonest; but the boy has seen the dullest side of soldiering, and hates it. His whole soul is set on scholarship. I am afraid it is a great mistake."

"Can't you persuade him?"

"We have both written; but Rose has no great hopes of the result. I wish he could follow his bent."

"Yes," said Jenny, lingering as she looked towards Church-house, "the young instinct ought not to be repressed."

Julius knew that she was recollecting how Archie Douglas had entreated to go to sea, and the desire had been quashed because he was an only son. His inclination to speak was as perilous as if he had been Rosamond herself, and he did not feel it unfortunate that Jenny found she must no longer stay away from home.

## CHAPTER XXII

### Times Out of Joint

Alte der Meere,  
Komm und höre;  
Meine Frau, die Ilsebill,  
Will nicht als ich will!

Life at Compton Poyntsett was different from what it had been when the two youngest sons had been at home, and Julius and Rosamond in the house. The family circle had grown much more stiff and quiet, and the chief difference caused by Mrs. Poyntsett's presence was that Raymond was deprived of his refuge in her room. Cecil had taken a line of polite contempt. There was always a certain languid amount of indifferent conversation, 'from the teeth outward,' as Rosamond said. Every home engagement was submitted to the elder lady with elaborate scrupulousness, almost like irony. Visitors in the house or invitations out of it, were welcome breaks, and the whirl of society which vaguely alarmed Joanna Bowater was a relief to the inhabitants of the Hall.

Anne's companionship was not lively for her mother-in-law, but she was brightening in the near prospect of Miles's return, and they had established habits that carried them well through the evening. Anne covered screens and made scrap-books, and did other work for the bazaar; and Mrs. Poyntsett cut out pictures, made suggestions, and had associations of her own with the combinations of which Anne had little notion. Or she dictated letters which Anne wrote, and through all these was a kindly, peaceful spirit, most unlike the dreary alienation in which Cecil persevered.

To Cecil this seemed the anxious desire for her lawful rights. She had been used to spend the

greater part of the evening at the piano, but her awakened eyes perceived that this was a cover to Raymond's conversations at his mother's sofa; so she sat tying knots in stiff thread at her macramé lace pillow, making the bazaar a plea for nothing but work. Raymond used to arm himself with the newspapers as the safest *point d'appui*, and the talk was happiest when it *only* languished, for it could do much worse.

"Shall you be at Sirenwood to-morrow, Cecil?" asked Mrs. Poyntsett, as she was wheeled to her station by the fire after dinner. "Will you kindly take charge of a little parcel for me? One of the Miss Strangeways asked me to look for some old franks, so Anne and I have been turning out my drawers."

"Are they for sale?" asked Raymond.

"Yes," said Cecil. "Bee Strangeways is collecting; she will pay for all that are new to her, and sell any duplicates."

"Has she many?" asked Mrs. Poyntsett, glad of this safe subject.

"Quantities; and very valuable ones. Her grandfather knew everybody, and was in the Ministry."

"Was he?" said Raymond, surprised.

"Lord Lorimer?" said Mrs. Poyntsett. "Not when I knew them. He was an old-fashioned Whig, with some peculiar crotchets, and never could work with any Cabinet."

"Beatrice told me he was," said Cecil, stiffly.

"I rather think he was Master of the Buckhounds for a little while in the Grey Ministry," said Mrs. Poyntsett, "but he gave it up because he would not vote with ministers on the poor laws."

"I knew I was not mistaken in saying he was in the Ministry," said Cecil.

"The Master of the Buckhounds is not in the Cabinet, Cecil," said her husband.

"I never said he was. I said he was in office," returned the infallible lady.

Mrs. Poyntsett thought it well to interrupt by handing in an envelope franked by Sir Robert Peel; but Cecil at once declared that the writing was different from that which Bee already owned.

"Perhaps it is not the same Sir Robert," said Mrs. Poyntsett.

"She got it from the *Queen*, and they are all authenticated. The *Queen* newspaper, of course" (rather petulantly).

"Indisputable," said Raymond; "but this frank contained a letter from the second Sir Robert to my father."

Mrs. Poyntsett made a sign of acquiescence, and Cecil pouted in her dignified way, though Mrs. Poyntsett tried to improve matters by saying, "Then it appears that Miss Strangeways will have a series of Peel autographs, all in fact but the first generation."

Common sense showed she was right, but Cecil still felt discontented, for she knew she had been resisted and confuted, and she believed it was all Mrs. Poyntsett's doing instead of Raymond's.

And she became as mute as Anne for the next half-hour, nor did either Raymond or his mother venture on starting any fresh topic, lest there might be fresh jarring.

Only Anne presently came up to Mrs. Poyntsett and tenderly purred with her over some little preparation for Miles.

Certainly Anne was the most improved in looks of all the three brides, who had arrived just a year ago. The thin, scraggy Scotch girl, with the flabby, washed-out look alternating with angular rigidity was gone, but the softening and opening of her expression, the light that had come into her eyes, and had made them a lovely blue instead of pale gray; the rose-tint on her cheeks, the delicate rounded contour of her face, the improved carriage of her really fine figure, the traces of style in the braiding of her profuse flaxen hair, and the taste that was beginning to conquer in the dress, were all due to the thought that the *Salamanca* might soon be in harbour. She sat among them still as a creature whose heart and spirit were not with them.

That some change must come was felt as inevitable by each woman, and it was Mrs. Poyntsett who began, one forenoon when her son had brought a lease for her to sign. "Raymond," said she, "you know Church-house is to be vacant at Michaelmas. I wish you would look at it, and see what repairs it wants, and if the drawing-room windows could be made to open on the lawn."

"Are you hoping to tempt Miles to settle there?"

"No, I fear there is no hope of that; but I do not think an old broken-backed invalid ought to engross this great house."

"Mother, I cannot hear you say so! This is your own house!"

"So is the other," she said, trying to smile, "and much fitter for my needs, with Susan and Jenkins to look after me."

"There is no fit place for you but this. You said that once."

"Under very different circumstances. All the younger boys were still under my wing, and needed the home, and I was strong and vigorous. It would not have been acting right by them to have given up the place; but now they are all out in the world, and I am laid by, my stay here only interferes with what can be much better managed without me or my old servants."

"I do not see that. If any one moves, it should be ourselves."

"You are wanted on the spot continually. If Sirenwood were in the market, that might not be so much amiss."

"I do not think that likely. They will delay the sale in the hope of Eleonora's marrying a rich man; besides, Mr. Charnock has set his mind upon Swanslea. I hope *this* is from nothing Cecil has said or done!"

"Cecil wishes to part then? She has said nothing to me, but I see she has to you. Don't be annoyed, Raymond; it is in the nature of things."

"I believe it is all Lady Tyrrell's doing. The mischief such a woman can do in the neighbourhood!"

"Perhaps it is only what any friend of Cecil would advise."

"It is the very reverse of what I intended," said Raymond, shading his face.

"My dear Raymond, I know what you meant, and what you wish; but I am also certain it is for no one's happiness to go on in this way."

He groaned.

"And the wife's right comes first."

"Not to this house."

"But to this man. Indeed I see more hope of your happiness now than I did last year."

"What, because she has delivered herself over bound hand and foot to Camilla Vivian?"

"No, because she is altered. Last year she was merely vexed at my position in the house. Now she is vexed at my position with you."

"Very unjustly."

"Hardly so. I should not have liked your father to be so much devoted to his mother. Remember, jealousy is a smoke that cannot exist without some warmth."

"If she had any proper feeling for me, she would show it by her treatment of you."

"That would be asking too much when she thinks I engross you."

"Mother, while you show such marvellous candour and generosity, and she—"

"Hush! Raymond, leave it unsaid! We cannot expect her to see more than her own side of the question. She has been put into an avowedly trying position, and does not deserve hard judgment for not being happy in it. All that remains is to relieve her. Whether by my moving or yours is the question. I prefer the Church-house plan."

"Either way is shame and misery to me," broke out Raymond in a choked voice.

"Nonsense," said his mother, trying to be cheerful. "You made an impracticable experiment, that's all. Give Cecil free scope, let her feel that she has her due, and all will come right."

"Nothing can be done till after the Wil'sbro' business," said Raymond, glad of the reprieve. He could not bear the prospect of banishment for his mother or himself from the home to which both were rooted; and the sentence of detachment from her was especially painful when she seemed his only consolation for his wife's perverseness. Yet he was aware that he had been guilty of the original error, and was bound to give such compensation to his wife as was offered by his mother's voluntary sacrifice. He was slow to broach the subject, but only the next morning came a question about an invitation to a dull house.

"But," said Cecil, "it is better than home." She spoke on purpose.

"I am sorry to hear you say so."

"I can't call it home where I am but a guest."

"Well, Cecil, my mother offers to leave the home of her life and retire into Church-house."

Cecil felt as if the screw she had been long working had come off in her hands. She frowned, she gazed, collecting her senses, while Raymond added, "It is to my intense grief and mortification, but I suppose you are gratified."

"Uh, it would never do!" she exclaimed, to his surprise and pleasure.

"Quite right," he returned. "Just what I felt. Nothing can make me so glad as to see that you think the idea as socking as I do."



"Our going to Swanslea would be much better—far more natural, and no one could object. We could refurbish, and make it perfect; whereas nothing can be done to this place, so inconveniently built and buried in trees. I should feel much freer in a place of my own."

"So that is what you meant when I thought you were thinking of my mother?"

"I am obliged to take thought for myself when you take heed to no one but her," said Cecil; and as the carriage was at that moment announced, she left him. Which was the most sick at heart it would be hard to say, the wife with the sense that she was postponed in everything to the mother, the husband at the alienation that had never before been so fully expressed. Cecil's errand was a council about the bazaar; and driving round by Sirenwood, Lady Tyrrell became her companion in the carriage. The quick eyes soon perceived that something had taken place, and confidence was soon drawn forth.

"The ice is broken; and by whom do you think?"

"By *la belle mère*? Skilful strategy to know when the position is not tenable."

"She wants to retreat to Church-house."

"Don't consent to that."

"I said I should prefer Swanslea for ourselves."

"Hold to that, whatever you do. If she moves to the village you will have all the odium and none of the advantages. There will be the same daily haunt; and as to your freedom of action, there are no spies like the abdicated and their dependents. A very clever plan, but don't be led away by it."

"No," said Cecil, resolutely; but after a moment: "It would be inconvenient to Raymond to live so far away from the property."

"Swanslea will be property too, and a ride over on business is not like strolling in constantly."

"I know I shall never feel like my own mistress in a house of hers."

"Still less with her close by, with the Rectory family running in and out to exchange remarks. No, no, hold fast to insisting that she must not leave the ancestral halls. That you can do dutifully and gracefully."

Cecil knew she had been betrayed into the contrary; but they were by this time in the High Street, bowing to others of the committee on their way to the town-hall, a structure of parti-coloured brick in harlequin patterns, with a peaked roof, all over little sham domes, which went far to justify its title of the Rat-house, since nothing larger could well use them. The façade was thus somewhat imposing; of the rear the less said the better; and as to the interior, it was at present one expanse of dust, impeded by scaffold-poles, and all the windows had large blotches of paint upon them.

It required a lively imagination to devise situations for the stalls; but Mrs. Duncombe valiantly tripped about, instructing her attendant carpenter with little assistance except from the well-experienced Miss Strangeways. The other ladies had enough to do in keeping their plumage unsoiled. Lady Tyrrell kept on a little peninsula of encaustic tile, Cecil hopped across bird-like and unsoiled, Miss Slater held her carmelite high and dry, but poor Miss Fuller's pale blue and drab, trailing at every step, became constantly more blended!

The dust induced thirst. Lady Tyrrell lamented that the Wil'sbro' confectioner was so far off and his ices doubtful, and Miss Slater suggested that she had been making a temperance effort by setting up an excellent widow in the lane that opened opposite to them in a shop with raspberry vinegar, ginger-beer, and the like mild compounds, and Mrs. Duncombe caught at the opportunity of exhibiting the sparkling water of the well which supplied this same lane. The widow lived in one of the tenements which Pettitt had renovated under her guidance, and on a loan advanced by Cecil, and she was proud of her work.

"Clio Tallboys would view this as a triumph," said Mrs. Duncombe, as, standing on the steps of the town-hall, she surveyed the four tenements at the corner of the alley. "Not a man would stir in the business except Pettitt, who left it all to me."

"Taking example by the Professor," said Lady Tyrrell.

"It is strange," said Miss Slater, "how much illness there has been ever since the people went into those houses. They are in my district, you know."

"You should make them open their windows," said Mrs. Duncombe.

"They lay it on the draughts."

"And stuff up my ventilators. That is always the way they begin."

The excellent widow herself had a bad finger, which was a great impediment in administering the cooling beverages, but these were so excellent as to suggest the furnishing of a stall therewith for the thirsty, as something sure to be popular and at small expense. Therewith the committee broke up, all having been present but Miss Moy, whose absence was not regretted, though apologized for by Mrs. Duncombe. "I could not get her away from the stables," she said. "She

and Bob would contemplate Dark Hag day and night, I believe."

"I wouldn't allow it," said Lady Tyrrell.

Mrs. Duncombe shrugged her shoulders and laughed. "That's Mr. Moy's look-out," she said.

"You don't choose to interfere with her emancipation," said Lady Tyrrell.

"Clio would tell you she could take care of herself at the stables as well as anywhere else."

"Query?" said Lady Tyrrell. "Don't get into a scrape, Bessie. Does your Captain report on the flirtation with young Simmonds?"

"Who is he?" asked Cecil

"The trainer's son," said Bessie. "It is only a bit of imitation of Aurora Floyd."

"You know she's an heiress," said Lady Tyrrell. "You had better take care how you put such a temptation in his way."

"I don't suppose the Moys are anybody," said Cecil.

"Not in your sense, my dear," said Lady Tyrrell, laughing; "but from another level there's a wide gap between the heiress of Proudfoot Lawn and the heir of the training stables."

"Cecil looks simply disgusted," said Bessie. "She can't bear the Moys betwixt the wind and her nobility."

"They are the great drawback to Swansea, I confess," said Cecil.

"Oh! are you thinking of Swanslea?" cried Mrs Duncombe.

"Yes," said Lady Tyrrell, "she is one to be congratulated on emancipation."

"Well can I do so," said Mrs. Duncombe. "Don't I know what mothers-in-law are? Mine is the most wonderful old Goody, with exactly the notions of your meek Mrs. Miles."

"Incompatibility decidedly," said Lady Tyrrell.

"Only she was the Spartan mother combined with it," continued Mrs. Duncombe. "When Bob was a little urchin, he once, in anticipation of his future tastes, committed the enormity of riding on a stick on Sunday; so she locked him up till he had learnt six verses of one of Watts's hymns about going to church being like a little heaven below, isn't it?"

"Increasing his longing that way," said Lady Tyrrell.

"She doesn't even light the drawing-room fire on Sunday, for fear people should not sit in their rooms and meditate," continued Mrs. Duncombe. "Bob manages to be fond of her through all; but she regularly hates me."

"Not very wonderful," said Lady Tyrrell, laughing. "I suppose there is a charming reciprocity of feeling."

"I think I can afford to pity her," said Mrs. Duncombe, lightly. "Just fancy what I must have been to her! You know I was brought up in a convent at Paris. The very bosom of the scarlet woman."

"But," interrupted Cecil, "you were never a Roman Catholic, Bessie!"

"Oh dear, no; the Protestant boarders were let entirely alone. There were only two of us, and we lay in bed while the others went to mass, and played while they went to confession, that was all. I was an orphan; never remember my mother, and my father died abroad. Luckily for me, Bob was done for by my first ball. Very odd he should have liked a little red-haired thing like me; but every one is ticketed, I believe. My uncle was glad enough to get rid of me, and poor old Mrs. Duncombe was unsuspecting till we went home—and then!"

"And then?"

"Cecil may have some faint idea."

"Of what you underwent?"

"She wanted to begin on me as if I were a wild savage heathen, you know! I believe she nearly had a fit when I declined a prayer-meeting, and as to my walking out with Bob on Sunday evening!"

"Did she make you learn Watts's hymns?"

"No! but she did what was much worse to poor Bob. She told him she had spent the time in prayer and humiliation, and the poor fellow very nearly cried."

"Ah, those mothers have such an advantage over their sons," said Lady Tyrrell.

"I determined I would never go near her again after that," said Mrs. Duncombe. "Bob goes; he is really fond of her; but I knew we should keep the peace better apart. I let her have the children now and then, when it is convenient, and oddly enough they like it; but I shall soon have to stop that, for I won't have them think me a reprobate; and she has thought me ten times worse ever

since I found out that I had brains and could use them."

"Quite true," said Camilla; "there's no peacemaker like absence."

"The only pity is that Swanslea is no further off," returned Bessie.

And so it was that Cecil, backed by her two counsellors, held her purpose, and Raymond sadly spoke of the plan of separation to Julius. Both thought Mrs. Poynsett's own plan the best, though they could not bear the idea of her leaving her own house. Raymond was much displeased.

"At least," he said, "there is a reprieve till this frantic fortnight is over. I envy your exemption from the turmoil."

"I wish you would exempt yourself from the races," said Julius. "The mischief they have done in these villages is incalculable! The very men-servants are solicited to put into sweepstakes, whenever they go into Wil'sbro'; and only this morning Mrs. Hornblower has been to me about her son."

"I thought he was the great feather in Herbert Bowater's cap."

"Showing the direction of the wind only too well. Since Herbert has been infected with the general insanity, poor Harry Hornblower has lapsed into his old ways, and is always hanging about the 'Three Pigeons' with some of the swarm of locusts who have come down already to brawl round the training stables. This has come to Truelove's ears, and he has notice of dismissal. At the mother's desire I spoke to Truelove, but he told me that at last year's races the lad had gambled at a great rate, and had only been saved from dishonesty by detection in time. He was so penitent that Truelove gave him another trial, on condition that he kept out of temptation; but now he has gone back to it, Mr. Truelove thinks it the only way of saving him from some fresh act of dishonesty. 'It is all up with them,' he says, 'when once they take that turn.'"

"You need not speak as if I were accountable for all the blackguardism."

"Every man is accountable who lends his name and position to bolster up a field of vice."

"Come, come, Julius. Remember what men have been on the turf."

"If those men had withheld their support, fashion would not have led so many to their ruin."

"Hundreds are present without damage. It is a hearty out-of-doors country amusement, and one of the few general holidays that bring all ranks together."

"You speak of racing as it has been or might be in some golden age," said Julius. "Of course there is no harm in trying one horse's speed against another; but look at the facts and say whether it is right to support an amusement that becomes such an occasion of evil."

"Because a set of rascals choose to bring their villainies there you would have the sport of the whole neighbourhood given up. 'No cakes and ale' with a vengeance!"

"The cakes and ale that make a brother offend ought to be given up."

"That sentences all public amusements."

"Not necessarily. The question is of degree. Other amusements may have evil incidentally connected with them, and may lead to temptation, but it is not their chief excitement. The play or the opera is the prime interest, and often a refined and elevated one, but at races the whole excitement depends upon the horses, and is so fictitious that it needs to be enhanced by this betting system. No better faculty is called into play. Some few men may understand the merits of the horse; many more, and most of the ladies, simply like the meeting in numbers; but there is no higher faculty called out, and in many cases the whole attraction is the gambling, and the fouler wickedness in the background."

"Which would be ten thousand times worse if all gentlemen stood aloof."

"What good do these gentlemen do beyond keeping the contest honourable and the betting in which they are concerned? Do not they make themselves decoys to the young men on the borderland who would stay away if the turf were left to the mere vulgar? Why should they not leave it to drop like bull-baiting or cock-fighting?"

"Well done, Julius!" said Raymond. "You will head a clerical crusade against the turf, but I do not think it just to compare it with those ferocious sports which were demoralizing in themselves; while this is to large numbers simply a harmless holiday and excuse for an outing, not to speak of the benefit to the breed of horses."

"I do not say that all competitions of speed are necessarily wrong, but I do say that the present way of managing races makes them so mischievous that no one ought to encourage them."

"I wonder what Backsworth and Wil'sbro' would say to you! It is their great harvest. Lodgings for those three days pay a quarter's rent; and where so many interests are concerned, a custom cannot lightly be dropped."

"Well," said Raymond with a sigh, "it is not pleasure that takes me. I shall look on with impartial eyes, if that is what you wish."

Poor Raymond! it was plain that he had little liking for anything that autumn. He rode over to Swanslea with Cecil, and when he said it was six miles off, she called it four; what he termed bare, marshy, and dreary, was in her eyes open and free; his swamp was her lake; and she ran about discovering charms and capabilities where he saw nothing but damp and dry rot, and, above all, banishment.

Would she have her will? Clio would have thought her lecture had taken effect, and mayhap, it added something to the general temper of self-assertion, but in fact Cecil had little time to think, so thickly did gaieties and preparations crowd upon her. It was the full glory and importance of the Member's wife, her favourite ideal, but all the time her satisfaction was marred by secret heartache as she saw how wearily and formally her husband dragged through whatever fell to his lot, saw how jaded and depressed he looked, and heard him laugh his company laugh without any heart in it. She thought it all his mother's fault, and meant to make up for everything when she had him to herself.

Julius had his troubles. When Rosamond found that races were what she called his pet aversion, she resisted with all her might. Her home associations were all on fire again. She would not condemn the pleasures she had shared with her parents, by abstinence from them, any more than she would deviate from Lady Rathforlane's nursery management to please Mrs. Poyntett and Susan. A bonnet, which Julius trusted never to see in church, was purchased in the face of his remark that every woman who carried her gay attire to the stand made herself an additional feather on the hook of evil. At first she laughed, and then grew tearfully passionate in protests that nothing should induce her to let her brothers see what their own father did turned into a crime; and if they went without her to take care of them, and fell into mischief, whose fault would that be?

It was vain to hint that Tom was gone back to school, and Terry cared more for the Olympic dust than that of Backsworth. She had persuaded herself that his absence would be high treason to her father, whom she respected far more at a distance than when she had been struggling with his ramshackle, easy-going ways. Even now, she was remonstrating with him about poor Terry's present misery. His last half year had been spent under the head-master, who had cultivated his historical and poetical intelligence, whereas Mr. Driver was nothing but an able crammer; and the moment the lad became interested and diverged from routine, he was choked off because such things would not 'tell.' If the 'coach' had any enthusiasm it was for mathematics, and thitherwards Terry's brain was undeveloped. With misplaced ingenuity, he argued that sums came right by chance and that Euclid was best learnt by heart, for 'the pictures' simply confused him; and when Julius, amazed at finding so clever a boy in the novel position of dunce, tried to find out what he did know of arithmetic, his ignorance and inappreciation were so unfathomable that Julius doubted whether the power or the will was at fault. At any rate he was wretched in the present, and dismal as to the future, and looked on his brother-in-law as in league with the oppressors for trying to rouse his sense of duty.

Remonstrance seemed blunted and ineffective everywhere. When Herbert Bowater tried to reclaim Harry Hornblower into giving up his notorious comrades, he received the dogged reply, "Why should not a chap take his pleasure as well as you?" With the authority at once of clergyman and squire's son, he said, "Harry, you forget yourself. I am not going to discuss my occupations with you."

"You know better," rudely interrupted the lad. "Racketing about all over the country, and coming home late at night. You'd best not speak of other folks!"

As a matter of fact, Herbert had never been later than was required by a walk home from a dinner, or a very moderate cricket supper; and his conscience was clear as to the quality of his amusements; but instead of, as hitherto, speaking as youth to youth, he used the language of the minister to the insulting parishioner. "I am sorry I have disturbed Mrs. Hornblower, but the case is not parallel. Innocent amusement is one thing—it is quite another to run into haunts that have *already* proved dangerous to your principles."

Harry Hornblower laughed. "It's no go coming the parson over me, Mr. Bowater! It's well known what black coats are, and how they never cry out so loud upon other folks as when they've had a jolly lark among themselves. No concealment now, we're up to a thing or two, and parsons, and capitalists, and squires will have to look sharp."

This oration, smacking of 'The Three Pigeons,' was delivered so loud as to bring the mother on the scene. "O, Harry, Harry, you aren't never speaking like that to Mr. Bowater!"

"When folks jaw me about what's nothing to them I always give them as good as they bring. That's my principle," said Harry, flinging out of the house, while the curate tried to console the weeping mother, and soon after betook himself to his Rector with no mild comments on the lad's insolence.

"Another warning how needful it is for us to avoid all occasion for misconstruction," said Julius.

"We do, all of us," said Herbert. "Even that wretched decoction, Fuller, and that mere dictionary, Driver, never gave cause for imputations like these. What has the fellow got hold of?"

"Stories of the last century 'two-bottle men,'" said Julius, "trumped up by unionists now against us in these days. The truth is that the world triumphs and boasts whenever it catches the ministry on its own ground. Its ideal is as exacting as the saintly one."

"I say Rector," exclaimed the curate, after due pause, "you'll be at Evensong on Saturday? The ladies at Sirenwood want me to go to Backsworth with them to hear the band."

"Cannot young Strangeways take care of his sisters?"

"I would not ask it, sir, but they have set their heart on seeing Rood House, and want me to go with them because of knowing Dr. Easterby. Then I'm to dine with them, and that's the very last of it for me. There's no more croquet after this week."

"I am thankful to hear it," said Julius, suppressing his distaste that the man he most revered, and the place which was his haven of rest, should be a mere lion for Bee and Conny, a slight pastime before the regimental band!

## CHAPTER XXIII The Apple of Ate

Oh mirror, mirror on the wall,  
Who is the fairest of us all?—The Three Bears

"I do really think Terry has found the secret of happiness, for a *little* while at least," said Rosamond, entering Mrs. Poyntsett's room. "That funny little man in the loan museum has asked him to help in the arrangement."

"Who is it?"

"The little watchmaker, or watch cobbler, in the old curiosity shop."

"Yes; Terry calls him a descendant of the Genoese Frescobaldi, and I'm sure his black eyes were never made for an English head. Terry has always haunted those uncanny wares of his, and has pursued them to the museum. 'Tis not every young gentleman I would wish to see there,' says the old man, 'but the Honourable Mr. De Lancey has the soul of an antiquarian.'"

"They say the old man is really very clever and well read."

"He looks like an old magician, with his white cap and spectacles, and he had need to have a wand to bring order out of that awful chaos. Everybody all round has gone and cleared out their rubbish-closet. Upon my word, it looks so. There are pictures all one network of cracks, and iron caps and gauntlets out of all the halls in every stage of rust, and pots and pans and broken crocks, and baskets of coin all verdigris and tarnish!—Pah!"

"Are Miles's birds safe?"

"Oh yes, with a swordfish's sword and a sawfish's saw making a trophy on the top. Terry is in the library, hunting material for a dissertation upon the ancient unicorn, which ought to conclude with the battle royal witnessed by Alice in Wonderland. The stuffed department is numerous but in a bad way as to hair, and chiefly consists of everybody's grandmother's old parrots and squirrels and white rats. Then, every boy, who ever had a fit of birds' eggs or butterflies, has sent in a collection, chiefly minus the lower wings, and with volunteer specimens of moth; but luckily some give leave to do what they please with them, so the magician is making composition animals with the *débris*."

"Not really!"

"I made a feeble attempt with an admiral's wings and an orange tip, but I was scouted. About four dilapidated ones make up a proper specimen, and I can't think how it is all to be done in the time; but really something fit to be seen is emerging. Terry is sorting the coins, a pretty job, I should say; but felicity to him. But oh! the industrial articles! There are all the regalia, carved out of cherry-stones, and a patchwork quilt of 5000 bits of silk each no bigger than a shilling. And a calculation of the middle verse in the Bible, and the longest verse, and the shortest verse, and the like edifying Scriptural researches, all copied out like flies' legs, in writing no one can see but Julius with his spectacles off, and set in a brooch as big as the top of a thimble, all done by a one-legged sergeant of marines. So that the line might not be out done, I offered my sergeant-major's banner-screen, but I am sorry to say they declined it, which made me jealous."

"Are there any drawings of the Reynolds' boy?"

"Yes, Lenore Vivian brought them down, and very good they are. Every one says he has the making of a genius, but he does not look as if it agreed with him; he is grown tall, and thin, and white, and I should not wonder if those good-for-nothing servants bullied him."

"Did you see anything of Eleonora?"

"Nothing so impossible. I meet her every day, but she is always beset with the Strangeways, and I think she avoids me."

"I can hardly think so."

"I don't like it! That man is always hanging about Sirenwood, and Lenore never stirs an inch without one of those girls. I wish Frank could see for himself, poor fellow."

"He does hope to run down next week. I have just heard from him in high spirits. One of his seniors has come into some property, another is out of health and retires, so there is some promotion in view."

"I wish it would make haste then. I don't like the look of things."

"I can hardly disbelieve in the dear girl herself; yet I do feel as if it were against nature for it to succeed. Did you hear anything of Mrs. Bowater to-day?"

"Yes, she is much better, and Edith is coming to go into the gallery with me on Tuesday when they inaugurate the Rat-house. Oh! did you hear of the debate about it? You know there's to be a procession—all the Volunteers, and all the Odd Fellows, and all the Good Templars, and all the school-children of all denominations—whatever can walk behind a flag. Our choir boys grew emulous, and asked Herbert to ask the Rector to let them have our lovely banner with the lilies on it; but he declined, though there's no choice but to give the holiday that will be taken."

"Was that the debate?"

"Oh no! that was among the higher powers—where the procession should start from. The precedent was an opening that began with going to church, and having a sermon from the Bishop; but then there's no church, and after that spur the Bishop gave them they can't ask him without one; besides, the mayor dissents, and so do a good many more of them. So they are to meet at the Market Cross, and Mr. Fuller, in the famous black gown, supported by Mr. Driver, is to head them. I'm not sure that Julius and Herbert were not in the programme, but Mr. Truelove spoke up, and declared that Mr. Flynn the Wesleyan Methodist, and Mr. Howler the Primitive Methodist, and Mr. Riffell the Baptist, had quite as good a right to walk in the foreground and to hold forth, and Mr. Moy supported him."

"Popularity hunting against Raymond."

"Precisely. But Howler, Flynn, and Co. were too much for Mr. Fuller, so he seceded, and the religious ceremonies are now to be confined to his saying grace at the dinner. Raymond thinks it as well, for the inaugural speech would only have been solemn mockery; but Julius thinks it a sad beginning for the place to have no blessing because of our unhappy divisions. Isn't that like Julius?"

"Exactly, though I see it more from Raymond's point of view. So you are going to the dinner?"

"Oh yes. Happily my Rector has nothing to say against that, and I am sure he owes me something for keeping me out of the bazaar. In fact, having avoided the trouble, I *couldn't* take the pleasure! and he must set that against the races."

"My dear, though I am not set against races like Julius, I think, considering his strong feelings on the subject—"

"My dear Mrs. Poyntsett, it would be very bad for Julius to give in to his fancies. The next thing would be to set baby up in a little hood and veil like a nun!"

Rosamond's winsome nonsense could not but gain a smile. No doubt she was a pleasant daughter-in-law, though, for substantial care, Anne was the strength and reliance. Even Anne was much engrossed by preparations for the bazaar. It had been a great perplexity to her that the one thing she thought not worldly should be condemned by Julius, and he had not tried to prevent her from assisting Cecil, thinking, as he had told Eleonora, that the question of right and wrong was not so trenchant as to divide households.

The banquet and inauguration went off fairly well. There was nothing in it worth recording, except that Rosamond pronounced that Raymond only wanted a particle of Irish fluency to be a perfect speaker; but every one was observing how ill and depressed he looked. Even Cecil began to see it herself, and to ask Lady Tyrrell with some anxiety whether she thought him altered.

"Men always look worn after a Session," said Lady Tyrrell.

"If this really makes him unhappy!"

"My dear Cecil, that's the very proof of the necessity. If it makes him unhappy to go five miles away with his wife, it ought not. You should wean him from such dependence."

Cecil had tears in her eyes as she said, "I don't know! When I hear him sighing in his sleep, I long to give it up and tell him I will try to be happy here."

"My dear child, don't be weak. If you give way now, you will rue it all your life."

"If I could have taken to his mother, I think he would have cared more for me."

"No. The moment her jealousy was excited she would have resumed him, and you would have been the more shut out in the cold. A little firmness now, and the fresh start is before you."

Cecil sighed, feeling that she was paying a heavy price for that fresh start, but her hands were too full for much thought. Guests came to dinner, Mrs. Poyntsett kept more to her own room, and Raymond exerted himself to talk, so that the blank of the evenings was less apparent. The days

were spent at the town-hall, where the stalls were raised early enough for all the ladies, their maids and footmen, to buzz about them all day, decking them out.

Mrs. Duncombe was as usual the guiding spirit, contriving all with a cleverness that made the deficiencies of her household the more remarkable. Conny and Bee Strangeways were the best workers, having plenty of experience and resource, and being ready to do anything, however hard, dusty, or disagreeable; and to drudge contentedly, with plenty of chatter indeed, but quite as freely to a female as to a male companion; whereas Miss Moy had a knot of men constantly about her, and made a noise which was a sore trial to Cecil's heavy spirit all the first day, exclusive of the offence to her native fastidiousness. She even called upon Lady Tyrrell and Mrs. Duncombe to hold a council whether all gentlemen should not be excluded the next day, as spoiling the ladies' work, and of no use themselves; but there were one or two who really did toil, and so well that they could not be dispensed with, and Mrs. Duncombe added that it would not do to give offence.

There was a harassed look about Mrs. Duncombe herself, for much depended on the success of her husband's filly, Dark Hag. The Captain had hitherto been cautious, and had secured himself against heavy loss, so as to make the turf a tolerable speculation, on but the wonderful perfections of this animal had led him to stake much more on her than had been his wont; and though his wife was assured of being a rich woman in another week, she was not sorry for the multiplicity of occupations which hindered her mind from dwelling too much on the chances.

"How calm you look,—how I envy you!" she said, as she came to borrow some tape of Eleonora Vivian, who was fastening the pendent articles to the drapery of her sister's stall. Eleonora gave a constrained smile, feeling how little truth there was in her apparent peace, wearied out as she was with the long conflict and constant distrust. She was the more anxious to be with Lady Susan, whose every word she could believe, and she finally promised to leave home with Bee and Conny the day after the ball, and to meet their mother in London. They knew there was no chance for Lorimer, but they took her on her own terms, hoping something perhaps, and at any rate glad to be a comfort to one whom they really loved, while Lady Tyrrell was delighted to promote the visit, seeing that the family did more for Lorimer's cause than he did for himself; and in his own home who could guess the result, especially after certain other manœuvres of her ladyship had taken effect?

Lady Tyrrell did not know, nor indeed did Conny or Bee, that, though they would meet their mother in London, she would not at once go into Yorkshire with them, but would send them to their uncle's, while she repaired to the retreat at St. Faith's. The harass of these last few weeks, especially the endeavour to make her go to the races, had removed all scruples from Lenore's mind as to leaving her home in ignorance of her intentions. To her mind, the circumstances of her brother's death had made a race-course no place for any of the family, especially that of Backsworth; gout coming opportunely to disable her father in London, and one or two other little accidents, had prevented the matter from coming to an issue while she had been in London, and the avowal of her intention to keep away had filled her father with passion at her for her absurd scruples and pretences at being better than other people. It had been Lady Tyrrell who pacified him with assurances that she would soon do better; no one wished to force her conscience, and Lenore, always on the watch, began to wonder whether her sister had any reason for wishing to keep her away, and longed the more for the house of truth and peace.

So came on the bazaar day, which Mrs. Poynsett spent in solitude, except for visits from the Rectory, and one from Joanna Bowater, who looked in while Julius was sitting with her, and amused them by her account of herself as an emissary from home with ten pounds to be got rid of from her father and mother for good neighbourhood's sake. She brought Mrs. Poynsett a beautiful bouquet, for the elderly spinsters, she said, sat on the stairs and kept up a constant supply; and she had also some exquisite Genoese wire ornaments from Cecil's counter, and a set of studs from a tray of polished pebbles sent up from Vivian's favourite lapidary at Rockpier. She had been amused to find the Miss Strangeways hunting over it to match that very simple-looking charm which Lena wore on to her watch, for, as she said, "the attraction must either be the simplicity of it, or the general Lena-worship in which those girls indulge."

"How does that dear child look?"

"Fagged, I think, but so does every one, and it was not easy to keep order, Mrs. Duncombe's counter was such a rendezvous for noisy people, and Miss Moy was perfectly dreadful, running about forcing things on people and refusing change."

"And how is poor Anne enduring?"

"Like Christian in *Vanity Fair* as long as she did endure, for she retired to the spinsters on the back stairs. I offered to bring her home, and she accepted with delight, but I dropped her in the village to bestow her presents. I was determined to come on here; we go on Monday."

"Shall you be at the Ordination?"

"I trust so. If mamma is pretty well, we shall both go."

"Is Edith going to the ball on Thursday?"

"No, she has given it up. It seems as if we at least ought to recollect our Ember days, though I am ashamed to think we never did till this time last year."

"I confess that I never heard of them," said Mrs. Poynsett. "Don't look shocked, my dear; such things were not taught in my time."

Julius showed her the rubric and the prayer from the book in his pocket, knowing that the one endeared to her by association was one of the Prayer-books made easy by omission of all not needed at the barest Sunday service.

"I see," she said, "it seems quite right. I wish you had told me before you were ordained, my dear."

"You kept your Ember days for me by instinct, dear mother."

"Don't be too sure, Julius. One learns many things when one is laid on one's back."

"Think of Herbert now," whispered Jenny. "I am glad he is sheltered from all this hubbub by being at the palace. I suppose you cannot go to the Cathedral, Julius?"

"No, Bindon will not come back till his brother's holiday is over, nor do I even know where to write to him. Oh! here comes Anne. Now for her impressions."

Anne had brought her little gift for Mrs. Poynsett, and displayed her presents for Glen Fraser, but as to what she had seen it made her shudder and say, "You were right, Julius, I did not know people could go on so! And with all those poor people ill close by. Miss Slater, who sat on the stairs just below me tying up flowers, is much grieved about a lad who was at work there till a fortnight ago, and now is dying of a fever, and harassed by all the rattling of the carriages."

"What! close by! Nothing infectious, I hope?"

"The doctor called it gastric fever, but no one was to hear of it lest there should be an alarm; and it was too late to change the place of the bazaar, though it is so sad to have all that gaiety close at hand."

If these were the impressions of Anne and Joanna early in the day, what were they later, when, in those not sustained by excitement, spirit and energy began to flag? Cecil's counter, with her excellent and expensive wares, and her own dignified propriety, was far less popular than those where the goods were cheaper and the saleswomen less inaccessible, and she was not only disappointed at her failure, but vexed when told that the articles must be raffled for. She could not object, but it seemed an unworthy end for what had cost her so much money and pains to procure, and it was not pleasant to see Mrs. Duncombe and Miss Moy hawking the tickets about, like regular touters, nor the most beautiful things drawn by the most vulgar and tasteless people.

Miss Moy had around her a court of 'horsey' men who were lounging away the day before the races, and who had excited her spirits to a pitch of boisterousness such as dismayed Mrs. Duncombe herself when her attempts at repression were only laughed at.

Somehow, among these adherents, there arose a proposal for the election of a queen of beauty, each gentleman paying half-a-crown for the right of voting. Miss Moy bridled and tried to blush. She was a tall, highly-coloured, flashing-eyed brunette, to whom a triumph would be immense over the refined, statuesque, severe Miss Vivian, and an apple-blossom innocent-looking girl who was also present, and though Lady Tyrrell was incontestably the handsomest person in the room, her age and standing had probably prevented her occurring to the propounders of the scheme.

The design was taking shape when young Strangeways, who was willing to exchange chaff with Gussie Moy, but was gentleman enough to feel the indecorum of the whole thing, moved across to his sister, and muttered, "I say, Con, they are getting up that stupid trick of election of a queen of beauty. Does Lady Tyrrell know it?"

"Wouldn't it be rather fun?"

"Horrid bad form, downright impudence. Mother would squash it at once. Go and warn one of them," signing with his head.

Constance made her way to Eleonora, who had already been perplexed and angered by more than one critical stare, as one and another man loitered past and gazed intrepidly at her. She hurried at once to her sister, who was sitting passively behind her counter as if wearied out, and who would not be stirred to interference. "Never mind, Lenore, it can't be helped. It is all for the cause, and to stop it would be worse taste, fitting on the cap as an acknowledged beauty, and to that I'm not equal."

"It is an insult."

"Never fear, they'll never choose you while you look so forbidding, though perhaps it is rather becoming. They have not the taste."

Eleonora said no more, but went over to the window where Raymond was keeping his guard, with his old-fashioned sense of protection. She had no sooner told him than he started into incredulous indignation, in which he was joined by his wife who only wished him to dash forward to prevent the scheme before he would believe it real.

However, when the ballot-box came his way, and a simpering youth presented him with a card, begging for his opinion, he spoke so as to be heard by all, "No, thank you, sir. I am requested by the ladies present to state that such competition was never contemplated by their committee and



would be repugnant to all their sentiments. They beg that the election may be at once dropped and the money returned."

Mr. Charnock Poyntsett had a weight that no one resisted. There was a moment's silence, a little murmur, apologetic and remonstrant, but the deed was done.

Only a clear voice, with the thrillings of disappointed vanity and exultation scarcely disguised by a laugh, was heard saying, louder than the owner knew, "Oh, of course Mr. Charnock Poyntsett spoiled sport. It would have been awkward between his wife and his old flame."

"For shame, Gussie," hushed Mrs. Duncombe, "they'll hear."

"I don't care! Let them! Stuck-up people!"

Whoever heard, Cecil Charnock Poyntsett did, and felt as if the ground were giving way with her.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### The Lady Green Mantle

The night, just like the night before,  
In terrors passed away,  
Nor did the demons vanish thence  
Before the dawn of day.—MOORE

The turmoil was over, the gains had been emptied into bags to be counted at leisure, the relics of the sale left to be disposed of through the *Exchange and Mart*. Terry, looking tired to death, descended from his post as assistant showman; and, with some gentlemen who were to dine at Compton Poyntsett, Cecil drove home to dress in haste, and act hostess to a large dinner-party. All the time she felt giddy at the words she had heard—"Mr. Poyntsett's old flame." It was constantly ringing in her ears, and one conviction was before her mind. Her cheeks burnt like fire, and when she reached her own room at night, and leant from the window to cool them, they only burnt the more.

Had she been wilfully deceived? had she been taking the counsel of a jealous woman about her husband? Had not Camilla assured her that the object of his first love was not in the country? Ay; but when that was spoken Camilla herself was in London, and Cecil knew enough of her friend to be aware that she viewed such a subterfuge as ingenious. Even then she had perceived that the person alluded to could only have been a Vivian, and the exclamation of careless spite carried assurance to her that she had been tricked into confidence, and acceptance of the advice of a rival. She had a feverish longing to know more, and obtain explanation and external certainty. But how?

Raymond was one of the very tired that night. He fell asleep the instant his head touched the pillow; but it was that sobbing, sighing sleep which had before almost swept away, from very ruth, her resolution; and on this night there were faltering words, strangely, though unconsciously, replying to her thoughts. "Camilla, a cruel revenge!" "Poor child! but for you she might have learnt." "My mother!" "Why, why this persistent hatred?" "Cannot you let us alone?" "Must you destroy our home?"

These were the mutterings at intervals. She listened, and in the darkness her impulse was to throw herself on her husband, tell him all, show him how she had been misled, and promise to give up all to which that true Vivienne had prompted her. She did even try to wake him, but the attempt caused only a more distinct expostulation of "Cannot you let her alone?" "Cannot you let us learn to love one another?" "It may be revenge on me or my mother; but what has she done?" "Don't!—oh, don't!"

The distress she caused forced her to desist, and she remembered how Raymond had always warned her. The intimacy with Lady Tyrrell had been in the teeth of his remonstrances. He had said everything to prevent it short of confessing his former attachment, and though resentful that the warning had been denied her, she felt it had been well that she had been prevented from putting the question on her first impulse. Many ways of ascertaining the fact were revolved by her as with an aching head she lay hopelessly awake till morning, when she fell into a doze which lasted until she found that Raymond had risen, and that she must dress in haste, unless she meant to lose her character for punctuality. Her head still ached, and she felt thoroughly tired; but when Raymond advised her to stay at home, and recruit herself for the ball, she said the air of the downs would refresh her. Indeed, she felt as if quiet and loneliness would be intolerable until she could understand herself and what she had heard.

Raymond took the reins of the barouche, and a gentleman who had slept at the Hall went on the box beside him, leaving room for Rosamond and her brother, who were to be picked up at the Rectory; but when they drew up there, only Rosamond came out in the wonderful bonnet, just large enough to contain one big water-lily, which suited well with the sleepy grace of her movements, and the glossy sheen of her mauve silk.

"Terry is not coming. He has a headache, poor boy," she said, as Julius shut her into the

barouche. "Take care of him and baby."

"Take care of yourself, Madam Madcap," said Julius, with a smile, as she bent down to give him a parting kiss, with perhaps a little pleading for forgiveness in it. But instead of, as last year, shuddering, either at its folly or publicity, Cecil felt a keen pang of desire for such a look as half rebuked, while it took a loving farewell of Rosamond. Was Camilla like that statue which the husband inadvertently espoused with a ring, and which interposed between him and his wife for ever?

Rosamond talked. She always had a certain embarrassment in *tête-à-têtes* with Cecil, and it took form in a flow of words. "Poor Terry! he turned faint and giddy at breakfast. I thought he had been indulging at the refreshment-stall, but he says he was saving for a fine copy of the *Faerie Queen* that Friskyball told him of at a book-stall at Backsworth, and existed all day on draughts of water when his throat grew dry as showman; so I suppose it is only inanition, coupled with excitement and stuffiness, and that quiet will repair him. He would not hear of my staying with him."

"I suppose you do not wish to be late?"

"Certainly not," said Rosamond, who, indeed, would have given up before, save for her bonnet and her principle; and whatever she said of Lady Rathforlane's easy management of her nurslings, did not desire to be *too* many hours absent from her Julia.

"I only want to stay till the Three-year-old Cup has been run for," said Cecil. "Mrs. Duncombe would feel it unkind if we did not."

"You look tired," said Rosamond, kindly; "put your feet upon the front seat—nobody will look. Do you know how much you cleared?"

"Not yet," said Cecil. "I do not know what was made by the raffles. How I do hate them! Fancy that lovely opal Venetian vase going to that big bony Scotswoman, Mr. M'Vie's mother."

"Indeed! That is a pity. If I had known it would be raffled for, I would have sent a private commission, though I don't know if Julius would have let me. He says it is gambling. What became of the Spa work-box, with the passion-flower wreath?"

"I don't know. I was so disgusted, that I would not look any more. I never saw such an obnoxious girl as that Miss Moy."

"*That* she is," said Rosamond. "I should think she was acting the fast girl as found in sensation novels."

"Exactly," said Cecil, proceeding to narrate the proposed election; and in her need of sympathy she even told its sequel, adding, "Rosamond, do you know what she meant?"

"Is it fair to tell you?" said Rosamond, asking a question she knew to be vain.

"I must know whether I have been deceived."

"Never by Raymond!" cried Rosamond.

"Never, never, never!" cried Cecil, with most unusual excitement. "He told me all that concerned himself at the very first. I wish he had told me who it was. How much it would have saved! Rosamond, you know, I am sure."

"Yes, I made Julius tell me; but indeed, Cecil, you need not mind. Never has a feeling more entirely died out."

"Do you think I do not know that?" said Cecil. "Do you think my husband could have been my husband if he had not felt *that*?"

"Dear Cecil, I am so glad," cried impulsive Rosamond; her gladness, in truth, chiefly excited by the anger that looked like love for Raymond. "I mean, I am glad you see it so, and don't doubt him."

"I hope we are both above that," said Cecil. "No, it is Camilla that I want to know about. I *must* know whether she told me truth."

"She told! what did she tell you?"

"That *he*—Raymond—had loved some one," said Cecil in a stifled voice; "that I little knew what his love could be. I thought it had been for her sister in India. She told me that it was nobody in the country. But then we were in town."

"Just like her!" cried Rosamond, and wondered not to be contradicted.

"Tell me how it really was!" only asked Cecil.

"As far as I know, the attachment grew up with Raymond, but it was when the brother was alive, and Sir Harry at his worst; and Mrs. Poyntsett did not like it, though she gave in at last, and tried to make the best of it; but then she—Camilla—as you call her—met the old monster, Lord Tyrrell, made up a quarrel, because Mrs. Poyntsett would not abdicate, and broke it off."

"She said Mrs. Poyntsett only half consented, and that the family grew weary of her persistent

opposition."

"And she made you think it Mrs. Poyndset's doing, and that she is not possible to live with! O, Cecil! you will not think that any longer. Don't you see that it is breaking Raymond's heart?"

Cecil's tears were starting, and she was very near sobbing as she said, "I thought perhaps if we were away by ourselves he might come to care for me. *She* said he never would while his mother was by—that she would not let him."

"That's not a bit true!" said Rosamond, indignantly. "Is it not what she has most at heart, to see her sons happy? When has she ever tried to interfere between Julius and me? Not that she could," added Rosamond to herself in a happy little whisper, not meant to be heard, but it was; and with actual though suppressed sobs, Cecil exclaimed—

"O, Rose, Rose! what do you do to make your husband love you?"

"Do? Be very naughty!" said Rosamond, forced to think of the exigencies of the moment, and adding lightly, "There! it won't do to cry. Here are the gentlemen looking round to see what is the matter."

Ardently did she wish to have been able to put Cecil into Raymond's arms and run out of sight, but with two men-servants with crossed arms behind, a strange gentleman in front, the streets of Wil'sbro' at hand, and the race-ground impending, sentiment was impossible, and she could only make herself a tonic, and declare nothing to be the matter; while Cecil, horrified at attracting notice, righted herself and made protest of her perfect health and comfort. When Raymond, always careful of her, stopped the carriage and descended from his perch to certify himself whether she was equal to going on, his solicitude went to her heart, and she gave his hand, as it lay on the door, an affectionate thankful pressure, which so amazed him that he raised his eyes to her face with a softness in them that made them for a moment resemble Frank's.

That was all, emotion must be kept at bay, and as vehicles thickened round them as they passed through Wil'sbro', the two ladies betook themselves to casual remarks upon them. Overtaking the Sirenwood carriage just at the turn upon the down, Raymond had no choice but to take up his station with that on one side, and on the other Captain Duncombe's drag, where, fluttering with Dark Hag's colours, were perched Mrs. Duncombe and Miss Moy, just in the rear of the like conveyance from the barracks.

Greetings, and invitations to both elevations were plentiful, and Rosamond would have felt in her element on the military one. She was rapidly calculating, with her good-natured eye, whether the choice her rank gave her would exclude some eager girl, when Cecil whispered, "Stay with me pray," with an irresistibly beseeching tone. So the Strangeways sisters climbed up, nothing loth; Lady Tyrrell sat with her father, the centre of a throng of gentlemen, who welcomed her to the ground where she used to be a reigning belle; and the Colonel's wife, Mrs. Ross, came to sit with Lady Rosamond. The whole was perfect enjoyment to the last. She felt it a delightful taste of her merry old Bohemian days to sit in the clear September sunshine, exhilarated by the brilliancy and life around, laughing with her own little court of officers, exclaiming at every droll episode, holding her breath with the thrill of universal expectation and excitement, in the wonderful hush of the multitude as the thud of the hoofs and rush in the wind was heard coming nearer, straining her eyes as the glossy creatures and their gay riders flashed past, and setting her whole heart for the moment on the one she was told to care for.

Raymond, seeing his ladies well provided for, gave up his reins to the coachman, and started in quest of a friend from the other side of the county. About an hour later, when luncheon was in full progress, and Rosamond was, by Cecil's languor, driven into doing the honours, with her most sunshiny drollery and mirth, Raymond's hand was on the carriage door, and he asked in haste, "Can you spare me a glass of champagne? Have you a scent-bottle?"

"An accident?"

"Yes, no, not exactly. She has been knocked down and trampled on."

"Who? Let me come! Can't I help? Could Rosamond?"

"No, no. It is a poor woman, brutally treated. No, I say, I'll manage. It is a dreadful scene, don't."

But there was something in his tone which impelled Rosamond to open the carriage door and spring out.

"Rose, I say it is no place for a lady. I can't answer for it to Julius."

"I'll do that. Take me."

There was no withstanding her, and, after all, Raymond's tone betrayed that he was thankful for her help, and knew that there was no danger for her.

He had not many yards to lead her. The regions of thoughtless gaiety were scarcely separated from the regions of undisguised evil, and Raymond, on his way back from his friend, had fallen on a horrible row, in which a toy-selling woman had been set upon, thrown down and trodden on, and then dragged out by the police, bleeding and senseless. When he brought Rosamond to the spot, she was lying propped against a bundle, moaning a little, and guarded by a young

policeman, who looked perplexed and only equal to keeping back the crowd, who otherwise, with better or worse purposes, would have rushed back in the few minutes during which Mr. Poyntsett had been absent.

They fell back, staring and uttering expressions of rough wonder at the advance of the lady in her glistening silk, but as she knelt down by the poor creature, held her on her arm, bathed her face with scent on her own handkerchief, and held to her lips the champagne that Raymond poured out, there was a kind of hoarse cheer.

"I think her arm is put out," said Rosamond; "she ought to go to the Infirmary."

"Send for a cab," said Raymond to the policeman; but at that moment the girl opened her eyes, started at the sight of him and tried to hide her face with her hand.

"It is poor Fanny Reynolds," said he in a low voice to Rosamond, while the policeman was gruffly telling the woman she was better, and ought to get up and not trouble the lady; but Rosamond waved off his too decided assistance, saying:

"I know who she is; she comes from my husband's parish; and I will take her home. You would like to go home, would you not, poor Fanny?"

The woman shuddered, but clung to her; and in a minute or two an unwilling fly had been pressed into the service, and the girl lifted into it by Raymond and the policeman.

"You are really going with her?" said the former. "You will judge whether to take her home; but she ought to go to the Infirmary first."

"Tell Cecil I am sorry to desert her," said Rosamond, as he wrung her hand, then paid the driver and gave him directions, the policeman going with them to clear the way through the throng to the border of the down.

The choice of the cabman had not been happy. He tried to go towards Backsworth, and when bidden to go to Wil'sbro', growled out an imprecation, and dashed off at a pace that was evident agony to the poor patient; but when Rosamond stretched out at the window to remonstrate, she was answered with rude abuse that he could not be hindered all day by whims. She perceived that he was so much in liquor that their connection had better be as brief as possible; and the name on the door showed that he came from beyond the circle of influence of the name of Charnock Poyntsett. She longed to assume the reins, if not to lay the whip about his ears; but all she could do was to try to lessen the force of the jolts by holding up the girl, as the horse was savagely beaten, and the carriage so swayed from side to side that she began to think it would be well if there were not three cases for the Infirmary instead of one. To talk to the girl or learn her wishes was not possible, among the moans and cries caused by the motion; and it was no small relief to be safely at the Infirmary door, though there was no release till after a fierce altercation with the driver, who first denied, and then laughed to scorn the ample fare he had received, so that had any policeman been at hand, the porter and house surgeon would have given him in charge, but they could only take his number and let him drive off in a fury.

Poor Fanny was carried away fainting to the accident ward, and Rosamond found it would be so long before she would be visible again, that it would be wiser to go home and send in her relations, but there was not a fly or cab left in Wil'sbro', and there was nothing for it but to walk.

She found herself a good deal shaken, and walked fast because thus her limbs did not tremble so much, while the glaring September afternoon made her miss the parasol she had left in the carriage, and find little comfort in the shadeless erection on her head. It was much further than she had walked for a long time past, and she had begun to think she had parted with a good deal of her strength before the Compton woods grew more defined, or the church tower came any nearer.

Though the lane to the Reynolds' colony was not full in her way, she was glad to sit down in the shade to speak to old Betty, who did not comport herself according to either extreme common to parents in literature.

"So Fanny, she be in the 'firmary, be her? I'm sure as 'twas very good of the young Squire and you, my lady; and I'm sorry her's bin and give you so much trouble."

Everybody was harvesting but the old woman, who had the inevitable bad leg. All men and beasts were either in the fields or at the races, and Rosamond, uncertain whether her patient was not in a dying state, rejoiced in her recent acquisition of a pony carriage, and speeding home with renewed energy, roused her 'parson's man' from tea in his cottage, and ordered him off to take Betty Reynolds to see her daughter without loss of time.

Then at length she opened her own gate and walked in at the drawing-room window. Terry started up from the sofa, and Anne from a chair by his side, exclaiming at her appearance, and asking if there had been any accident.

"Not to any of us, but to a poor woman whom I have been taking to the Infirmary," she said, sinking into a low chair. "Where's Julius?"

"He went to see old George Willett," said Anne. "The poor old man has just heard of the death of his daughter at Wil'sbro'."

"And you came to sit with this boy, you good creature. How are you, master?"

"Oh, better, thanks," he said, with a weary stretch. "How done up you look, Rose! How did you come?"

"I walked from Wil'sbro'."

"Walked!" echoed both her hearers.

"Walked! I liked my two legs better than the four of the horse that brought me there, though 'twasn't his fault, poor beast, but the brute of a driver, whom we'll have up before the magistrate. I've got the name; doing his best to dislocate every bone in the poor thing's body. Well, and I hope baby didn't disturb you?"

"Baby has been wonderfully quiet. Julius went to see after her once, but she was out."

"I'll go and see the young woman, and then come and tell my story."

But Rosamond came back almost instantly, exclaiming, "Emma must have taken the baby to the Hall. I wish she would be more careful. The sun is getting low, and there's a fog rising."

"She had not been there when I came down an hour ago," said Anne; "at least, not with Mrs. Poyntsett. They may have had her in the housekeeper's room. I had better go and hasten her home."

Julius came in shortly after, but before he had heard the tale of Fanny Reynolds, Anne had returned to say that neither child nor nurse had been at the Hall, nor passed the large gate that morning. It was growing rather alarming. The other servants said Emma had taken the baby out as usual in the morning, but had not returned to dinner, and they too had supposed her at the Hall. None of the dependants of the Hall in the cottages round knew anything of her, but at last Dilemma Hornblower imparted that she had seen my lady's baby's green cloak atop of a tax-cart going towards Wil'sbro'.

Now Emma had undesirable relations, and Rosamond had taken her in spite of warning that her uncle was the keeper of the 'Three Pigeons.' The young parents stood looking at one another, and Rosamond faintly said, "If that girl has taken her to the races!"

"I'm more afraid of that fever in Water Lane," said Julius. "I have a great mind to take the pony carriage and see that the girl does not take her there."

"Oh! I sent it with Betty Reynolds," cried Rosamond in an agony.

"At that moment the Hall carriage came dashing up, and as Raymond saw the three standing in the road, he called to the coachman to stop, for he and his friend were now within, and Cecil leaning back, looking much tired. Raymond's eager question was what Rosamond had done with her charge.

"Left her at the Infirmary;—but, oh! you've not seen baby?"

"Seen—seen what! your baby?" asked Raymond, as if he thought Rosamond's senses astray, while his bachelor friend was ready to laugh at a young mother's alarms, all the more when Julius answered, "It is too true; the baby and her nurse have not been seen here since ten o'clock; and we are seriously afraid the girl may have been beguiled to those races. There is a report of the child's cloak having been seen on a tax-cart."

"Then it was so," exclaimed Cecil, starting forward. "I saw a baby's mantle of that peculiar green, and it struck me that some farmer's wife had been aping little Julia's."

"Where? When?" cried Rosamond.

"They passed us, trying to find a place. I did not show it to you for you were talking to those gentlemen."

"Did you see it, Brown?" asked Julius, going towards the coachman. "Our baby and nurse, I mean."

"I can't tell about Miss Charnock, sir," said the coachman, "but I did think I remarked two young females with young Gadley in a tax-cart. I would not be alarmed, sir, nor my lady," he added, with the freedom of a confidential servant, who, like all the household, adored Lady Rosamond. "It was a giddy thing in the young woman to have done; and no place to take the young lady to. But there—there were more infants there than a man could count, and it stands to reason they come to no harm."

"The most sensible thing that has been said yet," muttered the friend; but Rosamond was by no means pacified. "Gadley's cart! They'll go to that horrid public-house in Water Lane where there's typhus and diphtheria and everything; and there's this fog—and that girl will never wrap her up. Oh! why did I ever go?"

"My dear Rose," said Julius, trying to speak with masculine composure, "this is nonsense. Depend upon it, Emma is only anxious to get her home."

"I don't know, I don't know! If she could take her to the races, she would be capable of taking her anywhere! They all go and drink at that beer-shop, and catch—Julius, the pony carriage! Oh!

it's gone!"

"Yes," said Julius in explanation. "She sent Betty Reynolds into Wil'sbro' in it."

"Get in, Rosamond," cried Cecil, "we will drive back till we find her."

But this was more than a good coachman could permit for his horses' sake, and Brown declared they must be fed and rested before the ball. Cecil was ready to give up the ball, but still they could not be taken back at once; and Rosamond had by this time turned as if setting her face to walk at once to the race-ground until she found her child, when Raymond said, "Rose! would you be afraid to trust to King Coal and me? I would put him in at once and drive you till you find Julia."

"Oh! Raymond, how good you are!"

The coachman, glad of this solution, only waited to pick up Anne, and hurried on his horses, while the bachelor friend could not help grunting a little, and observing that it was plain there was only one child in the family, and that he would take any bet 'it' was at home all right long before Poyntsett reached the parsonage.

"Maybe so," said Raymond, "but I would do anything rather than leave her mother in the distress you take so easily."

"Besides, there's every chance of her being taken to that low public-house," said Cecil. "One that Mr. Poyntsett would not allow our servants to go to during the bazaar, though it is close to the town-hall, and all the others did."

"Let us hope that early influence may prevent contamination," solemnly said the friend.

Cecil turned from him. "I still hope she may be at home," she said; "it is getting very chill and foggy. Raymond, I hope you may not have to go."

"You must lie down and get thoroughly rested," he said, as he helped her out; and only waiting to equip himself for the evening dance, he hurried to the stables to expedite the harnessing of the powerful and fiery steed which had as yet been only experimentally driven by himself and the coachman.

Rosamond was watching, and when King Coal was with difficulty pulled up, she made but one spring to the seat of the dog-cart; and Julius, who was tucking in the rug, had to leap back to save his foot, so instantaneous was the dash forward. They went like the wind, Rosamond not caring to speak, and Raymond had quite enough on his hands to be glad not to be required to talk, while he steered through the numerous vehicles they met, and she scanned them anxiously for the outline of Emma's hat. At last they reached Wil'sbro', where, as they came to the entrance of Water Lane, Rosamond, through the hazy gaslight, declared that she saw a tax-cart at the door of the 'Three Pigeons,' and Raymond, albeit uncertain whether it were *the* tax-cart, could only turn down the lane at her bidding, with difficulty preventing King Coal from running his nose into the vehicle. Something like an infant's cry was heard through the open door, and before he knew what she was about, Rosamond was on the pavement and had rushed into the house; and while he was signing to a man to take the horse's head, she was out again, the gaslight catching her eyes so that they glared like a tigress's, her child in her arms, and a whole Babel of explaining tongues behind her. How she did it neither she nor Raymond ever knew, but in a second she had flown to her perch, saying hoarsely, "Drive me to Dr. Worth's. They were drugging her. I don't know whether I was in time. No, not a word"—(this to those behind)—"never let me see any of you again."

King Coal prevented all further words of explanation by dancing round, so that Raymond was rejoiced at finding that nobody was run over. They were off again instantly, while Rosamond vehemently clasped the child, which was sobbing out a feeble sound, as if quite spent with crying, but without which the mother seemed dissatisfied, for she moved the poor little thing about if it ceased for a moment. They were soon within Dr. Worth's iron gates, where Raymond could give the horse to a servant, help his sister-in-law down, and speak for her; for at first she only held up the phial she had clutched, and gazed at the doctor speechlessly.

He looked well both at the bottle and the baby while Raymond spoke, and then said, "Are you sure she took any, Lady Rosamond?"

"Quite, quite sure!" cried Rosamond. "The spoon was at her lips, the dear little helpless darling!"

"Well, then," said the doctor, dryly, "it only remains to be proved whether an aristocratic baby can bear popular treatment. I dare say some hundred unlucky infants have been lugged out to the race-course to-day, and come back squalling their hearts out with fatigue and hunger, and I'll be bound that nine-tenths are lulled with this very sedative, and will be none the worse."

"Then you do not think it will hurt her?"

"So far from it, that, under the circumstances, it was the best thing she could have. She has plainly been exhausted, and though I would not exactly recommend the practice in your nursery, I doubt if she could have taken nourishment till she had been composed. She will sleep for an hour or two, and by that time you can get her home, and feed her as usual. I should be more anxious about Lady Rosamond herself," he added, turning to Raymond. "She looks completely worn out. Let me order you a basin of soup."

But Rosamond would not hear of it, she must get baby home directly. Raymond advised a fly, but it was recollected that none was attainable between the races and the ball, so the little one was muffled in shawls and cloaks almost to suffocation, and the doctor forced a glass of wine on her mother, and promised to look in the next day. Still they had a delay at the door, caused by the penitent Emma and her aunt, bent on telling how far they had been from intending any harm; how Emma, when carrying the baby out, had been over-persuaded by the cousins she had never disappointed before; how they had faithfully promised to take her home early, long before my lady's return; how she had taken baby's bottle, but how it had got broken; how impossible it had been to move off the ground in the throng; and how the poor baby's inconsolable cries had caused the young nurse to turn aside to see whether her aunt could find anything to prevent her from screaming herself into convulsions.

Nothing but the most determined volubility on Mrs. Gadley's part could have poured this into the ears of Raymond; Rosamond either could not or would not heed, pushed forward, past the weeping Emma, and pulled away her dress with a shudder, when there was an attempt to draw her back and make her listen.

"Don't, girl," said Raymond. "Don't you see that Lady Rosamond can't attend to you? If you have anything to say, you must come another time. You've done quite enough mischief for the present."

"Yes," said the doctor, "tell your brother to put them both to bed, and keep them quiet. I should like to prescribe the same for you, Mr. Poyntsett; you don't look the thing, and I suppose you are going to take the ball by way of remedy."

Raymond thanked the doctor, but was too much employed in enveloping his passengers to make further reply.

It was quite dark, and the fog had turned to misty rain, soft and still, but all pervading, and Rosamond found it impossible to hold up an umbrella as well as to guard the baby, who was the only passenger not soaked and dripping by the time they were among the lighted windows of the village.

"Oh, Raymond! Raymond!" she then said, in a husky dreamy voice, "how good and kind you have been. I know there was something that would make you very, very glad!"

"Is there?" he said. "I have not met with anything to make me glad for a long time past!"

"And I don't seem able to recollect what it was, or even if I ought to tell," said Rosamond, in the same faint, bewildered voice, which made Raymond very glad they were at the gate, where stood Julius.

But before Rosamond would descend into her husband's arms, she opened all her child's muffings, saying, "Kiss her, kiss her, Raymond—how she shall love you!" And when he had obeyed, and Rosamond had handed the little one down to her father, she pressed her own wet cheek against his dripping beard and moustache, and exclaimed, "I'll never forget your goodness. Have you got her safe, Julius? I'll never, never go anywhere again!"

## CHAPTER XXV

### The Pebbles

O no, no, no; 'tis true. Here, take this too;  
It is a basilisk unto mine eye,  
Kills me to look on't. Let there be no honour,  
Where there is beauty; truth, where semblance; love,  
Where there's another man.—Cymbeline

When Julius, according to custom, opened his study shutters, at half-past six, to a bright sunrise, his eldest brother stood before the window. "Well, how are they?" he said.

"All right, thank you; the child woke, had some food, and slept well and naturally after it; and Rose has been quite comfortable and at rest since midnight. You saved us from a great deal, Raymond."

"Ah!" with a sound of deep relief; "may Julia only turn out as sweet a piece of womanhood as her mother. Julius, I never understood half what that dear wife of yours was till yesterday."

"I was forced to cut our gratitude very short," said Julius, laying his hand on his brother's shoulder. "You know I've always taken your kindness as a matter of course."

"I should think so," said Raymond, the more moved of the two. "I tell you, Julius, that Rosamond was to me the only redeeming element in the day. I wanted to know whether you could walk with me to ask after that poor girl; I hear she came home one with her grandmother."

"Gladly," said Julius. "I ought to have gone last night; but what with Rose, and the baby, and Terry, I am afraid I forgot everything." He disappeared, and presently issued from the front door

in his broad hat, while Raymond inquired for Terry.

"He is asleep now, but he has been very restless, and there is something about him I don't like. Did not Worth say he would come and look at the baby?"

"Yes, but chiefly to pacify Rosamond, about whom he was the most uneasy."

"She is quite herself now; but you look overdone, Raymond. Have you had any sleep?"

"I have not lain down. When we came home at four o'clock, Cecil was quite knocked up, excited and hysterical. Her maid advised me to leave her to her; so I took a bath, and came down to wait for you."

Julius would have liked to see the maid who could have soothed his Rosamond last night without him! He only said, however, "Is Frank come down? My mother rather expected him."

"Yes, he came to the race-ground."

"Indeed! He was not with you when you came back, or were we not sufficiently rational to see him?"

"Duncombe gave a dinner at the hotel, and carried him off to it. I'm mortally afraid there's something amiss in that quarter. What, didn't you know that Duncombe's filly failed?"

"No, indeed, I did not."

"The town was ringing with it. Beaten out-and-out by Fair Phyllida! a beast that took them all by surprise—nothing to look at—but causing, I fancy, a good deal of distress. They say the Duncombes will be done for. I only wish Frank was clear; but that unhappy engagement has thrown him in with Sir Harry's set, and he was with them all day—hardly spoke to me. To a fellow like him, a veteran scamp like old Vivian, with his benignant looks, is ten times more dangerous than men of his own age. However, having done the damage, they seem to have thrown him off. Miss Vivian would not speak to him at the ball."

"Eleonora! I don't know how to think it!"

"What you cannot *think*, a Vivian can *do* and does!" said Raymond, bitterly. "My belief is that he was decoyed into being fleeced by the father, and now they have done their worst, he is cast off. He came home with us, but sat outside, and I could not get a word out of him."

"I hope my mother may."

"If he be not too far gone for her. I always did expect some such termination, but not with this addition."

"I don't understand it now—Lena!"

"I only wonder at your surprise. The girl has been estranged from us all for a long time. If it is at an end, so much the better. I only wish we were none of us ever to see the face of one of them again."

Julius knew from his wife that there were hopes for Raymond, but of course he might not speak, and he was revolving these words, which had a vehemence unlike the wont of the speaker, when he was startled by Raymond's saying, "Julius, you were right. I have come to the conclusion that no consideration shall ever make me sanction races again."

"I am glad," began Julius.

"You would not be glad if you had seen all I saw yesterday. You must have lent me your eyes, for when you spoke before of the evils, I thought you had picked up a Utopian notion, and were running a-muck with it, like an enthusiastic young clergyman. For my own part I can't say I ever came across anything offensive. Of course I know where to find it, as one does wherever one goes, but there was no call to run after it; and as we were used to the affair, it was a mere matter of society—"

"No, it could never be any temptation to you," said Julius.

"No, nor to any other reasonable man; and I should add, though perhaps you might not allow it, that so long as a man keeps within his means, he has a right to enhance his excitement and amusement by bets."

"Umph! He has a right then to tempt others to their ruin, and create a class of speculators who live by gambling."

"You need not go on trying to demolish me. I was going to say that I had only thought of the demoralization, from the betting side; but yesterday it was as if you had fascinated my eyes to look behind the scenes. I could not move a step without falling on something abominable. Roughs, with every passion up to fever-pitch, ferocity barely kept down by fear of the police, gambling everywhere, innocent young things looking on at coarseness as part of the humour of the day, foul language, swarms of vagabond creatures, whose trade is to minister to the license of such occasions. I declare that your wife was the only being I saw display a spark of any sentiment human nature need not blush for!"



"Nay, Raymond, I begin to wonder whose is the exaggerated feeling now."

"You were not there," was the answer; and they were here interrupted by crossing the path of the policeman, evidently full of an official communication.

"I did not expect to see you so early, sir," he said. "I was coming to the Hall to report to you after I had been in to the superintendent."

"What is it?"

"There has been a burglary at Mrs. Hornblower's, sir. If you please, sir," to Julius, "when is the Reverend Mr. Bowater expected home?"

"Not before Monday. Is anything of his taken?"

"Yes, sir. A glass case has been broken open, and a silver cup and oar, prizes for sports at college, I believe, have been abstracted. Also the money from the till below; and I am sorry to say, young Hornblower is absconded, and suspicion lies heavy on him. They do say the young man staked heavily on that mare of Captain Duncombe's."

"You had better go on to the superintendent now," said Raymond. "You can come to me for a summons if you can find any traces."

Poor Mrs. Hornblower, what horror for her! and poor Herbert too who would acutely feel this ingratitude. The blackness of it was beyond what Julius thought probable in the lad, and the discussion of it occupied the brothers till they reached the Reynolds colony, where they were received by the daughter-in-law, a much more civilized person than old Betty.

After Fanny's dislocated arm had been set, the surgeon had sent her home in the Rectory carriage, saying there was so much fever in Wil'sbro', that she would be likely to recover better at home; but she had been suffering and feverish all night, and Dan Reynolds was now gone in quest of 'Drake,' for whom she had been calling all night.

"Is he her husband?" asked Julius.

"Well, I don't know, sir; leastways, Granny says he ought to be answerable for what's required."

Mrs. Reynolds further betrayed that the family had not been ignorant of Fanny's career since she had run away from home, leaving her child on her grandmother's hands. She had made her home in one of the yellow vans which circulate between fairs and races, driving an ostensible trade in cheap toys, but really existing by setting up games which were, in fact, forms of gambling, according to the taste of the people and the toleration of the police. From time to time, she had appeared at home, late in the evening, with small sums of money and presents for her boy; and Mrs. Dan believed that she thought herself as good as married to 'that there Drake.' She was reported to be asleep, and the place 'all of a caddle,' and Julius promised to call later in the day.

"Yes, sir," said Mrs. Reynolds; "it would be a right good thing, poor girl. She've a kind heart, they all do say; not as I know, not coming here till she was gone, nor wanting to know much on her, for 'twas a right bad way she was in, and 'twere well if them nasty races were put down by Act of Parliament, for they be the very ruin of the girls in these parts."

"There's a new suggestion, Raymond," said Julius as he shut the garden gate.

Raymond was long in answering, and when he spoke, it was to say, "I shall withdraw from the subscription to the Wil'sbro' Cup."

"So much the better."

Then Raymond began discussing the terms of the letter in which he would state his reasons, but with an amount of excitement that made Julius say, "I should think it better not to write in this first heat. It will take more effect if it is not so visibly done on the spur of the moment."

But the usually deliberate Raymond exclaimed, "I cannot rest till it is done. I feel as if I must be like Lady Macbeth, continually washing my hands of all this wreck and ruin."

"No wonder; but I should think there was great need of caution—to use your own words."

"My seat must go, if this is to be the price," said Raymond. "I felt through all the speeches at that gilt-gingerbread place, that it was a monument of my truckling to expediency. We began the whole thing at the wrong end, and I fear we are beginning to see the effects."

"Do you mean that you are anxious about that fever in Water Lane?"

"There was an oppressive sickly air about everything, strongest at the ball. I can't forget it," said Raymond, taking off his hat, so that the morning air might play about his temples. "We talked about meddling women, but the truth was that they were shaming us by doing what they could."

"I hope others will see it so. Is not Whitlock to be mayor next time?"

"Yes. He may do something. Well, they will hardly unseat me! I should not like to see Moy in my place, and it would be a sore thing for my mother; but," he continued, in the same strange, dreamy manner, "everything has turned out so wretchedly that I hardly know or care how it

goes."

"My dear old fellow!"

Raymond had stopped to lean over a gate, where he could look up to the old red house in the green park, set in brightly-tinted trees, all aglow in the morning sunshine. Tears had sprung on his cheeks, and a suppressed sob heaved his chest. Julius ventured to say, "Perhaps there may yet be a change of mind."

"No!" was the answer. "In the present situation there is nothing for it but to sacrifice my last shred of peace to the one who has the chief right—in a certain way."

They walked on, and he hardly spoke again till, as they reached the Rectory, Julius persuaded him to come in and have a cup of tea; and though he said he must go back and see his friend off, he could not withstand the sight of Rosamond at the window, fresh and smiling, with her child in her arms.

"Not a bit the worse for her dissipation," she merrily said. "Oh, the naughty little thing!—to have begun with the turf, and then the 'Three Pigeons'! Aren't you ashamed of her, papa? Sit down, Raymond; how horribly tired you do look."

"Ha! What's this?" exclaimed Julius, who had been opening the post-bag. "Here's a note from the Bishop, desiring me to come to the palace to-day, if possible."

"Oh!" cried Raymond. "Where is there vacant—isn't there a canonry or a chaplaincy?"

"Or an archbishopric or two?" said Julius. "The pony can do it, I think, as there will be a long rest. If he seems fagged, I can put up at Backsworth and take a fly."

"You'll let James drive you," said Rosamond.

"I had rather not," said Julius. "It may be better to be alone."

"He is afraid of betraying his elevation to James," laughed Rosamond.

"Mrs. Daniel Reynolds to see you, sir."

This was with the information that that there trapezing chap, Drake, had fetched off poor Fanny in his van. He had been in trouble himself, having been in custody for some misdemeanour when she was thrown down; but as soon as he was released, he had come in search of her, and though at first he seemed willing to leave her to be nursed at home, he had no sooner heard of the visitors of that morning than he had sworn he would have no parson meddling with his poor gal! she was good enough for him, and he would not have a pack of nonsense put in her head to set her against him.

"He's good to her, sir," said Mrs. Reynolds, "I think he be; but he is a very ignorant man. He tell'd us once as he was born in one of they vans, and hadn't never been to school nor nothin', nor heard tell of God, save in the way of bad words: he've done nothin' but go from one races and fairs to another, just like the gipsies, though he bain't a gipsy neither; but he's right down attached to poor Fanny, and good to her."

"Another product of the system," said Raymond.

"Like the gleeman, whom we see through a picturesque medium," said Julius; "but who could not have been pleasant to the mediæval clergyman. I have hopes of poor Fanny yet. She will drift home one of these days, and we shall get hold of her."

"What a fellow you are for hoping!" returned Raymond, a little impatiently.

"Why not?" said Julius.

"Why! I should say—" replied Raymond, setting out to walk home, where he presided over his friend's breakfast and departure, and received a little banter over his solicitude for the precious infant. Cecil was still in bed, and Frank was looking ghastly, and moved and spoke like one in a dream, Raymond was relieved to hear him pleading with Susan for to his mother's room much earlier than usual.

Susan took pity and let him in; when at once he flung himself into a chair, with his face hidden on the bed, and exclaimed, "Mother, it is all over with me!"

"My dear boy, what can have happened?"

"Mother, you remember those two red pebbles. Could you believe that she has sold hers?"

"Are you sure she has? I heard that they had a collection of such things from the lapidary at Rockpier."

"No, mother, that is no explanation. When I found that I should be able to come down, I sent a card to Lady Tyrrell, saying I would meet them on the race-ground—a post-card, so that Lena might see it. When I came there was no Lena, only some excuse about resting for the ball—lying down with a bad headache, and so forth—making it plain that I need not go on to Sirenwood. By and by there was some mild betting with the ladies, and Lady Tyrrell said, 'There's a chance for you, Bee; don't I see the very fellow to Conny's charm?' Whereupon that girl Conny pulled out

the very stone I gave Lena three years ago at Rockpier. I asked; yes, I asked—Lena had sold it; Lena, at the bazaar; Lena, who—”

“Stay, Frank, is this trusting Lena as she bade you trust her? How do you know that there were no other such pebbles?”

“You have not seen her as I have done. There has been a gradual alienation—holding aloof from us, and throwing herself into the arms of those Strangeways. It is no fault of her sister’s. She has lamented it to me.”

“Or pointed it out. Did she know the history of these pebbles?”

“No one did. Lena was above all reserved with her.”

“Camilla Tyrrell knows a good deal more than she is told. Where’s your pebble? You did not stake that?”

“Those who had one were welcome to the other.”

“O, my poor foolish Frank! May it not be gone to tell the same tale of you that you think was told of her? Is this all?”

“Would that it were!”

“Well, go on, my dear. Was she at the ball?”

“Surrounded by all that set. I was long in getting near her, and then she said her card was full; and when I made some desperate entreaty, she said, in an undertone that stabbed me by its very calmness, ‘After what has passed to-day, the less we meet the better.’ And she moved away, so as to cut me off from another word.”

“After what had passed! Was it the parting with the stone?”

“Not only. I got a few words with Lady Tyrrell. She told me that early impressions had given Lena a kind of fanatical horror of betting, and that she had long ago made a sort of vow against a betting man. Lady Tyrrell said she had laughed at it, but had no notion it was seriously meant; and I—I never even heard of it!”

“Nor are you a betting man, my Frank.”

“Ay! mother, you have not heard all.”

“You are not in a scrape, my boy?”

“Yes, I am. You see I lost my head after the pebble transaction. I couldn’t stand small talk, or bear to go near Raymond, so I got among some other fellows with Sir Harry—”

“And excitement and distress led you on?”

“I don’t know what came over me. I could not stand still for fear I should feel. I must be mad on something. Then, that mare of Duncombe’s, poor fellow, seemed a personal affair to us all; and Sir Harry, and a few other knowing old hands, went working one up, till betting higher and higher seemed the only way of supporting Duncombe, besides relieving one’s feelings. I know it was being no end of a fool; but you haven’t felt it, mother!”

“And Sir Harry took your bets?”

“One must fare and fare alike,” said Frank.

“How much have you lost?”

“I’ve lost Lena, that’s all I know,” said the poor boy; but he produced his book, and the sum appalled him. “Mother,” he said in a broken voice, “there’s no fear of its happening again. I can never feel like this again. I know it is the first time one of your sons has served you so, and I can’t even talk of sorrow, it seems all swallowed up in the other matter. But if you will help me to meet it, I will pay you back ten or twenty pounds every quarter.”

“I think I can, Frankie. I had something in hand towards my own possible flitting. Here is the key of my desk. Bring me my banker’s book and my cheque book.”

“Mother! mother!” he cried, catching her hand and kissing it, “what a mother you are!”

“You understand,” she said, “that it is because I believe you were not master of yourself, and that this is the exception, not the habit, that I am willing to do all I can for you.”

“The habit! No, indeed! I never staked more than a box of gloves before; but what’s the good, if she has made a vow against me?”

Mrs. Poyntsett was silent for a few moments, then she said, “My poor boy, I believe you are both victims of a plot. I suspect that Camilla Tyrrell purposely let you see that pebble-token and be goaded into gambling, that she might have a story to tell her sister, when she had failed to shake her constancy and principle in any other way.”

“Mother, that would make her out a fiend. She has been my good and candid friend all along. You don’t know her.”

"What would a friend have done by you yesterday?"

"She neither saw nor heard my madness. No, mother, Lenore's heart has been going from me for months past, and she is glad of this plea for release, believing me unworthy. Oh! that stern face of hers! set like a head of Justice with not a shade of pity—so beautiful—so terrible! It will never cease to haunt me."

He sat in deep despondency, while Mrs. Poyntsett overlooked her resources; but presently he started up, saying, "There's one shadow of a hope. I'll go over to Sirenwood, insist on seeing one her and having an explanation. I have a right, whatever I did yesterday; and you have forgiven me for that, mother!"

"I think it is the most hopeful way. If you can see her without interposition, you will at least come to an understanding. Here, you had better take this cheque for Sir Harry."

When he was gone, she wondered whether she had been justified in encouraging him in defending Eleonora. Was this not too like another form of the treatment Raymond had experienced? Her heart bled for her boy, and she was ready to cry aloud, "Must that woman always be the destroyer of my sons' peace?"

When Frank returned, it was with a face that appalled her by its blank despair, as he again flung himself down beside her.

"She is gone," he said.

"Gone!"

"Gone, and with the Strangeways. I saw her."

"Spoke to her?"

"Oh no. The carriage turned the corner as I crossed the road. The two girls were there, and she —"

"Going with them to the station?"

"I thought so; I went to the house, meaning to leave my enclosure for Sir Harry and meet her on her way back; but I heard she was gone to stay with Lady Susan in Yorkshire. Sir Harry was not up, nor Lady Tyrrell."

Mrs. Poyntsett's hope failed, though she was relieved that Camilla's tongue had not been in action. She was dismayed at the prone exhausted manner in which Frank lay, partly on the floor, partly against her couch, with his face hidden.

"Do you know where she is gone?"

"Yes, Revelrig, Cleveland, Yorkshire."

"I will write to her. Whatever may be her intentions, they shall not be carried out under any misrepresentation that I can contradict. You have been a foolish fellow, Frankie; but you shall not be painted worse than you are. She owes you an explanation, and I will do my best that you shall have it. My dear, what is the matter?"

She rang her bell hastily, and upheld the sinking head till help came. He had not lost consciousness, and called it giddiness, and he was convicted of having never gone to bed last night, and having eaten nothing that morning; but he turned against the wine and soup with which they tried to dose him, and, looking crushed and bewildered, said he would go and lie down in his own room.

Raymond went up with him, and returned, saying he only wanted to be alone, with his face from the light; and Mrs. Poyntsett, gazing at her eldest son, thought he looked as ill and sunken as his younger brother.

## CHAPTER XXVI A Stickit Minister

And the boy not out of him.—TENNYSON'S Queen Mary

Julius had only too well divined the cause of his summons. He found Herbert Bowater's papers on the table before the Bishop, and there was no denying that they showed a declension since last year, and that though, from men without his advantages they would have been passable, yet from him they were evidences of neglect of study and thought. Nor could the cause be ignored by any one who had kept an eye on the cricket reports in the county paper; but Herbert was such a nice, hearty, innocent fellow, and his father was so much respected, that it was with great reluctance that his rejection was decided on and his Rector had been sent for in case there should be any cause for extenuation.

Julius could not say there was. He was greatly grieved and personally ashamed, but he could

plead nothing but his own failure to influence the young man enough to keep him out of a rage for amusement, of which the quantity, not the quality, was the evil. So poor Herbert was sent for to hear his fate, and came back looking stunned. He hardly spoke till they were in the fly that Julius had brought from Backsworth, and then the untamed school-boy broke forth: "What are you doing with me? I say, I can't go back to Compton like a dog in a string."

"Where will you go?"

"I don't care. To Jericho at once, out of the way of every one. I tell you what, Rector, it was the most ridiculous examination I ever went up for, and I'm not the only man that says so. There was Rivers, of St. Mary's at Backsworth,—he says the questions were perfectly unreasonable, and what no one could be prepared for. This fellow Danvers is a new hand, and they are always worst, setting one a lot of subjects of no possible use but to catch one out. I should like to ask him now what living soul at Compton he expects to be the better for my views on the right reading of—"

Julius interrupted the passionate tones at the lodge by saying, "If you wish to go to Jericho, you must give directions."

Herbert gave something between a laugh and a growl.

"I left the pony at Backsworth. Will you come with me to Strawyers and wait in the park till I send Jenny out to you?"

"No, I say. I know my father will be in a greater rage than he ever was in his life, and I won't go sneaking about. I'd like to go to London, to some hole where no one would ever hear of me. If I were not in Orders already, I'd be off to the ivory-hunters in Africa, and never be heard of more. If this was to be, I wish they had found it out a year ago, and then I should not have been bound," continued the poor young fellow, in his simplicity, thinking his thoughts aloud, and his sweet candid nature beginning to recover its balance. "Now I'm the most wretched fellow going. I know what I've undertaken. It's not your fault, nor poor Joanna's. You've all been at me, but it only made me worse. What could my father be thinking of to make a parson of a fellow like me? Well, I must face it out sooner or later at Compton, and I had better do it there than at home, even if my father would have me."

"I must go to Strawyers. The Bishop gave me a letter for your father, and I think it will break it a little for your mother. Would you wait for me at Rood House? You could go into the chapel, and if they wish for you, I could return and fetch you."

Herbert caught at this as a relief, and orders were given accordingly. It seemed a cruel moment to tell him of young Hornblower's evasion and robbery, but the police wanted the description of the articles; and, in fact, nothing would have so brought home to him that, though Compton might not appreciate minutiae of Greek criticism, yet the habit of diligence, of which it was the test, might make a difference there. The lingering self-justification was swept away by the sense of the harm his pleasure-seeking had done to the lad whom he had once influenced. He had been fond and proud of his trophies, but he scarcely wasted a thought on them, so absorbed was he in the thought of how he had lorded it over the youth with that late rebuke. The blame he had refused to take on himself then came full upon him now, and he reproached himself too much to be angered at the treachery and ingratitude.

"I can't prosecute," he said, when Julius asked for the description he had promised to procure.

"We must judge whether it would be true kindness to refrain, if he is captured," said Julius. "I had not time to see his mother, but Rosamond will do what she can for her, poor woman."

"How shall I meet her?" sighed Herbert; and so they arrived at the tranquil little hospital and passed under the deep archway into the gray quadrangle, bright with autumn flowers, and so to the chapel. As they advanced up the solemn and beautiful aisle Herbert dropped on his knees with his hands over his face. Julius knelt beside him for a moment, laid his hand on the curly brown hair, whispered a prayer and a blessing, and then left him; but ere reaching the door, the low choked sobs of anguish of heart could be heard.

A few steps more, and in the broad walk along the quadrangle, Julius met the frail bowed figure with his saintly face, that seemed to have come out of some sacred bygone age.

Julius told his errand. "If you could have seen him just now," he said, "you would see how much more hope there is of him than of many who never technically fail, but have not the same tender, generous heart, and free humility."

"Yes, many a priest might now be thankful if some check had come on him."

"And if he had met it with this freedom from bitterness. And it would be a great kindness to keep him here a day or two. Apart from being with you, the showing himself at Compton or at Strawyers on Sunday would be hard on him."

"I will ask him. I will gladly have him here as long as the quiet may be good for him. My nephew, William, will be here till the end of the Long Vacation, but I must go to St. Faith's on Monday to conduct the retreat."

"I leave him in your hands then, and will call as I return to see what is settled, and report what his family wish. I grieve more for them than for himself."

Julius first encountered Jenny Bowater in the village making farewell calls. He stopped the carriage and joined her, and not a word was needed to tell her that something was amiss. "You have come to tell us something," she said. "Herbert has failed?"

"Prayers are sometimes answered as we do not expect," said Julius. "I believe it will be the making of him."

"Oh, but how will mamma ever bear it!" cried Jenny.

"We must remind her that it is only a matter of delay, not rejection," said Julius.

"Have you seen him?"

"Yes, the Bishop sent for me, and asked me to see your father. It was partly from slips in critical knowledge, which betrayed the want of study, and the general want of thought and progress, and all the rest of it, in his papers—"

"Just the fact—"

"Yes, which a man of less reality and more superficial quickness might have concealed by mere intellectual answers, though it might have been much worse for him in the end."

"Where is he?"

"At Rood House. Unless your mother wishes for him here, he had better stay there till he can bear to come among us again."

"Much better, indeed," said Jenny. "I only hope papa and mamma will see how good it is for him to be there. O, Julius, if he is taking it in such a spirit, I can think it all right for him; but for them—for them, it is very hard to bear. Nothing ever went wrong with the boys before, and Herbert—mamma's darling!" Her eyes were full of tears.

"I wish he had had a better Rector," said Julius.

"No, don't say that. It was not your fault."

"I cannot tell. An older man, or more truly a holier man, might have had more influence. We were all in a sort of *laissez-aller* state this autumn, and now comes the reckoning."

"There's papa," said Jenny. "Had you rather go to him alone, or can I do any good?"

"I think I will go alone," said Julius.

Mr. Bowater, who had grown up in a day when examinations were much less earnest matters, never guessed what brought Julius over, but simply thought he had come to wish them good-bye; then believed in any accident rather than in failure, and finally was exceedingly angry, and stormed hotly, first at examinations and modern Bishops, then at cricket and fine ladies, then at Julius, for not having looked after the lad better, and when this was meekly accepted, indignation took a juster direction, and Herbert's folly and idleness were severely lashed more severely than Julius thought they quite deserved, but a word of pleading only made it worse. Have him home to take leave? No, indeed, Mr. Bowater hoped he knew his duty better as father of a family, when a young man had publicly disgraced himself. "I'll tell you what, Julius Charnock, if you wish him to forget all the little impression it may have made, and be ready to run after any amount of folly, you'd make me have him home to be petted and cried over by his mother and sisters. He has been their spoilt pet too long, and I won't have him spoilt now. I'll not see him till he has worked enough to show whether there's any real stuff in him."

Mr. Bowater never even asked where his son was, probably taking it for granted that he was gone back to Compton; nor did Julius see Jenny again, as she was trying to comfort her mother under the dreadful certainty that poor dear Herbert was most cruelly treated, and that the examining chaplain came of a bad stock, and always had had a dislike to the family. It was to be hoped that Mr. Bowater would keep to his wise resolution, and not send for Herbert, for nothing could be worse for him than the sympathy he would have met with from her.

What with looking in to report at Rood House and finding Herbert most grateful for leave to remain there for a few days, Julius did not reach home till long after dark. Pleasantly did the light greet him from the open doorway where his Rosamond was standing. She sprang at once into his arms, as if he had been absent a month, and cried, "Here you are, safe at last!" Then, as she pulled off his wraps, "How tired you must be! Have you had any food? No—it's all ready;" and he could see 'high tea' spread, and lighted by the first fire of the season. "Come and begin!"

"What, without washing my hands?"

"You are to do that in the study; it is all ready." He did not exactly see why he should be too tired to mount to his dressing-room; but he obeyed, not ungratefully, and his chair was ready, his plate heaped with partridge and his tumbler filled with ale almost before his eyes had recovered the glare of light. The eagerness and flutter of Rosamond's manner began to make him anxious, and he began for the third time the inquiries she had always cut short—"Baby all right? Terry better?"

"Baby—oh yes, a greater duck than ever. I put her to bed myself, and she was quite delicious. Eat, I say; go on."

"Not unless you eat that other wing."

"I'll help myself then. You go on. I don't see Herbert, so I suppose it is all right. Where's your canonry?"

"Alas! poor Herbert is plucked. I had to go round by Strawyers to tell them."

"Plucked! I never heard of such a thing. I think it is a great shame such a nice honest fellow should be so ill-used, and when all his pretty things have been stolen too! Do you know, they've taken up young Hornblower; but his friends have made off with the things, and they say they are in the melting-pot by this time, and there's no chance of recovering them."

"I don't think he cares much now, poor fellow. Did you see Mrs. Hornblower?"

"No; by the time I could get my hat on she had heard it, poor thing, and was gone to Backsworth; for he's there, in the county gaol; was taken at the station, I believe; I don't half understand it."

Her manner was indeed strange and flighty; and though she recurred to questions about the Ordination and the Bowaters, Julius perceived that she was forcing her attention to the answers as if trying to stave off his inquiries, and he came to closer quarters. "How is Terry? Has Dr. Worth been here?"

"Yes; but not till very late. He says he never was so busy."

"Rosamond, what is it? What did he say of Terry?"

"He said"—she drew a long breath—"he says it is the Water Lane fever."

"Terry, my dear—"

She held him down with a hand on his shoulder—

"Be quiet. Finish your dinner. Dr. Worth said the great point was to keep strong, and not be overdone, nor to go into infected air tired and hungry. I would not have let you come in if there had been any help for it; and now I'll not have you go near him till you've made a good meal."

"You must do the same then. There, eat that slice, or I won't;" and as she allowed him to place it on her plate, "What does he call it—not typhus?"

"He can't tell yet; he does not know whether it is infectious or only epidemic; and when he heard how the dear boy had been for days past at the Exhibition at the town-hall, and drinking lots of iced water on Saturday, he seemed to think it quite accounted for. He says there is no reason that in this good air he should not do very well; but, oh, Julius, I wish I had kept him from that horrid place. They left him in my charge!"

"There is no reason to distress yourself about that, my Rose. He was innocently occupied, and there was no cause to expect harm. There's all good hope for him, with God's blessing. Who is with him now?"

"Cook is there now. Both the maids were so kind and hearty, declaring they would do anything, and were not afraid; and I can manage very well with their help. You know papa had a low fever at Montreal, and mamma and I nursed him through it, so I know pretty well what to do."

"But how about the baby?"

"Emma came back before the doctor came, crying piteously, poor child, as if she had had a sufficient lesson; so I said she might stay her month on her good behaviour, and now we could not send her out of the house. I have brought the nursery down to the spare room, and in the large attic, with plenty of disinfecting fluid, we can, as the doctor said, isolate the fever. He is quiet and sleepy, and I do not think it will be hard to manage, if you will only be good and conformable."

"I don't promise, if that means that you are to do everything and I nothing. When did Worth see him?"

"Not till five o'clock: and he would not have come at all, if Anne had not sent in some one from the Hall when she saw how anxious I was. He would not have come otherwise; he is so horribly busy, with lots of cases at Wil'sboro'. Now, if you have done, you may come and see my boy."

Julius did see a flushed sleeping face that did not waken at his entrance; and as his wife settled herself for her watch, he felt as if he could not leave her after such a day as she had had, but an indefinable apprehension made him ask whether she would spare him to run up to the Hall to see his mother and ask after Raymond, whose looks had haunted him all day. She saw he would not rest otherwise, and did not show how unwilling was her consent, for though she knew little, her mind misgave her.

He made his way into the Hall by the back door, and found his mother still in the drawing-room, and Raymond dozing in the large arm-chair by the fire. Mrs. Poynsett gave a warning look as Julius bent over her, but Raymond only opened his eyes with a dreamy gaze, without speaking. "Why, mother, where are the rest?"

"Poor Frank—I hope it is only the shock and fatigue; but Dr. Worth wished him to be kept as quiet as possible. He can't bear to see any one in the room, so that good Anne said she would sit

in Charlie's room close by."

"Then he is really ill?" said Julius.

"He nearly fainted after walking over to Sirenwood in vain. I don't understand it. There's something very wrong there, which seems perfectly to have crushed him."

"I'll go up and see him," said Julius. "You both of you look as if you ought to be in bed. How is Cecil, Raymond?"

"Quite knocked up," he sleepily answered. "Here's Susan, mother."

Susan must have been waiting till she heard voices to carry off her mistress. Raymond pushed her chair into her room, bent over her with extra tenderness, bade her good night; and when Julius had done the same they stood by the drawing-room fire together.

"I've been trying to write that letter, Julius," said Raymond, "but I never was so sleepy in my life, and I can't get on with it."

"What letter?"

"That letter. About the races."

"Oh! That seems long ago!"

"So it does," said Raymond, in the same dreamy manner, as if trying to shake something off. "Some years, isn't it? I wanted it done, somehow. I would sit down to it now, only I have fallen asleep a dozen times over it already."

"Not very good for composition," said Julius, alarmed by something indefinable in his brother's look, and by his manner of insisting on what was by no means urgent. "Come, put it out of your head, and go to bed."

"How did you find the boy Terry?" asked Raymond, again as if in his sleep.

"I scarcely saw him. He was asleep."

"And Worth calls it—?"

"The same fever as in Water Lane."

"I thought so. We are in for it," said Raymond, now quite awake. "He did not choose to say so to my mother, but I gathered it from his orders."

"But Frank only came down yesterday."

"Frank was knocked down and predisposed by the treatment he met with, poor boy. They say he drank quarts of iced things at the dinner and ball, and ate nothing. This may be only the effect of the shock, but his head is burning, and there is a disposition to wander. However, he has had his *coup de grâce*, and that may account for it. It is Cecil."

"Cecil!"

"Cecil, poor child. She has been constantly in that pestiferous place. All Worth would say was that she must be kept quiet and cool, but he has sent the same draughts for all three. I saw, for Terry's came here. I fancy Worth spoke out plainly to that maid of Cecil's, Grindstone; but she only looks bitter at me, says she can attend to her mistress, and has kept me out of the room all day. But I will go in to-night before I go to bed," added Raymond, energetically. "You are ready to laugh at me, Julius. No one has meddled between you and Rosamond."

"Thank God, no!" cried Julius.

"Friend abroad, or you may leave out the *r*," said Raymond, "maid at home. What chance have I ever had?"

"I'll tell you what I should do, Raymond," said Julius, "turn out the maid, keep the field, nurse her myself."

"Yes," said Raymond, "that's all very well if—if you haven't got the fever yourself. There, you need say nothing about it, nobody would be of any use to me to-night, and it may be only that I am dead beat."

But there was something about his eyes and his heavy breath which confirmed his words, and Julius could only say, "My dear Raymond!"

"It serves us right, does not it?" said his brother, smiling. "I only wish it had not fixed on the one person who tried to do good."

"If I could only stay with you; but I must tell Rosamond first."

"No, indeed. I want no one to-night, no one; after that you'll look after my mother, that's the great thing." He spoke steadily, but his hand trembled so that he could not light his candle, and Julius was obliged to do it, saying wistfully, "I'll come up the first thing in the morning and see how you are."



"Do, and if there is need, you will tell my mother. A night's rest may set me right, but I have not felt well these three or four days—I shall be in my own old room."

He leant heavily on the balusters, but would not take his brother's arm. He passed into his dressing-room, and thus to the open door of the room where he heard his wife's voice; and as Mrs. Grindstone came forward to warn him off, he said, "She is awake."

"Yes, sir; but she must not be excited."

"Raymond!"

"How are you now?" he asked, coming up to the bed.

"Oh! it is very hot and heavy," said Cecil wearily, putting her hand into his; "I'm aching all over."

"Poor child!" he said softly.

She lifted her eyes to his face. "I wanted to tell you all day," she said. "Didn't you come to the door?"

"Many times, my dear."

"And now! oh dear! I don't recollect. Don't go, please."

He sat down by her; she held his hand and dozed again.

"You had best leave her now, sir," said the maid; "she will only go on in this way, and I can tend her."

He would have given a great deal to have been sure that he could hold up his head ten minutes longer and to venture to send the woman away. Cecil muttered "Stay," and he sat on till her sleep seemed deeper, and he felt as if a few moments more might disable him from crossing the room, but his first movement again made her say "Don't."

"Mr. Poyntsett cannot stay, ma'am," said Grindstone, in a persuasive tone. "He is very tired, and not well, and you would not wish to keep him."

"Give me a kiss," she said, like a tired child. It was not like the shy embrace with which they had sometimes met and parted, but he knew he must not rouse her, and only said very low, "Good night, my poor dear; God bless you, and grant us a happy meeting, whenever it is."

Tears were flowing down his cheeks when Julius presently came to him again, and only left him when settled for the night.

## **CHAPTER, XXVII**

### **The Water Lane Fever**

The Water Lane Fever. People called it so, as blinking its real name, but it was not the less true that it was a very pestilence in the lower parts of Wil'sbro'; and was prostrating its victims far and wide among the gentry who had resorted to the town-hall within the last few weeks.

Cases had long been smouldering among the poor and the workmen employed, and several of these were terminating fatally just as the outbreak was becoming decisive.

On Monday morning Julius returned from visits to his brothers to find a piteous note from Mrs. Fuller entreating him to undertake two funerals. Her husband had broken down on Sunday morning and was very ill, and Mr. Driver had merely read the services and then joined his pupils, whom he had sent away to the sea-side. He had never been responsible for pastoral care, and in justice to them could not undertake it now. "Those streets are in a dreadful state," wrote the poor lady, "several people dying; and there is such a panic in the neighbourhood that we know not where to turn for help. If you could fix an hour we would let the people know. The doctor insists on the funerals being immediate."

Julius was standing in the porch reading this letter, and thinking what hour he could best spare from nearer claims, when he heard the gate swing and beheld his junior curate with a very subdued and sobered face, asking, "Is it true?"

"That the fever is here? Yes, it is."

"And very bad?"

"Poor Frank is our worst case as yet. He is constantly delirious. The others are generally sensible, except that Terry is dreadfully haunted with mathematics."

"Then it is all true about the Hall. Any one else ill?"

"Only the two Willses. They were carousing at the 'Three Pigeons.' I hope that Raymond's prohibition against that place may have been the saving of the Hall servants. See here," and he gave the note.

"I had better take those two funerals. I can at least do that," said Herbert. "That Driver must be a regular case of a hireling."

"He never professed that the sheep were his," said Julius.

"Then I'll go to the Vicarage and get a list of the sick, and see after them as far as I can," said Herbert, in a grave, humble tone, showing better than a thousand words how he felt the deprivation he had brought on himself; and as to shame or self-consciousness, the need had swallowed them all.

"It will be a great act of kindness, Herbert. The point of infection does not seem clear yet, but I am afraid it will be a serious outbreak."

"I did not believe it could all be true when the report came to Rood House, but of course I came to hear the truth and see what I could do. How is Mrs. Poyntsett bearing up?"

"Bravely. Anne contrived our carrying her up-stairs, and it is the greatest comfort to Raymond to lie and look at her, and Susan looks after them both."

"Then he can't be so very ill."

"Not so acutely, but there are symptoms that make Worth anxious. Shall I give you a note for Mrs. Fuller?"

"Do, and put me at your disposal for all you can spare for, or I can do. Have you written to Bindon?"

"I don't know where, within some hundred miles. But, Herbert, I think we ought to undertake the help that is wanted at Wil'sbro'. Smith of Duddingstone is too weakly, and poor old Mr. Moulden neither could nor would. We are the nearest, and having it here already, do not run the risk of spreading it. As things are, I cannot be very long away from home, but I would come in for an hour or so every day, if you could do the rest."

"Yes, that was what I meant," said Herbert.

"Worth says the best protection is never to go among the sick hungry or exhausted. He says he keeps a biscuit in his pocket to eat before going into a sick house. I shall make Rosamond keep you supplied, and you must promise to use them."

"Oh yes, I promise."

"And never drink anything there. There is to be a public meeting to-morrow, to see whether the cause of this outbreak is not traceable to the water down there."

"Mrs. Duncombe's meddling?"

"Don't judge without evidence. But it does seem as if the water at the well at Pettitt's houses had done much of the harm. Terry was drinking it all that hot day, and to-day we hear that Lady Tyrrell and two of the servants are ill, besides poor little Joe Reynolds."

"It is very terrible," said Herbert. "Lady Tyrrell, did you say?"

"Yes. She was there constantly, like Raymond's wife. Happily there is not much fear for your people, Herbert. Your father was at the dinner, but he is not a water drinker, and Jenny only just came to the bazaar, that was all. Edith happily gave up the ball."

"I know," said Herbert, colouring. "Jenny persuaded her to give it up because of—me. Oh, how I have served them all!"

"I told Jenny that perhaps her Ember prayers had been met in the true way."

"Yes," said Herbert. "I can't understand now how I could have been such an audacious fool as to present myself so coolly after the year I had spent. God forgive me for it! Rector, thank you for leaving me at Rood House. It was like having one's eyes opened to a new life. I say, do you know anything about Harry Hornblower? Is he come home?"

"Yes. You wouldn't prosecute?"

"Happily I couldn't. The things were gone and could not be identified, and there was nothing about him. So, though they had me over to Backsworth, they could not fall foul of me for refusing to prosecute. Have you seen him?"

"No, I tried, but he had got out of my way. You've not been there?" seeing that Herbert had brought back his bag.

"No; I will not till I come back;" and as he took the note he added, "Rector, I do beg your pardon with all my might." Then, after a strong clasp of the hand, he sped away with a long, manful, energetic stride, which made Julius contrast his volunteer courage with the flight of the man who, if not pledged to pastoral care at Wil'sbro', still had priestly vows upon him.

Julius had no scruples about risking this favourite home child. If he thought about it at all, it was to rejoice that Mrs. Bowater was safely gone, for he had passed unscathed through scenes at St. Awdry's that would have made his mother tremble, and he had little fear of contagion, with reasonable care. Of course the doctors had the usual debate whether the fever were infectious

or epidemic, but it made little difference. The local ones, as well as an authority from London, had an inspection previous to the meeting, which took place in the school, whose scholars were dispersed in the panic. No ladies were admitted. "We have had enough of them," quoted Worshipful Mayor Truelove. Mr. Briggs, the ex-mayor, was at the bedside of his son, and there were hardly enough present to make decisions.

The focus of the disease was in Pettitt's well. The water, though cold, clear, and sparkling, was affected by noxious gases from the drains, and had become little better than poison; the air was not much better, and as several neighbouring houses, some swarming with lodgers, used this water, the evil was accounted for. The 'Three Pigeons' had been an attraction to the servants waiting with their ladies' carriages during the entertainments, and though they had not meddled much with the simple element, spirits had not neutralized the mischief. Thence too had come water for the tea and iced beverages used at the bazaar and ball. Odours there had been in plenty from the untouched drainage of the other houses, and these, no doubt, enhanced the evil; but every one agreed that the bad management of the drains on Mr. Pettitt's property had been the main agency in the present outbreak.

The poor little perfumer had tears of grief and indignation in his eyes, but he defended his cause and shielded the ladies with chivalry worthy of his French ancestry. He said he had striven to do his duty as a proprietor, and if other gentlemen had done the same, and the channels could have had a free outlet, this misfortune would never have occurred. He found himself backed up by Mr. Julius Charnock, who rose to declare that what Mr. Pettitt had said was just what his brother, Mr. Charnock Poyntsett, had desired should be stated as his own opinion, namely, that the responsibility rested, not with those who had done all within their power or knowledge for the welfare of their tenants, but with those whose indifference on the score of health had led them to neglect all sanitary measures.

"He desires me to say," added Julius, "that being concerned both in the neglect and in the unfortunate consequences, he is desirous to impress his opinion on all concerned."

Future prevention was no longer in the hands of the Town Council, for a sanitary commission would take that in hand; but in the meantime it was a time of plague and sickness, and measures must be taken for the general relief. Mr. Moy, to whom most of the houses belonged, was inquired for; but it appeared that he had carried off his wife and daughter on Saturday in terror when one of his servants had fallen ill, and even his clerks would not know where to write to him till he should telegraph. The man Gadley was meantime driving an active trade at the 'Three Pigeons,' whither the poor, possessed with the notion that spirits kept out the infection, were resorting more than ever, and he set at defiance all the preventives which doctors, overseer, and relieving officer were trying to enforce, with sullen oaths against interference.

Two deaths yesterday, one to-day, three hourly apprehended; doctors incessantly occupied, nurses, however unfit, not to be procured by any exertion of the half-maddened relieving-officer; bread-winners prostrated; food, wine, bedding, everything lacking. Such was the state of things around the new town-hall of Wil'sbro', and the gentry around were absorbed by cases of the same epidemic in their own families.

To telegraph for nurses from a hospital, to set on foot a subscription, appoint a committee of management, and name a treasurer and dispenser of supplies, were the most urgent steps. Julius suggested applying to a Nursing Sisterhood, but Mr. Truelove, without imputing any motives to the reverend gentleman, was unwilling to insert the thin end of the wedge; so the telegram was sent to a London Hospital, and Mr. Whitlock, the mayor-elect, undertook to be treasurer, and to print and circulate an appeal for supplies of all sorts. Those present resolved themselves into a committee, and consulted about a fever hospital, since people could hardly be expected to recover in the present condition of Water Lane; but nothing was at present ready, and the question was adjourned to the next day. As Julius parted with Mr. Whitlock he met Herbert Bowater returning from the cemetery in search of him, with tidings of some cases where he was especially needed. As they walked on together Mrs. Duncombe overtook them with a basket on her arm. She held out her hand with an imploring gesture.

"Mr. Charnock, it can't be true, can it?—they only say so out of ignorance—that it was Pettitt's well, I mean?"

In a few words Julius made it clear what the evil had been and how it arose.

She did not dispute it, she merely grew sallow and said:

"God forgive us! We did it for the best. I planned. I never thought of that. Oh!"

"My brother insists that the mischief came of not following the example you set."

"And Cecil!"

"Cecil is too much stupefied to know anything about it."

"You are helping here? Make me all the use you can. Whatever has to be done give it to me."

"Nay, you have your family to consider."

"My boys are at their grandmother's. My husband is gone abroad. Give me work. I have brought some wine. Who needs it most?"

"Wine?" said Herbert. "Here? I was going back for some, but half an hour may make all the difference to the poor lad in here."

Mrs. Duncombe was within the door in a moment.

"There has been an execution in her house," said Herbert, as they went home. "That fellow went off on Saturday, and left her alone to face it."

"I thought she had striven to keep out of debt."

"What can a woman do when a man chooses to borrow? That horse brought them to more unexpected smash. They say that after the ball, where she appeared in all her glory, as if nothing had happened, she made Bob give her a schedule of his debts, packed his portmanteau, sent him off to find some cheap hole abroad, and stayed to pick up the pieces after the wreck."

"She is a brave woman," said Julius.

Therewith they plunged into the abodes of misery, where the only other helper at present was good old Miss Slater, who was going from one to another, trying to show helpless women how to nurse, but able only to contribute infinitesimal grains of aid or comfort at immense cost to herself. Julius insisted on taking home with him his curate, who had been at work from ten o'clock that morning till six, when as Julius resigned the pony's reins to him, he begged that they might go round and inquire at Sirenwood, to which consent was the more willingly given because poor Frank's few gleams of consciousness were spent in sending his indefatigable nurse Anne to ask whether his mother had 'had that letter,' and in his delirium he was always feeling his watch-chain for that unhappy pebble, and moaning when he missed it. Mrs. Poyntsett's letter had gone on Friday, and still there was no answer, and this was a vexation, adding to the fear that the poor fellow's rejection had been final. Yet she might have missed the letter by being summoned home. Close to the lodge, they overtook Sir Harry, riding dejectedly homewards, and, glad to be saved going up to the house, they stopped and inquired for Lady Tyrrell.

"Very low and oppressed," he said. "M'Vie does not give us reason to expect a change just yet. Do they tell you the same? Worth attends you, I think?"

"He seems to think it must run on for at least three weeks," said Julius.

"You've been to the meeting, eh? Was it that well of Pettitt's? Really that meddling wife of Duncombe's ought to be prosecuted. I hope she'll catch the fever and be served out."

"She tried to prevent it," said Julius.

"Pshaw! women have no business with such things, they only put their foot in it. Nobody used to trouble themselves about drains, and one never heard of fevers."

Instead of contesting the point, Julius asked whether Miss Vivian were at home.

"No; that's the odd thing. I wrote, for M'Vie has no fear of infection, and poor Camilla is always calling for her, and that French maid has thought proper to fall ill, and we don't know what to do. Upper housemaid cut and run in a panic, cook dead drunk last night, not a servant in the house to be trusted. If it were not for my man Victor I don't know where I should be. Very odd what that child is about. Lady Susan can't be keeping it from her. Unjustifiable!"

"She is with Lady Susan Strangeways?"

"Yes. Went with Bee and Conny. I was glad, for we can't afford to despise a good match, though I was sorry for your brother."

"Do I understand you that she is engaged to Mr. Strangeways?"

"No, no; not yet. One always hears those things before they are true, and you see they are keeping her from us as if she belonged to them already. I call it unfeeling! I have just been to the post to see if there's a letter! Can't be anything wrong in the address,—Revelrig, Cleveland, Yorkshire."

"Why don't you telegraph?"

"I shall, if I don't hear to-morrow morning."

But the morning's telegrams were baffling. None came in answer to Sir Harry, though he had bidden his daughter to telegraph back instantly; and two hospitals replied that they had no nurses to spare! This was the first thing Julius heard when he came to the committee-room. The second was that the only parish nurse had been found asleep under the influence of the port-wine intended for her patients, the third that there were five more deaths, one being Mrs. Gadley, of the 'Three Pigeons,' from diphtheria, and fourteen more cases of fever were reported. Julius had already been with the schoolmistress, who was not expected to live through the day. He had found that Mrs. Duncombe had been up all night with one of the most miserable families, and only when her unpractised hands had cared for a little corpse, had been forced home by good Miss Slater for a little rest. He had also seen poor Mr. Fuller, who was too weak and wretched to say anything more than 'God help us, Charnock: you will do what you can;' and when Julius asked for his sanction to sending for Sisters, he answered, "Anything, anything."

The few members who had come to the committee were reduced to the same despairing consent,

and Julius was allowed to despatch a telegram to St. Faith's, which had sent Sisters in the emergency at St. Awdry's. He likewise brought an offer, suggested by Raymond, of a great old tithe barn, his own property, but always rented by Mrs. Poynsett, in a solitary field, where the uninfected children might be placed under good care, and the houses in Water Lane thus relieved. As to a fever hospital, Raymond had sent his advice to use the new town-hall itself. A word from him went a great way just then with the Town Council, and the doctors were delighted with the proposal.

Funds and contributions of bedding, clothing, food and wine were coming in, but hands were the difficulty. The adaptations of the town-hall and the bringing in of beds were done by one strong carpenter and Mrs. Duncombe's man Alexander, whom she had brought with her, and who proved an excellent orderly; and the few who would consent, or did not resist occupying the beds there, were carried in by Herbert Bowater and a strapping young doctor who had come down for this fever pasture. There Mrs. Duncombe and Miss Slater received them. No other volunteer had come to light willing to plunge into this perilous and disgusting abyss of misery; and among the afflicted families the power of nursing was indeed small.

However, the healthy children were carried away without much resistance, and established in the great barn under a trustworthy widow; and before night, two effective-looking Sisters were in charge at the hospital.

Still, however, no telegram, no letter, came from Eleonora Vivian. Mr. M'Vie had found a nurse for Lady Tyrrell, but old Sir Harry rode in to meet every delivery of the post, and was half distracted at finding nothing from her; and Frank's murmurs of her name were most piteous to those who feared that, if he were ever clearly conscious again, it would only be to know how heavy had been the meed of his folly.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### The Retreat

What dost thou here, frail wanderer from thy task?—Christian Year

Eleonora Vivian was trying to fix her attention on writing out the meditation she had just heard from Dr. Easterby.

It had been a strange time. All externally was a great hush. There was perfect rest from the tumult of society, and from the harassing state of tacit resistance habitual to her. This was the holy quietude for which she had longed, yet where was the power to feel and profit by it? Did not the peace without only make her hear the storm within all the more?

A storm had truly been raging within ever since Conny Strangeways had triumphantly exhibited the prize she had won from Frank Charnock at the races; and Camilla had taken care that full and undeniable evidence should prove that this was not all that the young man had lost upon the Backsworth race-ground.

Lenore might guess, with her peculiarly painful intuition, who had been the tempter, but that did not lessen her severity towards the victim. In her resolution against a betting man, had she not trusted Frank too implicitly even to warn him of her vow? Nay, had she not felt him drifting from her all through the season, unjustly angered, unworthily distrustful, easily led astray? All the misgivings that had fretted her at intervals and then cleared away seemed to gather into one conviction—Frank had failed her!

Eleonora's nature was one to resent before grieving. Her spirit was too high to break down under the first shock, and she carried her head proudly to the ball, betraying by no outward sign the stern despair of her heart, as she listened to the gay chatter of her companions, and with unflinching severity she carried out that judicial reply to Frank which she had already prepared, and then guarded herself among numerous partners against remonstrance or explanation. It had been all one whirl of bewilderment; Lady Tyrrell tired, and making the girls' intended journey on the morrow a plea for early departure; and the Strangeways, though dancing indefatigably, and laughing at fatigue, coming away as soon as they saw she really wished it. All said good night and good-bye together, both to Lady Tyrrell and Sir Harry, and Lenore started at ten o'clock without having seen either. Her sense of heroism lasted till after the glimpse of Frank on the road. Her mood was of bitter disappointment and indignation. Frank was given up, but not less so were her father, her sister, and the world. Sir Harry had made Camilla suffice to him, he did not want her. He had been the means of perverting Frank, and Lenore could not see that she need any longer be bound for his sake to the life she detested. In a few weeks she would be of age, and what would then prevent her from finding a congenial home in the Sisterhood, since such kindred could have no just claim to her allegiance? It was the hasty determination of one who had suffered a tacit persecution for three years, and was now smarting under the cruellest of blows. Her lover perverted, her conditions broken, her pledge gambled away, and all this the work of her father and sister!

Conny and Bee thought her grave and more silent than usual, and when Lady Susan met them in London there was no time for thought. Saturday was spent on a harvest festival at a suburban

church, after which the daughters were despatched to their uncle's by a late train. Sunday was spent in the pursuit of remarkable services; and on Monday Lady Susan and Eleonora had gone to St. Faith's and the Retreat began.

Here was to be the longed-for rest, for which she had thirsted all the more through those days of hurry and of religious spectacles, as she felt that, be they what they might to their regular attendants, to her, as an outsider, they could be but sights, into whose spirit her sick and wearied soul could not enter.

Here was no outward disturbance, no claim from the world, no importunate chatter, only religious services in their quietest, most unobtrusive form; and Dr. Easterby's low tender tones, leading his silent listeners to deep heart-searchings, earnest thoughts, and steadfast resolutions.

Ah! so no doubt it was with many; but Lena, with book and pen, was dismayed to find that the one thing she recollected was the question, "Friend, how camest thou in hither?" After that, she had only heard her own thoughts. Her mind had lapsed into one vague apprehension of the effects of having cut off all communication with home, imaginings of Frank's despair, relentings of pity, all broken by dismay at her own involuntary hypocrisy in bringing such thoughts into the Retreat. Had she any right to be there at all? Was not a thing that should have been for her peace become to her an occasion of falling?

It was Thursday evening, and on the morrow there would be the opportunity of private interviews with Dr. Easterby. She longed for the moment, chiefly to free herself from the sense of deception that had all this time seemed to vitiate her religious exercises, deafen her ears, and blow aside her prayers. There was a touch on her shoulder, and one of the Sisters who had received the ladies said, interrogatively, "Miss Vivian? The Mother would be obliged if you would come to her room."

The general hush prevented Lenore from manifesting her extreme agitation, and she moved with as quiet a step as she could command, though trembling from head to foot. In the room to which she came stood the Superior and Dr. Easterby, and a yellow telegram-paper lay on the table.

"My father?" she asked.

"No," said the Superior, kindly, "it is your sister, who is ill. Here is the telegram—"

"Sister Margaret to the Mother Superior, St. Faith's, Dearport. Lady Tyrrell has the fever. Miss Vivian much needed.

"Wils'bro, Sept. 26th, 5.30."

"The fever!" She looked up bewildered, and the Superior added—

"You did not know of a fever at Wil'sbro'? Some of our nursing Sisters were telegraphed for, and went down yesterday. I was sorry to send Sister Margaret away just when her mother and you are here; but she was the only available head, and the need seemed great."

"I have heard nothing since I left home on Friday," said Eleonora, hoarsely. "It is my own fault. They think I am at Revelrig."

"Your family do not know you are here?" said the Superior, gravely.

"It was very wrong," she said. "This is the punishment. I must go. Can I?"

"Surely, as soon as there is a train," said the Superior, beginning to look for a *Bradshaw*; while Dr. Easterby gave Lenore a chair, and bade her sit down. She looked up at his kind face, and asked whether he had heard of this fever.

"On Sunday evening, some friends who came out from Backsworth to our evening service spoke of an outbreak of fever at Wil'sbro', and said that several of the Charnock family were ill. I have had this card since from young Mr. Bowater:—

"T. F. in severe form. J. C. well, but both his brothers are down in it, and Lady K.'s brother, also Lady T. and the Vicar. No one to do anything; we have taken charge of Wil'sbro'. I have no time to do more than thank you for unspeakable kindness. H. B."

"You knew?" exclaimed Lenore, as she saw her sister's initial.

"I knew Lady Tyrrell was ill, but I do not know who the ladies are whom I address. I did not guess that you were here," said Dr. Easterby, gently.

No one living near Backsworth could fail to know Sir Harry Vivian's reputation, so that the master of Rood House knew far better than the Superior of St. Faith's how much excuse Lenore's evasion might have; but whatever could seem like tampering with young people was most distressing to the Sisters, and the Mother was more grave than pitiful.

There was no train till the mail at night, and there would be two hours to wait in London; but Lenore would listen to no entreaties to wait till morning, and as they saw that she had plenty of health and strength, they did not press her, though the Superior would send a nurse with her, who, if not needed at Sirenwood, might work in Water Lane. It was thought best not to distract Lady Susan, and Lenore was relieved not to have her vehement regret and fussy cares about her;

but there were still two hours to be spent before starting, and in these Dr. Easterby was the kindest of comforters.

Had she erred in her concealment? He thought she had, though with much excuse. A Retreat was not like a sacrament, a necessity of a Christian's life; and no merely possible spiritual advantage ought to be weighed against filial obedience. It was a moment of contrition, and of outpouring for the burthened heart, as Lenore was able to speak of her long trial, and all the evil it had caused in hardening and sealing up her better nature. She even told of her unsanctioned but unforbidden engagement, and of its termination; yearning to be told that she had been hasty and hard, and to be bidden to revoke her rejection.

She found that Dr. Easterby would not judge for her, or give her decided direction. He showed her, indeed, that she had given way to pride and temper, and had been unjust in allowing no explanation; but he would not tell her to unsay her decision, nor say that it might not be right, even though the manner had been wrong. While the past was repented, and had its pardon, for the future he would only bid her wait, and pray for guidance and aid through her trial.

"My child," he said, "chastening is the very token of pardon, and therein may you find peace, and see the right course."

"And you will pray for me—that however it may be, He may forgive me?"

"Indeed, I will. We all will pray for you as one in sorrow and anxiety. And remember this: There is a promise that a great mountain shall become a plain; and so it does, but to those who bravely try to climb it in strength not their own, not to those who try to go round or burrow through."

"I see," was all she answered, in the meek submissive tone of a strong nature, bent but not daring to break down. She could not shed tears, deeply as she felt; she must save all her strength and bear that gnawing misery which Herbert Bowwater's mention of J. C.'s brothers had inflicted upon her—bear it in utter uncertainty through the night's journey, until the train stopped at Wil'sbro' at eleven o'clock, and her father, to whom she had telegraphed, met her, holding out his arms, and absolutely crying over her for joy.

"My dear, my dear, I knew you would come; I could trust to my little Lena. It was all some confounded mistake."

"It was my fault. How is she?"

"Does nothing but ask for you. Very low—nasty fever at night. What's that woman? M'Vie sent a nurse, who is awfully jealous; can't have her in to Camilla: but there's plenty to do; Anaïs is laid up—coachman too, and Joe—half the other servants gone off. I told Victor I would pay anything to him if he would stay."

"And—at Compton?" faintly asked Lenore.

"Bad enough, they say. Serves 'em right; Mrs. Raymond was as mischievous as Duncombe's wife, but I've not heard for the last two days; there's been no one to send over, and I've had enough to think about of my own."

"Who have it there?" she managed to say.

"Raymond and his wife, both; and Frank and the young De Lancey, I heard. I met Julius Charnock the other day very anxious about them. He's got his tithe barn stuffed with children from Water Lane, as if he wanted to spread it. All their meddling! But what kept you so long, little one? Where were you hiding?—or did Lady Susan keep it from you? I began to think you had eloped with her son. You are sure you have not?"

"I was wrong, father; I went to a Retreat with Lady Susan."

"A what? Some of Lady Susan's little poperies, eh? I can't scold you, child, now I've got you; only have your letters forwarded another time," said Sir Harry, placable as usual when alone with Lenore.

Fears of infection for her did not occur to him. Mr. M'Vie held the non-contagion theory, and helpless selfishness excluded all thoughts of keeping his daughter at a distance. He clung to her as he used to do in former days, before Camilla had taken possession of him, and could not bear to have her out of reach. In the sick-room she was of disappointingly little use. The nurse was a regular professional, used to despotism, and resenting her having brought home any one with her, and she never permitted Miss Vivian's presence, except when the patient's anxiety made it necessary to bring her in; and when admitted, there was nothing to be done but to sit by Camilla, and now and then answer the weary disjointed talk, and, if it grew a little livelier, the warning that Lady Tyrrell was getting excited was sure to follow.

Outside there was enough to do, in the disorganized state of the sick and panic-stricken household, where nobody was effective but the French valet and one very stupid kitchen-maid. Lena helped the St. Faith's nurse in her charge of the French maid, but almost all her time in the morning was spent in domestic cares for the sick and for her father; and when he was once up, he was half plaintive, half passionate, if she did not at once respond to his calls. She read the papers to him, walked up and down the terrace with him while he smoked, and played *bezique* with him late into the night, to distract his thoughts. And where were hers, while each day's bulletin from Compton Hall was worse than the last? Little Joe Reynolds had been sent home on

being taken ill, and she would fain have gone to see him, but detentions sprang up around her, and sometimes it would have been impossible to go so far from the house, so that days had become weeks, and the month of October was old before she was walking down the little garden of old Betty's house. The door opened, and Julius Charnock came out, startling her by the sight of his worn and haggard looks, as he made a deprecating movement, and shut the door behind him. Then she saw that the blinds were in the act of being drawn down.

"Is it so?" she said.

"Yes," said Julius, in a quiet tone, as sad and subdued as his looks. "He slept himself away peacefully a quarter of an hour ago."

"I suppose I must not go in now. I longed to come before. Poor boy, he was like a toy flung away."

"You need not grieve over him," said Julius. "Far from it. You have done a great deal for him."

"I—I only caused him to be put into temptation."

"Nay. Your care woke his spirit up and guarded him. No one could hear his wanderings without feeling that he owed much to you. There is a drawing to be given to you that will speak much to you. It is at the Rectory; it was not safe here. And his mother is here. I can't but hope her soul has been reached through him. Yes," as Lenore leant against the gate, her warm tears dropping, "there is no grief in thinking of him. He had yearnings and conceptions that could not have been gratified in his former station; and for him an artist's life would have been more than commonly uphill work—full of trial. I wish you could have heard the murmured words that showed what glorious images floated before him—no doubt now realized."

"I am glad he was really good," were the only words that would come.

The hearts of both were so full, that these words on what was a little further off were almost necessary to them.

"Take my arm," said Julius, kindly. "Our roads lie together down the lane. How is your sister? Better, I hope, as I see you here."

"She has slept more quietly. Mr. M'Vie thinks her a little better."

"So it is with Terry de Lancey," said Julius; "he is certainly less feverish to-day;" but there was no corresponding tone of gladness in the voice, though he added, "Cecil is going on well too."

"And—" Poor Lenore's heart died within her; she could only press his arm convulsively, and he had mercy on her.

"Frank's illness has been different in character from the others," he said; "the fever has run much higher, and has affected the brain more, and the throat is in a very distressing state; but Dr. Worth still does not think there are specially dangerous symptoms, and is less anxious about him than Raymond."

"Ah! is it true?"

"He does not seem as ill as Frank; but there have been bleedings at the nose, which have brought him very low, and which have hitherto been the worst symptoms," and here the steady sadness of his voice quivered a little.

Lenore uttered a cry of dismay, and murmured, "Your mother?"

"She is absorbed in him. Happily, she can be with him constantly. They seem to rest in each other's presence, and not to look forward."

"And Cecil?"

"It has taken the lethargic turn with Cecil. She is almost always asleep, and is now, I believe, much better; but in truth we have none of us been allowed to come near her. Her maid, Grindstone, has taken the sole charge, and shuts us all out, for fear, I believe, of our telling her how ill Raymond is."

"Oh, I know Grindstone."

"Who looks on us all as enemies. However, Raymond has desired us to write to her father, and he will judge when he comes."

They were almost at the place of parting. Eleonora kept her hand on his arm, longing for another word, nay, feeling that without it her heart would burst. "Who is with Frank?"

"Anne. She hardly ever leaves him. She is our main-stay at the Hall."

"Is he ever sensible?" she faintly asked.

"He has not been really rational for nearly ten days now."

"If—if—oh! you know what I mean. Oh! gain his pardon for me!" and she covered her face with her hand.

"Poor Frank!—it is of your pardon that he talks. Tell me, Eleonora, did you ever receive a letter



from my mother?"

"Never. Where was it sent?" she said, starting.

"To Revelrig. It was written the day after the ball."

"I never went to Revelrig. Oh! if I could have spoken to you first I should have been saved from so much that was wrong. No one knew where I was."

"No, not till Sister Margaret told Herbert Bowater that her sisters had been at a ball at the town-hall the week before. Then he saw she was Miss Strangeways, and asked if she knew where you were."

"Ah, yes! disobedience—tacit deception—temper. Oh! they have brought their just punishment. But that letter!"

"I think it was to explain poor Frank's conduct at the races. Perhaps, as the servants at Revelrig had no knowledge of you, it may have been returned, and my mother's letter have been left untouched. I will see."

They knew they must not delay one another, and parted; Julius walking homewards by the Hall, where, alas! there was only one of the family able to move about the house, and she seldom left her patient.

Julius did, however, find her coming down-stairs with Dr. Worth, and little as he gathered that was reassuring in the physician's words, there was a wistful moisture about her eyes, a look altogether of having a bird in her bosom, which made him say, as the doctor hurried off, "Anne, some one must be better."

"Cecil is," she said; and he had nearly answered, "*only* Cecil," but her eyes brimmed over suddenly, and she said, "I am so thankful!"

"Miles!" he exclaimed.

She handed him a telegram. The *Salamanca* was at Spithead; Miles telegraphed to her to join him.

"Miles come! Thank God! Does mother know?"

"Hush! no one does," and with a heaving breast she added, "I answered that I could not, and why, and that he must not come."

"No, I suppose he must not till he is free of his ship. My poor Anne!"

"Oh no! I know he is safe. I am glad! But the knowledge would tear your mother to pieces."

"Her soul is in Raymond now, and to be certain of Miles being at hand would be an unspeakable relief to him. Come and tell them."

"No, no, I can't!" she cried, with a sudden gush of emotion sweeping over her features, subdued instantly, but showing what it was to her. "You do it. Only don't let them bring him here."

And Anne flew to her fastness in Frank's attic, while Julius repaired to Raymond's room, and found him as usual lying tranquil, with his mother's chair so near that she could hand him the cool fruit or drink, or ring to summon other help. Their time together seemed to both a rest, and Julius always liked to look at their peaceful faces, after the numerous painful scenes he had to encounter. Raymond, too, was clinging to him, to his ministrations and his talk, as to nothing else save his mother. Raymond had always been upright and conscientious, but his religion had been chiefly duty and obligation, and it was only now that comfort or peace seemed to be growing out of it for him. As he looked up at his brother, he too saw the involuntary brightness that the tidings had produced, and said, "Is any one else better, Julius? I know Terry is; I am so glad for Rose."

"I asked Anne the same question," said Julius. "Mother, you will be more glad than tantalized. The *Salamanca* is come in."

Raymond made an inarticulate sound of infinite relief. His mother exclaimed, "He must not come here! But Frankie could not spare Anne to him. What will she do?"

"She will stay bravely by Frank," said Julius. "We must all wait till the ship is paid off."

"Of course," said Raymond. "If she can rejoice that he is out of danger, we will; I am content to know him near. It makes all much easier. And, mother, he will find all ready to own what a priceless treasure he sent before him in his wife."

There was the old note of pain in the comparison. Julius's heart was wrung as he thought of Sirenwood, with the sense that the victim was dying, the author of the evil recovering. He could only stifle the thought by turning away, and going to the table in his mother's adjacent room, where letters had accumulated unopened. 'On Her Majesty's Service' bore the post-mark which justified him in opening it, and enclosing the letter it contained to Miss Vivian.

He did so almost mechanically. He had gone through these weeks only by never daring to have a self. The only man of his family who could be effective; the only priest in the two infected

parishes; he had steadfastly braced himself for the work. He ventured only to act and pray, never to talk, save for the consolation of others. To Wil'sbro' he daily gave two morning hours, for he never failed to be wanted either for the last rites, or for some case beyond Herbert's experience, as well as to see the Vicar, who was sinking fast, in a devout and resigned frame, which impressed while it perplexed his brother clergyman, in view of the glaring deficiencies so plain to others, but which never seemed to trouble his conscience.

The nursing-staff still consisted of the Sisters, Herbert Bowater, Mrs. Duncombe and her manservant. Under their care, the virulence of the disease was somewhat abating, and the doctors ventured to say that after the next few days there would be much fewer fatal cases; but Water Lane was now a strangely silent place,—windows open, blinds flapping in the wind, no children playing about, and the 'Three Pigeons' remained the only public-house not shut up. It was like having the red cross on the door.

## CHAPTER XXIX A Strange Night

Cold, cold with death, came up the tide  
In no manner of haste,  
Up to her knees, and up to her side,  
And up to her wicked waist;  
For the hand of the dead, and the heart of the dead,  
Are strong hasps they to hold.—G. MACDONALD

"Rector," said Herbert Bowater, "are you specially at home?"

"Why?" asked Julius, pausing.

"There's that man Gadley."

"Gadley! Is he down?"

"It seems that he has been ill this fortnight, but in the low, smouldering form; and he and that hostler of his kept it a secret, for fear of loss of gain, and hatred of doctors, parsons, Sisters, and authorities generally, until yesterday, when the hostler made off with all the money and the silver spoons. This morning early, a policeman, seeing the door open, went in, and found the poor wretch in a most frightful state, but quite sensible. I was passing as he came out to look for help, and I have been there mostly ever since. He is dying—M'Vie says there's not a doubt of that, and he has got something on his mind. He says he has been living on Moy's hush-money all this time, for not bringing to light some embezzlement of your mother's money, and letting the blame light on that poor cousin of yours, Douglas."

Herbert was amazed at the lighting up of his Rector's worn, anxious face.

"Douglas! Thank Heaven! Herbert, we must get a magistrate at once to take the deposition!"

"What! Do you want to prosecute Moy?"

"No, but to clear Archie."

"I thought he was drowned?"

"No; that was all a mistake. Miles saw him at Natal. Herbert, this will be life and joy to your sister. What!—you did not know about Jenny and Archie?"

"Not I—Jenny!—poor old Joan! So that's what has stood in her way, and made her the jolliest of old sisters, is it? Poor old Joanie! What! was she engaged to him?"

"Yes, much against your father's liking, though he had consented. I remember he forbade it to be spoken of,—and you were at school."

"And Joan was away nursing old Aunt Joan for two years. So Archie went off with this charge on him, and was thought to be lost! Whew! How did she stand it? I say, does she know he is alive?"

"No, he forbade Miles to speak. No one knows but Miles and I, and our wives. Anne put us on the scent. Now, Herbert, I'll go to the poor man at once, and you had better find a magistrate."

"Whom can I find?" said Herbert. "There's my father away, and Raymond ill, and Lipscombe waved me off—wouldn't so much as speak to me for fear I should be infectious."

"You must get a town magistrate."

"Briggs is frantic since he lost his son, and Truelove thinks he has the fever, though Worth says it is all nonsense. There's nobody but Whitlock. Dear old Jenny! Well, there always was something different from other people in her, and I never guessed what it was. I'd go to the end of the world to make her happy and get that patient look out of her eyes."

Herbert had nearly to fulfil this offer, for Mr. Whitlock was gone to London for the day, and

magistrates were indeed scarce; but at last, after walking two miles out of the town, his vehemence and determination actually dragged in the unfortunate, timid justice of the peace who had avoided him in the road, but who could not refuse when told in strong earnest that the justification of an innocent man depended on his doing his duty.

Poor Mr. Lipscombe! The neglected 'Three Pigeons' was just now the worst place in all Water Lane. The little that had hastily been done since the morning seemed to have had no effect on the foetid atmosphere, even to Herbert's well accustomed nostrils; and what must it have been to a stranger, in spite of the open window and all the disinfectants? And, alas! the man had sunk into a sleep. Julius, who still stood by him, had heard all he had to say to relieve his mind, all quite rationally, and had been trying to show him the need of making reparation by repeating all to a magistrate, when the drowsiness had fallen on him; and though the sound of feet roused him, it was to wander into the habitual defiance of authority, merging into terror.

Herbert soothed him better than any one else could do, and he fell asleep again; but Mr. Lipscombe declared it was of no use to remain—nothing but madness; and they could not gainsay him. He left the two clergymen together, feeling himself to have done a very valiant and useless thing in the interests of justice, or at the importunity of a foolishly zealous young curate.

"Look here," said Herbert, "Whitlock may be trusted. Leave a note for him explaining. I'll stay here; I'm the best to do so, any way. If he revives and is sensible, I'll send off at once for Whitlock, or if there is no time, I'll write it down and let him see me sign it."

"And some one else, if possible," said Julius. "The difficulty is that I never had authority given me to use what he said to me in private. Rather the contrary, for old instinctive habits of caution awoke the instant I told him it was his duty to make it known, and that Archie was alive. I don't like leaving you here, Herbert, but Raymond was very weak this morning; besides, there's poor Joe's funeral."

"Oh, never mind. He'll have his sleep out, and be all right when he awakes. Think of righting Jenny's young man! How jolly!"

Julius went across to the town-hall hospital, and told the Sisters, whose darling his curate was, of the charge he had undertaken, and they promised to look after him. After which Julius made the best of his way home, where Rosamond had, as usual, a bright face for him. Her warm heart and tender tact had shown her that obtrusive attempts to take care of him would only be harassing, so she only took care to secure him food and rest in his own house whenever it was possible, and that however low her own hopes might be, she would not add to his burden; and now Terry was so much better that she could well receive him cheerily, and talk of what Terry had that day eaten, so joyously, as almost to conceal that no one was better at the Hall.

"I will come with you," she said; "I might do something for poor Fanny," as the bell began to toll for little Joshua's funeral. Fanny Reynolds, hearing some rumour of her boy's illness, had brought Drake to her home three days before his death. The poor little fellow's utterances, both conscious and unconscious, had strangely impressed the man, and what had they not awakened in the mother? And when the words, so solemn and mysterious, fell on those unaccustomed ears in the churchyard, and Fanny, in her wild overpowering grief, threw herself about in an agony of sorrow and remorse, and sobbed with low screams, it was 'the lady' whom she viewed as an angel of mercy, who held her and hushed her; and when all was over, and she was sinking down, faint and hysterical, it was 'the lady' who—a little to the scandal of the more respectable—helped Drake to carry her to the Rectory, the man obeying like one dazed.

"I must leave the sheep that was lost to you, Rose," said Julius. "You can do more for them than I as yet, and they have sent for me to the Hall."

"You will stay there to-night if they want you; I don't want any one," said Rosamond at the door.

He was wanted indeed at his home. Frank was in a wilder and more raving state than ever, and Raymond so faint and sinking, and with such a look about him, that Julius felt, more than he had ever done before, that though the fever had almost passed away, there was no spirit or strength to rally. He was very passive, and seemed to have no power to wonder, though he was evidently pleased when Julius told him both of Archie Douglas's life and the hopes of clearing his name. "Tell Jenny she was right," he said, and did not seem inclined to pursue the subject.

They wheeled Mrs. Poyntsett away at her usual hour, when he was dozing; and as Frank was still tossing and moaning incoherently, and often required to be held, Julius persuaded Anne to let him take her place with him, while she became Raymond's watcher. He dozed about half an hour, and when she next gave him some food, he said, in a very low feeble tone:

"You have heard from Miles?"

"Yes; he says nothing shall stop him the moment they are paid off."

"That's right. No fear of infection—that's clear," said Raymond.

"I think not—under God!" and Anne's two hands unseen clasped over her throbbing, yearning heart.

"Dear old fellow!" said Raymond. "It is such pleasure to leave mother to him. If I don't see him, Anne, tell him how glad I am. I've no charge. I know he will do it all right. And mother will have

you," and he held out his hand to her. Presently he said: "Anne. One thing—"

"Yes," she said anxiously.

"You always act on principle, I know; but don't hang back from Miles's friends and pleasures. I know the old fellow, Anne. His nature is sociable, and he wants sympathy in it."

"I know what you mean, Raymond," said Anne; "I do mean to try to do right—"

"I know, I know," said he, getting a little excited, and speaking eagerly; "but don't let right blind you, Anne, if you censure and keep from all he likes—if you will be a recluse and not a woman—he—don't be offended, Anne; but if you leave him to himself, then will every effort be made to turn him from you. You don't believe me."

"My dear Raymond, don't speak so eagerly," as his cheeks flushed.

"I must! I can't see his happiness and yours wrecked like mine. Go with him, Anne. Don't leave him to be poisoned. Mesmerism has its power over whoever has been under the spell. And he has—he has! She will try to turn him against you and mother."

"Hush, Raymond! Indeed I will be on my guard. There's no one there. What are you looking at?"

"Camilla!" he said, with eyes evidently seeing something. "Camilla! Is it not enough to have destroyed *one* peace?"

"Raymond, indeed there is no one here."

But he had half raised himself. "Yes, Camilla, you have had your revenge. Let it be enough. No—no; I forgive you; but I forbid you to touch her."

He grasped Anne's arm with one hand, and stretched the other out as though to warn some one away. The same moment there was another outburst of the bleeding. Anne rang for help with one hand, and held him as best she could. It lasted long; and when it was over he was manifestly dying. "It is coming," he said; looking up to Julius. "Pray! Only first—my love to Cecil. I hope she is still young enough not to have had all her life spoilt. Is her father coming?"

"To-morrow," said Anne.

"That's well. Poor child! she is better free."

How piteously sad those words of one wedded but a year! How unlike the look that met his mother's woeful yet tender eyes, as she held his hand. She would aid him through that last passage as through all before, only a word of strong and tender love, as he again looked up to Julius and Anne, as if to put her in their keeping, and once more murmured something of "Love to sweet Rose! Now, Julius, pray!"

An ever dutiful man, there was no wandering in look or tone. He breathed 'Amen' once or twice, but never moved again, only his eyes still turned on his mother, and so in its time came the end.

Old Susan saw at first that the long fluttering gasp had no successor, and her touch certified Julius. He rose and went towards his mother. She held out her hands and said. "Take me to my Frank."

"We had better," whispered Anne.

They wheeled her to the foot of the stairs. Julius took her in his arms, Anne held her feet, and thus they carried her up the stairs, and along the passage, hearing Frank's husky rapid babble all the way, and finding him struggling with the fierce strength of delirium against Jenkins, who looked as if he thought them equally senseless, when he saw his helpless mistress carried in.

"Frank, my boy, do lie still," she said, and he took no notice; but when she laid her hand on his, he turned, looked at her with his dull eyes, and muttered, "Mother!"

It was the first recognition for many a day! and, at the smoothing motion of her hand over him, while she still entreated, "Lie still, my dear," the mutterings died away; the childish instinct of obedience stilled the struggles; and there was something more like repose than had been seen all these weary months.

"Mother," said Julius, "you can do for us what no one else can. You will save him."

She looked up to him, and hope took away the blank misery he had dreaded to see. "My poor Frankie," she said dreamily, "he has wanted me, I will not leave him now."

All was soon still; Frank's face had something like rest on it, as he lay with his mother's hand on his brow, and she intent only on him.

"You can leave them to me, I think," said Anne. "I will send if there be need; but if not, you had better not come up till you have been to Wil'sbro'—if you must go."

"I must, I fear; I promised to come to Fuller if he be still here. I will speak to Jenkins first."

Julius was living like a soldier in a campaign, with numbers dropping beside him, and no time to mourn, scarcely to realize the loss, and he went on, almost as if he had been a stranger; while the grief of poor old Jenkins was uncontrollable, both for his lady's sake and for the young master,

who had been his pride and glory. His sobs brought out Mrs. Grindstone into the gallery, to insist, with some asperity, that there should be no noise to awaken her mistress, who was in a sweet sleep.

"We will take care," said Julius, sadly. "I suppose she had better hear nothing till Mr. Charnock comes."

"She must be left to me, sir, or I cannot be answerable for the consequences," was the stiff reply, wherewith Mrs. Grindstone retreated into her castle.

Julius left the hushed and veiled house, in the frosty chill of the late autumn just before dawn, shivering between grief and cold, and he walked quickly down the avenue, feeling it strange that the windows in the face of his own house were glittering back the reflection of the setting moon.

Something long and black came from the opposite direction. "Rector," it said, in a low hoarse voice, "I've got leave from him to use what he said to you. Sister Margaret and I signed it. Will that do?"

"I can't tell now, Herbert, I can't think. My brother is just gone," said Julius in his inward voice.

"Raymond! No! Oh, I beg your pardon; I never thought of that; Raymond—"

"Go home and go to bed," said Julius, as the young man wrung his hand. "Rest now—we must think another time."

Did Rosamond know? was perhaps the foremost of his weary thoughts. Ah! did she not! Was she not standing with her crimson shawl round her, and the long black plaits falling on it, to beckon him to the firelit comfort of his own room? Did she not fall on his neck as he came heavily up, and cling around him with her warm arms? "Oh, Julius, what a dear brother he was! What can we do for your mother?"

As he told her how Frank's need did more than any support could do for her, her tears came thicker; but in spite of them, her fond hands put him into the easy-chair by the fire, and drew off his damp boots; and while listening to the low sunken voice that told her of the end, she made ready the cup of cocoa that was waiting, and put the spoon in his hand in a caressing manner, that made her care, comfort, not oppression. Fatigue seconded her, for he took the warm food, faltered and leant back, dozing till the baby's voice awoke him, and as he saw Rosamond hushing her, he exclaimed:

"O, Rose! if poor Raymond had ever known one hour like this!" and he held out his arms for his child.

"You know I don't let you hold her in that coat. Go into your dressing-room, have your bath, and put on your dressing-gown, and if you will lie on the bed, you shall take care of her while I go and feed Terry. You can't do anything for anybody yet, it is only six o'clock."

These precautions, hindering his going jaded and exhausted into infection, were what Rosamond seemed to live for, though she never forced them on him, and he was far too physically tired out not to yield to the soothing effect; so that even two hours on the bed sent him forth renovated to that brief service in the church, where Herbert and he daily met and found their strength for the day. They had not had time to exchange a word after it before there was a knock at the vestry door, and a servant gave the message to Herbert, who had opened it: "Lady Tyrrell is taken worse, sir, and Sir Harry Vivian begged that Mr. Charnock would come immediately."

A carriage had been sent for him, and he could only hurry home to tell Rosamond to send on the pony to Sirenwood, to take him to Wil'sbro', unless he were first wanted at home. She undertook to go up to the Hall and give Anne a little rest, and he threw himself into the carriage, not daring to dwell on the pain it gave him to go from his brother's death bed to confront Camilla.

At the door Eleonora came to meet him. "Thank you," she said. "We knew it was no time to disturb you."

"I can be better spared *now*," answered Julius.

"You don't mean," she said, with a strange look, which was not quite surprise.

"Yes, my dear brother left us at about three o'clock last night. A change came on at twelve."

"Twelve!" Eleonora laid her hand on his arm, and spoke in a quick agitated manner. "Camilla was much better till last night, when at twelve I heard such a scream that I ran into her room. She was sitting up with her eyes fixed open, like a clairvoyante, and her voice seemed pleading—pleading with *him*, as if for pardon, and she held out her hands and called him. Then, suddenly, she gave a terrible shriek, and fell back in a kind of fit. Mr. M'Vie can do nothing, and though she is conscious now, she does nothing but ask for you and say that he does not want you now."

Julius grew paler, as he said very low, "Anne said he seemed to be seeing and answering *her*. Not like delirium, but as if she were really there."

"Don't tell any one," entreated Eleonora, in a breathless whisper, and he signed consent, as both felt how those two spirits must have been entwined, since these long years had never broken that subtle link of sympathy which had once bound them.

Sir Harry's face, dreary, sunken, and terrified, was thrust over the balusters, as he called, "Don't hinder him, Lena, she asks for him every moment;" and as they came on, he caught Julius's hand, saying, "Soothe her, soothe her—'tis the only chance. If she could but sleep!"

There lay Camilla Tyrrell, beautiful still, but more than ever like the weird tragic head with snake-wreathed brows, in the wasted contour of her regular features and the flush on her hollow cheeks, while her eyes burned with a strange fire that almost choked back Julius's salutation of peace, even while he breathed it, for might not the Son of Peace be with some there?

The eager glance seemed to dart at him. "Julius Charnock!" she cried, "come!" and as he would have said some word about her health, she cut him short: "Never mind that; I must speak while my brain serves. After that be the priest. He is dead!"

"My brother? Yes."

"The only one I ever loved! There's no sin nor scandal in saying so now. His wife is better? It will never kill her."

"She does not know."

"No? There was nothing to make her. He could not give her his heart, try as he would. Why did he turn the unchangeable to hate! hate! hate!"

"Lady Tyrrell, you did not send for me to hear what ought not to be said at all?"

"Don't fly off," she said. "I had really something to say. It was not wholly hate, Julius; I really tried to teach his little idiot of a wife to win him at last. I meant it to turn out well, and nothing could, with that mother there."

"I must leave you, Lady Tyrrell, if you will not control yourself."

"Don't be hard on me, Julius," and she looked up with a glance of better days. "You idolize her, like all the rest of you; but she chilled me and repelled me, and turned me to bitterness, when I was young and he might have led me. Her power and his idolatry made me jealous, and what I did in a fit of petulance was so fastened on that I could not draw back. Why did not he wait a little longer to encumber himself with that girl! No—that wasn't what I had to say—it's all over now. It is the other thing. How is Frank?"

"Very ill indeed; but quieter just now."

"Then there shall not be another wreck like ours. Lena, are you here? You saw that Frank had let Constance Strangeways win your pebble. It was because I showed him the one Beatrice bought, and he thought it yours. Yes, I saw nothing else for it. What was to become of the property if you threw yourself away, and on *her* son?" she added, with the malignant look. "Whether he knew of this little vow of yours, I can't tell, but he had lost his head and did for himself. It was for your good and papa's; but I shall not be here to guide the clue, so you must go your own way and be happy in it, if *she* will let you. Father, do you hear? Don't think to please me by hindering the course of true love; and you, Julius, tell Frank he was 'a dull Moor.' I liked the boy, I was sorry for him; but he ought to have known his token better;—and there was the estate to be saved."

"Estates weigh little now!"

"Clerical! I suppose now is the time for it? You were all precision at Compton. It would kill me; I can't live with Mrs. Poyntsett. No, no, Tom, I can't have old Raymond quizzed; I'll get him out of it when the leading-strings are cut. What right has she—?"

The delirium had returned. Julius's voice kept her still for a few moments, but she broke out afresh at his first pause, and murmurs fell thick and fast from her tongue, mixing the names of her brother and Raymond with railings at Mrs. Poyntsett for slights in the days when the mother was striving to discourage the inclination that resulted in the engagement.

Earnestly did Julius beseech for peace, for repentance for the poor storm-tossed soul; but when the raving grew past control, and the time was coming for his ministrations to the Vicar of Wil'sbro', he was forced to leave her. Poor old Sir Harry would have clung to him as to anything like a support, but Eleonora knew better. "No, dear papa," she said, "he has given us too much of his time already. He must go where he can still help. Poor Camilla cannot attend to him."

"If she came to herself—"

"Then send for me. I would come instantly. Send to the town-hall any time before twelve, after that to Compton. Send without scruples, Lenore, you have truly the right."

They did not send, except that a note met him as he returned home, telling him that suffusion of the brain had set in. Camilla Tyrrell did not survive Raymond Poyntsett twelve hours.

## CHAPTER XXX

### Come Back

And are ye sure the news is true?  
And are ye sure he's weel?—J. THOMPSON

Eleonora Vivian was striving to write her sorrowful announcements in the deepening dusk of that autumn evening, while her father had shut himself up after his vigil to sleep under Victor's care, when a message came that Lady Rosamond Charnock earnestly begged to see her. She stood with a face white and set, looking like a galvanized corpse, as her lips framed the words, "He is dead!"

"No!" almost screamed Rosamond, snatching her hand. "No! But no one can save him but you. Come!"

Without a word, Eleonora stepped into her own room, and came back in cloak, hat, and veil.

"Right," said Rosamond, seizing her arm, and taking her to the pony-carriage at the door, then explaining while driving rapidly: "He has left off raving ever since his mother has been with him, but he lies—not still but weak, not speaking, only moaning now and then. His throat is so dreadful that it is hard to give him anything, and he takes no notice of what one says, only if his mother takes the spoon. He gets weaker, and Dr. Worth says it is only because there is no impulse to revive him—he is just sinking because he can't be roused. When I heard that, I thought I knew who could."

Eleonora's lips once moved, but no sound came from them, and Rosamond urged her little pony to its best speed through the two parks from one veiled house to another, fastened it to the garden-door without calling any one, and led her silent companion up the stairs.

Mrs. Poyntsett felt a hand on her shoulder, and Rosamond said, "I have brought our only hope," and Eleonora stood, looking at the ghastly face. The yellow skin, the inflamed purple lips, the cavernous look of cheeks and eyes, were a fearful sight, and only the feeble incessant groping of the skeleton fingers showed life or action.

"Put this into his hand," said Rosamond, and Lenore found the pebble token given to her, and obeyed. At the touch, a quivering trembled over face and form, the eyelids lifted, the eyes met hers, there was a catching of the breath, a shudder and convulsive movement. "He is going," cried his mother, but Anne started forward with drops of strong stimulant, Rosamond rubbed spirit into his forehead, the struggle lessened, the light flickered back into his brown eyes, his fingers closed on hers. "Speak to him," said Mrs. Poyntsett. "Do you see her, Frankie dear?"

"Frank! dear Frank, here I am."

The eyes gazed with more meaning, the lips moved, but no sound came till Anne had given another drop of the stimulant, and the terrible pain of the swallowing was lessened. Then he looked up, and the words were heard.

"Is it true?"

"It is, my dear boy. It is Lena."

"Here, Frank," as still the wistful gaze was unsatisfied; she laid her hands on his, and then he almost smiled and tried to raise it to his cheeks, but he was too weak; and she obeyed the feeble gesture, and stroked the wasted face, while a look of content came over it, the eyes closed, and he slept with his face against her hand, his mother watching beside with ineffable gratitude and dawning hope.

Lenore was forgetting everything in this watching, but in another quarter of an hour Anne was forced again to torture him with her spoon; but life was evidently gaining ground, for though he put it from him at first, he submitted at Lena's gesture and word. She felt the increased warmth and power in his grasp, as he whispered, "Lena, you are come back," then felt for the token.

Alas! that she must leave him. They knew she must not stay away from her father; indeed, Rosamond had told no one of her attempt, her forlorn hope. Lena tried to give assurances that she only went because it could not be helped, and the others told him she would return, but still he held her, and murmured, "Stay." She could not tear herself away, she let him keep her hand, and again he dozed and his fingers relaxed. "Go now, my dear," said Mrs. Poyntsett, "you have saved him. This stone will show him that you have been here. You will come back to-morrow, I may promise him?"

"Yes, yes. In the morning, or whenever I can be spared," whispered Lena, who was held for a moment to Mrs. Poyntsett's breast, ere Rosamond took her away again, and brought her once more down-stairs and to the pony-carriage. There she leant back, weeping quietly but bitterly over the shock of Frank's terribly reduced state, which seemed to take from her all the joy of his revival, weeping too at the cruel need that was taking her away.

"He will do now! I know he will," said Rosamond, happy in her bold venture.

"Oh! if I could stay!"

"Most likely you would be turned out for fear of excitement. The stone will be safer for him."

"Where did that come from?" asked Lenore, struck suddenly with wonder.

"I wrote to Miss Strangeways, when I saw how he was always feeling, feeling, feeling for it, like

the Bride of Lammermoor. I told her there was more than she knew connected with that bit of stone, and life or death might hang on it. Then when I'd got it, I hardly knew what to do with it, for if it had soothed the poor boy delirious, the coming to his right mind might have been all the worse."

Rosamond kissed her effusively, and she dreamily muttered, "He must be saved." There was a sort of strange mist round her, as though she knew not what she was doing, and she longed to be alone. She would not let Rosamond drive her beyond the Sirenwood gate, but insisted on walking through the park alone in the darkness, by that very path where Frank had ten months ago exchanged vows with her.

Rosamond turned back to the Hall. It was poor Cecil's pony-carriage that she was driving, and she took it to the stable-yard, where her entreaty had obtained it from the coachman, whom she rewarded by saying, "I was right, Brown, I fetched his best doctor," and the old servant understood, and came as near a smile as any one at Compton could do on such a day.

"Is the carriage gone for Mr. Charnock?"

"Yes, my lady, I sent Alfred with it; I did not seem as if I could go driving into Wil'sbro' on such a day."

Rosamond bade a kind farewell to the poor old coachman, and was walking homewards, when she saw a figure advancing towards her, strangely familiar, and yet hat and coat forbade her to believe it her husband, even in the dusk. She could not help exclaiming, "Miles!"

"Yes!" he said, coming to a standstill. "Are you Rosamond?"

"I am;—Anne is quite well and Frank better. Oh! this will do them good! You know—"

"Yes—yes, I know," he said hastily, as if he could not bear to let himself out to one as yet a stranger. "My mother?"

"Absorbed in Frank too much to feel it yet fully; Anne watches them both. Oh! Miles, what she has been!" and she clasped his hand again. "Let me call her."

And Rosamond opened the hall door just as some instinct, for it could hardly have been sense of hearing, had brought Anne upon the stairs, where, as Miles would have hurried up to her, she seemed, in the light gray dress she still wore, to hover like some spirit eluding his grasp like the fabled shades.

"Oh no! you ought not. Infection—I am steeped in it."

"Nonsense," and she was gathered into the strong grasp that was home and rest to her, while Miles was weeping uncontrollably as he held her in his arms. "O, Nannie, Nannie! I did not think it would be like this. Why did they keep me till he was gone? No, I did not get the telegram, I only heard at the station. They let me go this morning, and I did think I should have been in time." He loosed himself from her, and hung over the balustrade, struggling with a strong man's anguish, then said in a low voice, "Did he want me?"

"He knew it was your duty," said Anne. "We all were thankful you were kept from infection, and he said many little things, but the chief was that he trusted you too much to leave any special messages. Hark! that must be Mr. Charnock, Cecil's father! I must go and receive him. Stay back, Miles, you can't now—you know my room—"

He signed acquiescence, but lingered in the dark to look down and see how, though Rosamond had waited to spare them this reception, his wife's tall graceful figure came forward, and her kindly comforting gestures, as the two sisters-in-law took the newcomer into the drawing-room, and in another minute Anne flitted up to him again. "That good Rosamond is seeing to Mr. Charnock," she said; "will you come, Miles? I think it will do your mother good; only quietly, for Frank knows nothing."

Mrs. Poyntsett still sat by Frank. To Miles's eyes he was a fearful spectacle, but to Anne there was hourly progress; the sunken dejected look was gone, and though there was exhaustion, there was rest; but he was neither sleeping nor waking, and showed no heed when his brother dropped on one knee by his mother's side, put an arm round her waist, and after one fervent kiss laid his black head on her lap, hiding his face there while she fondled his hair, and said, "Frank, Frankie dear, here's Miles come home." He did not seem to hear, only his lips murmured something like 'Anne,' and the tender hand and ready touch of his unwearied nurse at once fulfilled his need, while his mother whispered, "Miles, she is our blessing!"

Poor Miles! Never had sailor a stranger, though some may have had an even sadder, return. He had indeed found his wife, but hers was the only hand that could make Frank swallow the sustenance that he needed every half-hour, or who knew how to relieve him. Indeed, even the being together in the sick-room was not long possible, for Anne was called to the door. Mr. Charnock was asking to see Mrs. Poyntsett. Would Mrs. Miles come and speak to him?

Mr. Charnock was a small and restless man with white hair, little black eyes, looking keener than they were, and a face which had evidently been the mould of Cecil's. He was very kind, with a full persuasion that the consolations of his august self must be infallible; but this was coupled with an inclination to reprove everybody for the fate that had left his cherished darling a childless widow at two-and-twenty. To take him to Frank's room was impossible, and he had to be roundly



told so. Neither had he seen his daughter. She was very weak, but recovering, and Grindstone, whom he had seen and talked with, was as strenuous in deprecating any excitement as he was nervous about it. So he could only be disposed of in his room till dinner-time, when he came down prepared to comfort the family, but fulfilled his mission rather by doing such good as a blister, which lessens the force of the malady by counter-irritation.

Julius came up to be with Miles, and to help them through the dinner, the first which had been laid for many a long day. His enquiry for Cecil was answered: "She is progressing as favourably as there can be reason to expect, but I have not seen her. I follow the judgment of her faithful Grindstone."

"Then she still knows nothing—"

"Of her bereavement? No. Her state does not yet warrant it. In fact, I almost wish I had obeyed my original impulse, and brought down Venn to make the melancholy communication."

To every one's surprise Anne bristled up, saying, "Why, here is Julius, Mr. Charnock!"

Mr. Charnock bowed: "I understand that my Cousin Julius has been engrossed by his wife's family and by the adjoining parish, the care of which he has assumed."

Anne fairly coloured up, and exclaimed, "Julius has been our main-stay and help in everything—I can't think how he has done it. He has been here whenever we needed him, as well as at Wil'sbro', where people have been dying everywhere, the poor Vicar and all—"

"Far be it from me to discourage philanthropy," said Mr. Charnock, "only I would have it within due bounds. I am an old-fashioned squire, of a school, it may be, antiquated, an advocate of the parochial system; and I cannot help thinking that if this had been closely adhered to by hot-headed young clergymen, my poor child might not have been a childless widow at two-and-twenty."

Julius was too much tired and too sad-hearted to heed greatly what Mr. Charnock said. It was so strange to have Miles in sight, yet to feel so unable to be glad, that he scarcely heard anything. But Anne again took up the cudgels: "Mr. Charnock, you don't suppose that it was anything Julius did that brought this fever here. It was going to the town-hall among the drains."

"My dear Mrs. Miles Charnock, I am sure your husband will agree with me that sanitary arrangements and all connected with them are beyond the range of ladies, who are happily exempted from all knowledge of the subject."

Anne could not say aloud that she wished Cecil had held this opinion, but she subsided, while Mr. Charnock prosed on, asking questions about the arrangements, and seeming shocked to hear that the funeral must be early the next day, this being one of the prime injunctions of the doctors, and that the one had been asked to attend it. It made him sigh again for his poor daughter, as he handed Anne in to dinner. She did not stay half through it, for it was again the time for feeding Frank. Miles went half way up-stairs with her and returned, looking very wistful. Julius smiled at him, "Your wife is too valuable, Miles; she is every one's property."

"It must be very gratifying to you," added Mr. Charnock, "to find how example and superior society have developed the native qualities your discernment detected in the charming young lady who has just quitted us. It was a most commendable arrangement to send her to enjoy the advantages of this place."

"I sent her to be a comfort to my mother," said Miles, bluntly.

"And so she has been," said Julius, fervently, but *sotto voce*.

"I understand," said Mr. Charnock; "and as I was saying, my dear Cecil expressed from the first her desire to assist in forming her stranger sister-in-law, and I am happy to see the excellent effect. I should scarcely have guessed that she came from a colony."

"Indeed," Miles answered dryly.

Mr. Charnock might have it his own way, if he liked to think Anne had been a Hottentot till Cecil reclaimed her.

The two brothers did feel something like joy when a message at last informed Mr. Charnock that his daughter was awake and he might see her. They drew nearer together, and leant against one another, with absolute joy in the contact. They were singularly alike in outline, voice, and manner, in everything but colouring, and had always been one in spirit, except for the strong passion for adventure which had taken Miles to sea, to find he had chosen his profession too young to count the cost, and he held to it rather by duty than taste. Slight as had been his seniority, poor Raymond had always been on a sort of paternal pinnacle, sharing the administration with his mother, while Miles and Julius had paired on an equality.

"Poor mother!" sighed Miles. "How is she to live without him? Julius, did he leave any word for me with you?"

"Above all, that Anne is the daughter for my mother, and so she is."

"What, when this poor wife of Raymond's was said to be the superior creature?"

"You see her adoring father," said Julius. "My Rose has necessarily her own cares, but Anne has been my mother's silent aid and stay for months, and what she has been in the present need no words can say. My mother has had no power to take the direction of anything, her whole being has been absorbed, first in Raymond, now in Frank; and not only has Anne been Frank's constant nurse through these five weeks of the most frightful fever and delirium I have seen at all here, but she has had thought for all, and managed all the house and servants. We could do comparatively little, with Rose's brother ill at home, and the baby so young; besides, there have been eleven cases in the parish; and there was Wil'sbro'—but Anne has been the angel in the house."

"I knew—I knew she would be everything when once the first strangeness was over; but, poor girl, her heart is in Africa, and it has been all exile here; I could see it in every letter, though she tried to make the best of it. If there had but been a child here!"

"I think you will find sufficient attachment to mother to weigh a good deal with her. Poor Anne, she did think us all very wicked at first, and perhaps she does still, but at least this has drawn us all nearer together."

And then the brothers lowered their voices, and Miles heard the full history of Raymond's last illness, with all the details that Julius could have spoken of to none else, while the sailor's tears slowly dropped through the hands that veiled his face. It was a great deprivation to him that he might not look on Raymond's face again, but the medical edict had been decisive, and he had come home to be of use and not a burthen. As Julius told Rosamond, he only thoroughly felt the blessing of Miles's return when he bade good night and left the Hall, in peace and security that it had a sufficient aid and stay, and that he was not deserting it.

Miles had proposed to send his wife to bed and take the night watch, and he so far prevailed that she lay down in the adjoining room in her dressing gown while he sat by Frank's side. She lay where she could feast her eyes upon him, as the lamplight fell on his ruddy brown cheek, black hair, and steady dark eye, so sad indeed, but so full of quiet strength and of heedful alacrity even in stillness—a look that poor Raymond, with all his grave dignity, had never worn. That sight was all Anne wanted. She did not speak, she did not sleep; it was enough, more than enough, to have him there. She was too much tired, body and mind, after five weeks of strain, for more than the sense that God had given her back what she loved, and this was 'more than peace and more than rest.'

## CHAPTER XXXI

### Breaking Down

Funerals were little attended in these sad days. The living had to be regarded more than the dead, and Raymond Poyntsett was only followed to the grave by his two brothers, his father-in-law, and some of the servants. Rosamond, however, weeping her soft profuse tears, could hear everything from behind the blind at Terry's open window, on that moist warm autumn day; everything, for no exception was made to the rule that coffins might not be taken into the church during this deadly sickness. She did hear a faltering and a blundering, which caused her to look anxiously at the tall white figure standing at the head of the grave, and, as she now saw, once or twice catching at the iron railing that fenced in the Poyntsett tombs. Neither her husband nor his brother seemed to notice what she observed. Absorbed in the sorrow and in one another, they turned away after the service was ended and walked towards the Hall. Rosamond did not speak for a minute or two, then she turned round to Terry, who was sitting up in bed, with an awe-struck face, listening as well as he could to the low sounds, and watching her.

"Terry, dear, shall you mind my going to see after Herbert Bowater? I am sure they have let him overwork himself. If he is not fit to take Lady Tyrrell's funeral this afternoon, I *shall* send to Duddingstone on my own responsibility. I will not have Julius doing that!"

"Do you think he is ill—Bowater, I mean?" asked Terry.

"I don't like it. He seemed to totter as he went across the churchyard, and he blundered. I shall go and see."

"Oh yes, go," said Terry; "I don't want anybody. Don't hurry."

Rosamond put on her hat and sped away to Mrs. Hornblower's. As usual, the front door leading to the staircase was open, and, going up, she knocked at the sitting-room door; but the only response was such a whining and scratching that she supposed the dogs had been left prisoners there and forgotten, and so she turned the lock—but there was an obstruction; so that though Mungo and Tartar darted out and snuffed round her, only Rollo's paw and head appeared, and there was a beseeching earnestness in his looks and little moans, as if entreating her to come in. Another push, vigorously seconded by Rollo within, showed her that it was Herbert's shoulder that hindered her, and that he was lying outstretched on the floor, apparently just recalled to consciousness by the push; for as Rollo proceeded to his one remedy of licking, there was a faint murmur of "Who—what—"

"It is I! What is the matter?"

"Lady Rose! I'll—I'll try to move—oh!" His voice died away, and Rosamond thrust in her salts, and called to Mrs. Hornblower for water, but in vain. However, Herbert managed to move a little to one side. She squeezed into the doorway, hastily brought water from his bedroom within, and, kneeling down by him, bathed his face, so that he revived to say, in the same faint voice, "I'm so sorry I made such mulls. I couldn't see. I thought I knew it by heart."

"Never mind, never mind, dear Herbert! You are better. Couldn't you let me help you to the sofa?"

"Oh, presently;" and as she took his head on her lap, "Thank you; I did mean to hold out till after this day's work; but it is all right now Bindon is come."

"Come!—is he?" she joyfully exclaimed.

"Yes, I saw him from the window. I was getting up to hail him when the room turned upside down with me."

"There's his step!" now exclaimed Rosamond. "Squeeze in, Mr. Bindon; you are a very welcome sight."

Mr. Bindon did make his way in, and stood dismayed at the black mass on the floor. Rosamond and Rollo, one on each side of Herbert's great figure, in his cassock, and the rosy face deadly white, while Mungo and Tartar, who hated Mr. Bindon, both began to bark, and thus did the most for their master, whose call of 'Quiet! you brutes,' seemed to give him sudden strength. He took a grip of Rollo's curly back, and, supported by Mr. Bindon, dragged himself to the sofa and fell heavily back on it.

"Give him some brandy," said Mr. Bindon, hastily.

"There's not a drop of anything," muttered Herbert; "it's all gone—"

"To Wil'sbro'," explained Rosamond; then seeing the scared face of Dilemma at the door, she hastily gave a message, and sent her flying to the Rectory, while Mr. Bindon was explaining.

"I wish I had known. I never will go out of the reach of letters again. I saw in the *Times*, at Innsbruck, a mention of typhoid fever here, and I came back as fast as trains would bring me; but too late, I fear."

"You are welcome, indeed," repeated Rosamond. "Herbert has broken down at last, after doing more than man could do, and I am most thankful that my husband should be saved the funerals at Wil'sbro'."

Mr. Bindon, whose face showed how shocked he was, made a few inquiries. He had learnt the main facts on his way, but had been seeking his junior to hear the details, and he looked, like the warrior who had missed Thermopylæ, ashamed and grieved at his holiday.

The bottle Rosamond had sent for arrived, and there was enough vigour restored to make her say, "Here's a first service, Mr. Bindon, to help this poor fellow into bed."

"No, no!" exclaimed Herbert.

"You are not going to say there's nothing the matter with you?" said Rosamond, as a flush passed over the pale face.

"No," he said; "but I want to go home. I should have taken a fly at Wil'sbro'. Cranky will see to me without bothering anybody else. If you would send for one—"

"I don't think I can till I know whether you are fit to move," said Rosamond. "I desired Dilemma to tell them to send Dr. Worth here when he comes to Terry. Besides, is it quite right to carry *this* into another place?"

"I never thought of that," said Herbert. "But they would shut me up; nobody come near me but Cranky." But there a shivering fit caught him, so that the sofa shook with him, and Rosamond covered him with rugs, and again told him bed was the only place for him, and he consented at last, holding his head as he rose, dizzy with the ache.

"Look here, Lady Rose," he said, falling back into a sitting posture at the first attempt, "where's my writing-case? If I go off my head, will you give this to the Rector, and ask him if it will be any good in the matter he knows of?" and he handed her an envelope. "And this keep," he added, giving her one addressed to his father. "Don't let him have it till it's all over. You know." Then he took up a pen and a sheet of paper, and got as far, with a shaking hand, as 'Dear Crank—' but there he broke down, and laid his head on the table, groaning.

"I'll do it. What shall I say, dear Herbert?"

"Only tell her to come to me," he gasped. "Cranstoun—our old nurse. Then I'll be no trouble."

While Mr. Bindon helped Herbert into his room, Rosamond sped home to send for Mrs. Cranstoun, arrange for the care of the new patient in the intervening hours, and fetch some of those alleviations of which experience had taught the use. Mr. Bindon came to meet her on her return, carefully shutting the door, and saying, "Lady Rosamond, can he be delirious already? He

is talking of being plucked for his Ordination."

"Too true," said Rosamond. "I thought it a great shame to be so hard on a man with *that* in him; but I believe you expected it?"

"No; I may have said he would fail, but I never expected it."

"Fail, indeed! Fancy a man being turned back who has worked night and day—night and day—doing all the very hardest services—never resting! Very likely killing himself!" cried Rosamond hotly. "May I come back to him? Terry can spare me, and if you will go to Wil'sbro' I'll stay till my husband comes, or the doctor. The Sisters will tell you what to do."

Herbert was, however, so much more comfortable for being in bed, that he was able to give Mr. Bindon directions as to the immediate cares at Wil'sbro'; but he was distressed at occupying Lady Rose, his great object being to be no trouble to anybody, though he had seen so much of the disease as to have been fully aware that it had been setting in for the last two days, yet his resolution to spare his Rector had kept him afoot till he had seen other help arrive. He declared that he wanted nobody but Rollo, who could fetch and carry, and call any one, if only the doors were open, and really the creature's wistful eyes and gentle movements justified the commendation.

"Only," said Herbert anxiously, "I suppose this is not catching for dogs. You'll make a home for him Lady Rose?" he added. "I should like you to have him, and he'll be happier with you than with any one else."

"Herbert, I can't have you talk of that."

"Very well," he said, quietly. "Only you will keep my dear old fellow—I've had him from a puppy—and he is but three years old now."

Rosamond gave all promises, from her full heart, as she fondled the soft, wise black head.

Herbert was unhappy too about Mrs. Hornblower's trouble. Harry had been one of the slighter cases, and was still in his room, a good deal subdued by the illness, and by the attention the lodger had shown him; for Herbert had spent many hours, when he had been supposed to be resting, in relieving Mrs. Hornblower, and she was now in a flood of gratitude, only longing to do everything for him herself. Had he not, as she declared, saved her son, body and soul?

The most welcome sight was Julius, who came down in dismay as soon as he could leave the Hall. "I am so glad," said the patient; "I want to talk things over while my head is clearer than it ever may be again."

"Don't begin by desponding. These fevers are much less severe now than six weeks ago."

"Yes; but they always go the hardest with the great big strong young fellows. I've buried twelve young men out of the whole forty-five."

"Poor lads, I doubt if their life had been such a preparation as yours."

"Don't talk of my life. A stewardship I never set myself to contemplate, and so utterly failed in. I've got nothing to carry to my God but broken vows and a wasted year."

"Nothing can be brought but repentance."

"Yes, but look at others who have tried, felt their duties, and cared for souls; while I thought only of my vows as a restraint, and tried how much pleasure I could get in spite of them. A pretty story of all the ministry I shall ever have."

"These last weeks!"

"Common humanity—nonsense! I should always have done as much; besides, I was crippled everywhere, not merely by want of power as a priest, but by having made myself such a shallow, thoughtless ass. But that was not what I wanted to say. It was about Gadley and his confession."

"O, Herbert! I am afraid I was very unkind that night. I did not think of anything but our own trouble, nor see how much it had cost you."

"Of course not—nonsense. You had enough to think of yourself, and I was only ashamed of having bored you."

"And when I think of the state of that room, I am afraid it was then you took in the poison."

"Don't say *afraid*. If it was for Jenny, I shall have done some good in the world. But the thing is—is it good? Will it clear Douglas? I suppose what he said to you was under seal of confession?"

"Scarcely so, technically; but when a man unburthens himself on his death-bed, and then, so far from consenting, shows terror and dismay at the notion of his words being taken down as evidence, it seems to me hardly right or honourable to make use of them—though it would right a great wrong. But what did you get from him?"

"I gave Lady Rose the paper. He raved most horribly for an hour or two, as if all the foul talk of his pot-house had got into his brain," said Herbert, with a shudder. "Rector, Rector, pray for me, that I mayn't come out with *that* at any rate. It has haunted me ever since. Well, at last he slept,

and woke up sinking but conscious, knew me, and began to ask if this was death, and was frightened, clutching at me, and asking to be held, and what he could do. I told him at least he could undo a wrong, if he would only authorize us to use what he said to clear Douglas; and then, as Sister Margaret had come across, I wrote as well as I could: "George Gadley authorizes what he said to the Rev. Julius Charnock to be used as evidence;" and I suppose he saw us sign it, if he could see at all, for his sight was nearly gone."

Julius drew a long breath.

"And now, what was it?" said Herbert.

"Well, the trio—Moy, young Proudfoot, and Tom Vivian—detained a letter of my mother's, with a cheque in it, and threw the blame of it on Archie Douglas. They thought no one was in the office but themselves; but Gadley was a clerk there, and was in the outer room, where he heard all. He came to Moy afterwards, and has been preying on him for hush-money ever since."

"And this will set things straight?"

"Yes. How to set about the public justification I do not yet see; but with your father, and all the rest, Archie's innocence will be as plain as it always has been to us."

"Where is he?"

"On an ostrich farm at Natal."

"Whew!—we must have him home. Jenny can't be spared. Poor Jenny, when she hears that, it will make all other things light to her."

"What is their address?"

"No, don't write. Mamma has had a fresh cold, and neither my father nor Jenny could leave her. Let them have a little peace till it gets worse. There will be plenty of time, if it is to be a twenty-eight days business like the others. Poor mamma!" and he rolled his head away; then, after some minutes of tossing and shivering, he asked for a prayer out of the little book in his pocket. "I should know it, but my memory is muddled, I think."

The book—a manual for sick-rooms—was one which Julius had given him new five weeks back. It showed wear already, having been used as often in that time as in six ordinary years of parish work. By the time the hard-pressed doctor came, it was plain that the fever was setting in severely, aggravated no doubt by the dreadful night at the 'Three Pigeons,' and the unrelaxed exertions ever since; for he was made to allow that he had come home in the chill morning air, cold, sickened, and exhausted; had not chosen to disturb anybody, and had found no refreshment but a raw apple—the last drop of wine having been bestowed on the sick; had lain down for a short sleep worse than waking, and had neither eaten nor slept since, but worked on by sheer strength of will and muscle. When Julius thought of the cherishing care that he had received himself, he shuddered, with a sort of self-reproach for his neglect; and the doctor, though good-humouredly telling Herbert not to think he knew anything about his own symptoms, did not conceal from Julius that enough harm had been done in these few days to give the fine Bowater constitution a hard struggle.

"Grown careless," he said. "Regular throwing away of his life."

Careless Herbert might have been, but Julius wondered whether this might not be losing of the life to find it.

Cranstoun or Cranky arrived, a charming old nurse, much gratified in the midst of her grief, and inclination to scold. She summarily sent off Mungo and Tartar by the conveyance that brought her, and would have sent Rollo away, but that Herbert protested against it, and no power short of an order from him would have taken the dog from his bedside.

And Mr. Bindon returned from Wil'sbro' in unspeakable surprise. "The heroes of the occasion," he said, "were Bowater and Mrs. Duncombe! Every sick person I visited, and there were fourteen in all stages, had something to say of one or other. Poor things, how their faces fell when they saw me instead of his bright, honest face! 'Cheering the very heart of one!' as a poor woman said; 'That's what I call a true shepherd,' said an old man. You don't really mean he was rejected at the Ordination?"

"Yes, and it will make him the still truer shepherd, if he is only spared!"

"The Sisters can't say enough of him. They thought him very ill yesterday, and implored him to take care of himself; but he declared he could not leave these two funerals to you. But, after all, he is less amazing to me than Mrs. Duncombe. She has actually been living at the hospital with the Sisters. I should not have known her."

"Great revolutions have happened in your absence. Much that has drawn out her sterling worth, poor woman."

"I shall never speak harshly again, I hope. It seems to be a judgment on me that I should have been idling on the mountains, while those two were thus devoting themselves to my Master in His poor."

"We are thankful enough to have you coming in fresh, instead of breaking down now. Have you a

sermon? You will have to take Wil'sbro' to-morrow. Driver won't come. He wrote to the churchwardens that he had a cold, and that his agreement was with poor Fuller."

"And you undertook the Sunday?"

"Yes. They would naturally have no Celebration, and I thought Herbert's preaching in the midst of his work would be good for them. You never heard such an apology and confession as the boy made to our people the first Sunday here, begging them to bear with him."

"Then I can't spare you anything here?"

"Yes, much care and anxiety. The visitation has done its worst in our house. We have got into the lull after the storm, and you need not be anxious about me. There is peace in what I have to do now. It is gathering the salvage after the wreck."

Then Julius went into his own house, where he found Terry alone, and, as usual, ravenously hungry.

"Is Bowater really ill?" he asked.

"I am afraid there is no believing otherwise, Terry," said Julius. "You will have to spare Rose to him sometimes, till some one comes to nurse him."

"I would spare anything to him," said Terry, fervently. "Julius, it is finer than going into battle!"

"I thought you did not care much for battles, Terry."

"If it was battles, I should not mind," said the boy; "it is peaceful soldiering that I have seen too much of. But don't you bother my father, Julius, I won't grumble any more; I made up my mind to that."

"I know you did, my boy; but you did so much futile arithmetic, and so often told us that  $a+b=c$  equalled Peter the Great, that Dr. Worth said you must not be put to mathematics for months to come, and I have told your father that if he cannot send you to Oxford, we will manage it."

A flush of joy lighted up the boy's face. "Julius, you are a brick of a brother!" he said. "I'll do my best to get a scholarship."

"And the best towards that you can do now is to get well as soon as possible."

"Yes. And you lie down on the sofa there, Julius, and sleep—Rose would say you must. Only I want to say one thing more, please. If I do get to Oxford, and you are so good, I've made up my mind to one thing. It's not only for the learning that I'll go; but I'll try to be a soldier in your army and Bowater's. That's all that seems to me worth the doing now."

So Julius dropped asleep, with a thankworthy augury in his ears. It is not triumph, but danger and death that lead generous spirits each to step where his comrade stood!

## CHAPTER XXXII

### The Salvage

Frank was certainly better. Ever since that sight of Eleonora he had been mending. If he muttered her name, or looked distressed, it was enough to guide his hand to her token, he smiled and slept again; and on the Sunday morning his throat and mouth were so much better, that he could both speak and swallow without nearly so much pain; but one of his earliest sayings was, "Louder, please, I can't hear. When does she come?"

Mrs. Poyntsett raised her voice, Anne tried; but he frowned and sighed, and only when Miles uttered a sea-captain's call close to his ear, did he smile comprehension, adding, "Were you shouting?" a fact only too evident to those around.

"Then I'm deaf," he said. And Anne wrote and set before him, "We hope it will pass as you get better." He looked grateful, but there was little more communication, for his eyes and head were still weak, and signs and looks were the chief currency; however, Julius met Eleonora after morning service, to beg her to renew her visit, after having first prepared her for what she would find. Eleonora was much distressed; then paused a minute, and said, "It does him good to see me?"

"It seems to be the one thing that keeps him up," said Julius, surprised at the question.

"O, yes! I can't—I could not stay away," she said. "It is all so wrong together; yet this last time cannot hurt!"

"Last time?"

"Yes; did you not know that papa has set his heart on going to London to-morrow? Yes, early to-morrow. And it will be for ever. We shall never see Sirenwood again."

She stood still, almost bent with the agony of suppressed grief.

"I am very sorry; but I do not wonder he wishes for change."

"He has been in an agony to go these three days. It was all I could do to get him to stay to-day. You don't think it will do Frank harm? Then I would stay, if I took lodgings in the village; but otherwise—poor papa—I think it is my duty—and he can't do without me."

"I think Frank is quite capable of understanding that you are forced to go, and that he need not be the worse for it."

"And then," she lowered her voice, "it does a little reconcile me that I don't think we ought to go further into it till we can understand. I did make that dreadful vow. I know I ought not now; but still I did, in so many words."

"You mean against a gambler?"

"If it had only been against a gambler; but I was stung, and wanted to guard myself, and made it against any one who had ever betted! If I go on, I must break it, you see, and if I do might it not bring mischief on him? I don't even feel as if it were *true* to have come to him on Friday, and now—yet they said it was the only chance for his life."

"Yes, I think it saved him then, and to disappoint him now might quite possibly bring a relapse," said Julius. "It seems to me that you can only act as seems right at the moment. When he is his own man again, you will better have the power of judging about this vow, and if it ought to bind you. And so, it may really be well you do not see more of him, and that his weakness does not lead you further than you mean."

A tottering step, and an almost agonized, though very short sob under the crape veil, proved to Julius that his counsel, though chiming in with her stronger, sterner judgment, was terrible to her, nor would he have given it, if he had not had reason to fear that while she had grown up, Frank had grown down; and that, after this illness, it would have to be proved whether he were indeed worthy of the high-minded girl whom he had himself almost thrown over in a passion.

But there was no room for such misgivings when the electric shock of actual presence was felt—the thin hollow-cheeked face shone with welcome, the liquid brown eyes smiled with thankful sweetness, the fingers, fleshless, but cool and gentle, were held out; and the faint voice said, "My darling! Once try to make me hear."

And when, with all her efforts, she could only make him give a sort of smile of disappointment, she would have been stonyhearted indeed if she had not let him fondle her hand as he would, while she listened to his mother's report of his improvement. With those eyes fixed in such content on her face, it seemed absolutely barbarous to falter forth that she could come no more, for her father was taking her away.

"My dear, you must be left with us," cried Mrs. Poyntsett. "He cannot spare you."

"Ah! but my poor father. He is lost without me. And I came of age on Tuesday, and there are papers to sign."

"What is it?" murmured Frank, watching their faces.

Mrs. Poyntsett gave her the pen, saying, "You must tell him, if it is to be."

She wrote: "My father takes me to London to-morrow, to meet the lawyers."

His face fell; but he asked, "Coming back—when?"

She shook her head, and her eyes filled with tears, as she wrote: "Sirenwood is to be put up to auction."

"Your sister?" began Frank, and then his eye fell on her crape trimmings. He touched her sleeve, and made a low wail. "Oh! is every one dead?"

It was the first perception he had shown of any death, though mourning had been worn in his room. His mother leant down to kiss him, bidding Lena tell him the truth; and she wrote:

"I am left alone with poor papa. Let me go—now you can do without me."

"Can I?" he asked, again grasping her hand.

She pointed to his mother and Anne; but he repeated, "You—you!"

"When you are better we will see how it is to be," she wrote.

He looked sadly wistful. "No, I can't now. Something was very wrong; but it won't come back. By and by. If you wouldn't go—"

But his voice was now more weak and weary, tired by the effort, and a little kneeling by him, allowing his tender touch, soothed him, enough to say submissively, "Good-bye, then—I'll come for you"—wherewith he faltered into slumber.

Rosamond had just seen her off in the pony carriage, and was on the way up-stairs, when she stumbled on a little council, consisting of Dr. Worth, Mr. Charnock, and Grindstone, all in the gallery. "A widow in her twenty-second year. Good heavens!" was the echo she heard; and Grindstone was crying and saying, "She did it for the best, and she could not do it, poor lamb, not

if you killed her for it;" and Dr. Worth said, "Perhaps Lady Rosamond can. You see, Lady Rosamond, Mrs. Grindstone, whose care I must say has been devoted, has hitherto staved off the sad question from poor young Mrs. Poyntsett, until now it is no longer possible, and she is becoming so excited, that—"

Cecil's bell rang sharply.

"I cannot—I cannot! In her twenty-second year!" cried her father, wringing his hands.

Grindstone's face was all tears and contortions; and Rosamond, recollecting her last words with poor Cecil, sprang forward, both men opening a way for her.

Cecil was sitting up in bed, very thin, but with eager eyes and flushed cheeks, as she held out her hands. "Rosamond! Oh! But aren't you afraid?"

"No, indeed, I'm always in it now," said Rosamond, kissing her, and laying her down; "it has been everywhere."

"Ah! then they sent him away—Raymond?" then clutching Rosamond's hand, and looking at her with searching eyes, "Tell me, has his mother any right! Would you bear it if she kept *you* apart?"

"Ah! Cecil, it was not her doing."

"You don't mean it was his own? Papa is not afraid. You are not afraid. If it had been he, I wouldn't have feared anything. I would have nursed him day and night till—till I made him care for me."

"Hush, dear Cecil," said Rosamond, with great difficulty. "I know you would, and so would he have done for you, only the cruel fever kept you apart."

"The fever! He had it?"

"Yes, he *had* it."

"But he is better. I am better. Let me be taken to him. His mother is not there now. I heard them say she was in Frank's room. Call papa. He will carry me."

"Oh! poor, poor Cecil. His mother only went to Frank when he did not need her any more." And Rosamond hid her face on the bed, afraid to look.

Cecil lay back so white, that Grindstone approached with some drops, but this made her spring up, crying, "No, no, don't come near me! You never told me! You deceived me!"

"Don't, don't, ma'am—my dear Miss Charnock—now. It was all for the best. You would not have been here now."

"And then I should be with him. Rosamond, send her away, I can't bear her. She sent him away from me that night. I heard her."

"My dear Cecil, this will not do. You are making your father dreadfully unhappy. Dear Raymond stayed with you till he really could not sit up any longer, and then he kissed you."

"Kissed me! Oh, where? Did you see? No, don't ask Grindstone. She made me think he had left me, and fancy—oh, Rosamond! such—such things! And all the time—"

The moaning became an anguish of distress, unable to weep, like terrible pain, as the poor young thing writhed in Rosamond's arms. It was well that this one sister understood what had been in Cecil's heart, and did believe in her love for Raymond. Rosamond, too, had caressing power beyond any other of the family, and thus she could better deal with the sufferer, striving, above all, to bring tears by what she whispered to her as she held her to her bosom. They were a terrible storm at last, but Cecil clung to Rosamond through all, absolutely screaming when Grindstone came near; poor Grindstone who had been so devoted, though mistaken. Weakness, however, after the first violent agitation was soothed, favoured a kind of stunned torpor, and Cecil lay still, except when her maid tried to do anything for her, and then the passion returned. When old Susan Alston came with a message, she was at once recognized and monopolized, and became the only servant whom she would suffer about her.

The inconvenience was great, but relapse was such an imminent danger, that it was needful to give up everything to her; and Mr. Charnock, regarding his daughter's sufferings as the only ones worth consideration, seemed to pursue Rosamond the instant she had sat down by the still feeble, weary, convalescent Terry, imploring her to return to Cecil with the irresistible force of tearful eyes and piteous descriptions; and as Terry had a week's start in recovery, and was not a widow under twenty-two, he had to submit, and lie as contentedly as he could in his solitude.

Susan could be better spared to Cecil's morbid fancy of being waited on by her who had attended her husband, for Miles and Anne were sufficient for Mrs. Poyntsett and Frank. The long-sundered husband and wife scarcely saw each other, except over Frank's bed, and Mr. Charnock was on the Captain's hands whenever he came beyond it. On the Wednesday, however, Julius, who had only once spoken to his brother alone, came up to the breakfast-table where he and Mr. Charnock were sitting, and hurt the feelings of the latter by first asking for Frank. "He had slept all night, and only half woke when Miles and Anne changed watch and gave him beef-tea. Cecil,



very moaning and restless—more fever about her, poor dear. When would Lady Rosamond come up?—she was asking for her.” When she had seen to a few things at home, given her brother his breakfast, and seen to poor Herbert; he had had a dreadful night, and that Cranstoun *would* shut the window unless some one defended him. Mr. Charnock began to resume his daughter’s symptoms, when Julius, at the first pause, said:

“Have you finished, Miles? Could you speak to me in the library a minute? I beg your pardon, Mr. Charnock, but my time is short.”

“I hope—I quite understand. Do not let me be in your way.” And the brothers repaired to the library, where Julius’s first words were, “Miles, you must make up your mind. They are getting up a requisition to you to stand for Wil’sbro’.”

“To me?”

“You are the most obvious person, and the feeling for dear Raymond is so strong as to prevent any contest. Whitlock told Bindon yesterday that you should have no trouble.”

“I can’t. It is absurd. I know nothing about it. My poor mother bred up Raymond for nothing else. Don’t you remember how she made him read history, volumes upon volumes, while I was learning nothing but the ropes? I declare, Julius, there he goes.”

“Who?”

“Why, that old ass, down to hunt up poor Rosamond; I don’t believe he thinks there’s any one in the world but his daughter. I declare I’ll hail him and stop him.”

“No, no, Miles, Rosamond can take care of herself. She won’t come till she has seen to her patients down there; and, after all, Cecil’s is the saddest case, poor thing. To return. If you don’t take to politics in the end, I think you should let them put you in now, if only as a stop-gap, or we shall get some one whom it may not be easy to get rid of.”

“There’s something in that, but I can’t accept without knowing my position, and I would not utter a word to disturb my mother till it occurs to her of herself.”

“Now that Frank is better?”

“No. It will all come on her soon enough.”

“Would you stand if she made it right for you?”

“I can’t tell. There would be no punishment so great to my poor Anne as to be dragged into society, and I don’t know how she would bear it, even if she had no scruples. We never thought of anything but settling in Glen Fraser, only I wanted her to know you all. If that poor Cecil only had a child we could be free to go back. Poor Anne!”

“Do you think she is still as homesick as at first?”

“Well, not quite, perhaps; but I never can get to talk to her, and I know it is a terrible sacrifice to her to live here at all, and I won’t have her forced into a style of thing against her conscience. If they come to me, I shall tell them to take Mr. Bowater.”

“Poor Mr. Bowater! He will have little heart.”

“Who else is there? That fellow Moy would like it, I suppose.”

“That fellow Moy may have to change his note,” said Julius. “I think we have the means of clearing Archie, when we can see how to use them.”

Miles gave a sort of leap as he stood by the fire. “Tell me. Archie! I had no heart to write to him, poor fellow.”

“Write to him by all means, but say nothing here.” And Julius briefly repeated what Gadley had said.

“I don’t see that the scoundrel Moy deserves any consideration.”

“I don’t know whether he does; but he has a good wife, ailing and sickly, and a daughter. He has lived in good report these many years, and I think it is due to him and to old Proudfoot not to spread the report before giving him warning. In fact, I am not sure whether we could proceed against him as things stand.”

“It is just what Raymond would have known,” said Miles, with a sigh; “but you are right, Julius, one ought to give him fair play. Ah! what’s that, Jenkins?—Note from Lord Belfort? Wait for an answer. Can’t they give one any peace?”

While Miles was reluctantly answering his note, Julius, resolving to act before he was forbidden, mounted to Frank’s room, requested to speak with his mother, and propelled her into the outer room, leaving Anne on guard.

“Now then, my dear,” she said, “I have known a talk must soon come. You have all been very good to me to leave it so long.”

“I am come now without poor Miles’s knowledge or consent,” said Julius, “because it is necessary

for him to know what to do."

"He will give up the navy," said his mother. "O, Julius! does he require to be told that he—?" and she laid her head on her son's shoulder.

"It is what he cannot bear to be told; but what drives me on is that Whitlock tells me that the Wil'sbro' people want to bring him in at once, as the strongest proof of their feeling for Raymond."

"Yes," she raised her head proudly, "of course he must come forward. He need have no doubt. Send him to me, Julius, I will tell him to open letters, and put matters in train. Perhaps you will write to Graves for me, if he does not like it, poor boy."

She had roused herself into the woman of business, and when Miles, after some indignation at her having been disturbed, obeyed the summons, she held out her arms, and became the consoler.

"Come, my boy," she said, "we must face it sooner or later. You must stand foremost and take up his work for him."

"Oh, mother! mother! you know how little I am able," said Miles, covering his face with his hands.

"You do not bring his burthened heart to the task," she said. "If you had watched and felt with him, as perhaps only his mother could, you would know that I can be content that the long heartache should have ceased, where the weary are at rest. Yes, Miles, I feel as if I had put him to sleep after a long day of pain, as when he was a little child."

They hardened themselves to the discussion, Mrs. Poyntett explaining what she thought the due of her eldest son, only that Cecil's jointure would diminish the amount at her disposal. Indeed, when she was once aroused, she attended the most fully; but when Miles found her apologizing for only affording him the little house in the village, he cried out with consternation.

"My dear," she said, "it is best so; I will not be a burthen on you young ones. I see the mistake."

"I know," stammered Miles, "my poor Anne is not up to your mark—not clever like you or Jenny—but I thought you did like her pretty handy ways."

"I feel them and love them with all my heart; but I cannot have her happiness and yours sacrificed to me. Yes, you boys love the old nest; but even Julius and Rose rejoice in their own, and you must see what she really wishes, not what she thinks her duty. Take her out walking, you both need it badly enough."

They ventured to comply, and eluding Mr. Charnock, went into the park, silvery with the unstanched dews, and the leaves floating down one by one like golden rain. "Not much like the Bush," said Miles.

"No," was all Anne durst say.

"Poor Nan, how dreary it must have looked to you last year!"

"I am afraid I wrote very complaining letters!"

"Not complaining, but a direful little effort at content, showing the more piteously, because involuntarily, what a mistake I had made."

"No, no mistake. Indeed, Miles, it was not. Nothing else would have cured me of the dreadful uncharitableness which was the chief cause of my unhappiness, and if I had not been so forlorn, I should never have seen how good and patient your mother was with me. Yes, I mean it. I read over my old diary and saw how tiresome and presumptuous I was, and how wonderfully she bore with me, and so did Julius and Rosamond, while all the time I fancied them—no Christians."

"Ah! you child! You know I would never have done it if I had known you were to be swamped among brides. At any rate, this poor old place doesn't look so woefully dismal and hateful to you now."

"It could not, where you are, and where I have so many to know and love."

"You can bear the downfall of our Bush schemes?"

"Your duty is here now."

"Are you grieved, little one?"

"I don't know. I should like to have seen mamma; but she does not need me now as your mother does."

"Then you are willing to be her daughter?"

"I have tried hard, and she is very kind; but I am far too dull and ignorant for her. I can only wait upon her; but when she has you and Julius to talk to, my stupidity will not matter."

"Would you be content to devote yourself to her, instead of making a home of our own?"

"She can't be left alone in that great house."

"The question is, can you be happy in it? or do you wish for a house to ourselves?"

"You don't, Miles, it is your own home."

"That's not the question."

"Miles, why do you look at me so?"

"I was told to ascertain your wishes."

"I don't wish anything—now I have you—but to be a comfort to your mother. That is my first earthly wish just now."

"If that be earthly, it has a touch of the heavenly," muttered Miles to himself. "You will make it clear to mother then that you like to go on with her?"

"If she does not mind having me."

"And Julius says it really cheered our dear Raymond to think you would be the one to look after her! But that's not all, Nanny, I've only till to-morrow to decide whether I am to be Member for Wil'sbro'."

"Is that a duty?"

"Not such a duty as to bind me if it were altogether repugnant to you. I was not brought up for it, and may be a mere stop-gap, but it is every man's duty to come to the front when he is called for, and do his utmost for his country in Parliament, I suppose, as much as in action."

"I see; but it would be leaving your mother alone a great deal."

"Not necessarily. You could stay here part of the time, and I go backwards and forwards, as Raymond did before his marriage."

"It would be better than your being at sea."

"But remember," he added, "there is much that can't be shirked. I don't mean currying popularity, but if one is in that position, there's no shutting oneself up. It becomes a duty to keep society going, and give it the sort of tone that a nice woman can do. Do you see?"

"I think I do. Julius said so once."

"So if we are to have such tears and despair as there were about the ball in the Chimaera, then—"

"I was wrong then," said Anne. "I did not behave at all well to you all that time, dear Miles; I have been sorry for it ever since I understood."

"It was not you, little one, it was Mr. Pilgrim."

"No, it was not Mr. Pilgrim who made me cross."

"Yes, it was. He exacted pledges that he had no right to lay on your conscience, and your poor little conscience was in terrible straits, and I was too angry to feel for it. Never mind all that; you have done with the fellow, and understand better now."

"He thought he was right, and that only such abstinence could guard me. And, Miles, a promise is a promise, and I do not think I ought to dance or play at cards. It is not that I think them wrong for others, but I cannot break my word. Except those—I will do whatever is fitting for your wife."

"Spoken like a heroine!"

"I don't think I could ever give a tone. Rosamond could, if she tried, but I have no readiness and no training; but I do see that there is more good in being friendly like Jenny Bowater, than in avoiding everything, and as long as one does it because it is right and loving, it can't be the world or worldliness."

It was not lucidly expressed, but it satisfied the Captain.

"All right, my bonnie Nance, I'll promise on my side never to ask you to go against your real conscience, and if you must have a Pope, I had rather it were Pope Julius than Pope Pilgrim."

"Don't, Miles. Popes are all wrong, and I don't know whether Mr. Pilgrim would give the right hand of fellowship to Julius."

Miles chuckled. "You may think yourself lucky you have not to adjust that question, Madame Nan."

"There's the quarter chiming, Frank will want his beef-tea."

Presently after Miles laid his hand on his mother's shoulder, and said, "Mother, here's a daughter who thinks you want to turn us out because she is too slow and stupid for your home child." And he drew Anne up blushing as if she were his freshly-won bride.

"My dear, are you sure you don't want to go away from the old woman? Should you not be happier with him all to yourself?"

"I could not be happy if you were left," said Anne. "May I go on as we did last winter? I will try to do better now I have him to help me."

"My own dear child!"

That was the way Anne forgot her own people and her father's house.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### Herbert's Victory

And of our scholars let us learn  
Our own forgotten lore.—KEBLE

"Joan, Jenny, dearest old Joanie!" It was eagerly spoken, though the voice was strangely altered that came from behind the flowered curtain of that big bed, while the fingers drew it back, and Rollo raised his black muzzle near at hand. "Oh, Jenny! have you come to me?"

"My dear, dear, poor boy!"

"No kissing—it's not safe," and he burrowed under the sheet.

"As if I did not mean to do more for you than that! Besides, it is not catching."

"So I said, till it caught me. What a jolly cold hand! You've not come in cold and hungry though?"

"No, indeed, Rosamond forced me to sit down to a whole spread. As if one could eat with a knot in one's throat."

"Mind you do, Jenny—it was what did for me. The Rector ordered me never to go about unfed; but one could not always—and there was something I have to tell you that drove all the rest out —"

"Dear Herbs! Papa can't talk of what you have done without tears. He longed to come, but we could not leave mamma without one of us, and he thought I could do the most for you. I have a note for you."

"Forgiving me?"

"I should *think* so. It is in my bag—"

"No, not this moment; I like to know it. And mammy—poor mammy—"

"She is as comforted as she can be that you have Cranky and me; and then papa's being proud of you has cheered her—oh! so much."

"I'm glad they can comfort themselves—"

"But, Herbert, dear, you must be much better; I did not expect to see you so well."

"I am not so bad between whiles," said Herbert, wearily. "And, while I can, I've got something to tell you that will make it up to you, and a great deal more."

"Make it up?" said Jenny, looking with bewildered eyes at the dear face.

"Yes, I made Gadley consent. The Rector has it in writing, and it will do quite as well if I die. O, Jenny, woman, think of my never knowing what you had gone through!"

"Is it about Archie?" said Jenny, beginning to tremble.

"Yes. It will clear him."

"I always knew he was clear."

"Yes, but he can come back now all right. Eh! what an ass I am! I've begun at the wrong end. He wasn't drowned—it was all a mistake; Miles saw him in Africa—Cranky, I say, come to her."

"Yes, Master Herbert, you've been talking a great deal too much for your sister just off a journey. You'll get the fever on again. Miss Joanna, you ought to know better than to let him run on; I sha'n't be able to let you do nothing for him if this is the way."

"Was it too sudden, Joan?" said Herbert, wistfully, as she bent to kiss his brow with trembling lips. "I couldn't let any one tell you but myself, while I could; but I don't seem able to go on. Is the Rector there, Cranky?"

"Yes, sir, waiting in the parlour."

"Rector," and Julius hurried in at once, "take her and tell her. I can't do it after all."

"Is he alive?" whispered Jenny, so much overcome that Julius had to hold her up for a moment as he led her into the other room.

"Really! She thinks me delirious," said Herbert, rather amused. "Tell her all, Rector."

"Really, Joan," said Julius, putting her into the great chair, and holding her trembling hand. "Miles has seen him, has had him in his ship."

"And you never told me!"

"He made Miles promise not to tell."

"But he told you!"

"Yes, because it was Anne who gave the clue which led to his discovery; but when he found we all thought him dead, he laid Miles under the strictest charge to say nothing. He is on an ostrich farm in Natal, Jenny, well, and all that he ever was, and more too. He took your photograph from Miles's book."

"And I never knew," moaned Jenny, quite overcome.

"He would not be persuaded that it was not more for your peace not to know of his life, and when Miles was put on honour, what could we do? But now it is all changed. Since Herbert's discovery he need not be a banished man any more." And Julius told Jenny the manner of the discovery. She listened, evidently gathering all in, and then she asked: "And what have you done?"

"Nothing as yet."

"Nothing! while there is this blot on Archie's name, and he is living in exile, and that Moy is revelling in prosperity. Nothing! Why don't you publish it to every one?"

"My dear Jenny, I have only known it a week, and I have not been able to find out where Mr. Moy is."

"What, to have him taken up?"

"Taken up, no; I don't imagine he could be prosecuted after this length of time and on this kind of evidence. No, to give him warning."

"Warning? To flee away, and never clear Archie! What are you about, Julius? He ought to be exposed at once, if he cannot be made to suffer otherwise."

"Nay, Jenny, that would be hard measure."

"Hard measure!" she interrupted; "what has my innocent Archie had?"

"Think of the old man, his wife and daughter, Jenny."

"She's a Proudfoot.—And that girl the scandal of the country! You want to sacrifice Archie to them, Julius?"

"You are tired and shaken, Jenny, or you would see that all I want to do is to act with common consideration and honour."

She interrupted again. "What honour do you mean? You are not making it a secret of the confessional?"

"You are misunderstanding me, Joanna," Julius gently said. "Herbert's vigil spared me from that difficulty, but—"

"Then you would have sacrificed Archie to this imaginary—"

"Hush, Jenny! I fear he is wandering again. Alas! it is the sad old *refrain!*"

As they came to the door together, Herbert's voice, under that strange change which wandering brings, was heard muttering, "Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward." And Mrs. Cranstoun received them, with her head shaking, and tearful eyes. "It has come on again, sir; I was afraid it would be too much for him."

Herbert's prayer had been granted, inasmuch as the horrible ravings that he feared repeating never passed his lips. If he had gone down to the smoke of Tartarus to restore his sister's lover, none of its blacks were cleaning to him; but whether conscious or wandering, the one thought of his wasted year seemed to be crushing him. It was a curious contrast between poor Mr. Fuller's absence of regret for a quarter of a century's supineness, and this lad's repentance for twelve months' idleness. That his follies had been guileless in themselves might be the very cause that his spirit had such power of repentance. His admiration of Lady Tyrrell had been burnt out, and had been fancy, not heart, and no word of it passed his lips, far less of the mirth with the Strangeways. Habit sometimes brought the phrases of the cricket-field, but these generally ended in a shudder of self-recollection and prayer.

The delirium only came with the accesses of fever, and when sensible, he was very quiet and patient, but always as one weighed down by sense of failure in a trust. He never seemed to entertain a hope of surviving. He had watched too many cases not to be aware that his symptoms were those that had been almost uniformly fatal, and he noted them as a matter of course. Dr. Easterby came to see him, and was greatly touched; Herbert was responsive, but it was not the ordinary form of comfort that he needed, for his sorrow was neither terror nor despair. His heart

was too warm and loving not to believe that his heavenly Father forgave him as freely as did his earthly father; but that very hope made him the more grieved and ashamed of his slurred task, nor did he view his six weeks at Wil'sbro' as any atonement, knowing it was no outcome of repentance, but of mere kindness, and aware, as no one else could be, how his past negligence had hindered his full usefulness, so that he only saw his failures. As to his young life, he viewed it as a mortally wounded soldier does, as a mere casualty of the war, which he was pledged to disregard. He *did* perhaps like to think that the fatal night with Gadley might bring Archie back, and yet Jenny did not give him the full peace in her happiness which he had promised himself.

Joanna had suffered terribly, far more than any one knew, and her mind did not take the revulsion as might have been expected. Her lighthouse was shining again when she thought it extinguished for ever, but her spirits could not bear the uncertainty of the spark. She could not enter into what Miles and Julius both alike told her, of the impossibility of their mother beginning a prosecution for money embezzled ten years back, when no living witness existed, nothing but the scrap of paper written by Herbert, and signed by him and Margaret Strangeways, authorizing Julius Charnock to use what had been said by the dying, half-delirious man. What would a jury say to such evidence? And when Julius said it only freed himself morally from the secrecy, poor Jenny was bitter against his scruples, even though he had never said more than that he should have been perplexed. The most bitter anti-ritualist could hardly have uttered stronger things than she thought, and sometimes said, against what seemed to her to be keeping Archie in banishment; while the brothers' reluctance to expose Mr. Moy, and blast his reputation and that of his family, was in her present frame of mind an incomprehensible weakness. People must bear the penalty of their misdeeds, families and all, and Mrs. and Miss Moy did not deserve consideration: the pretensions of the mother had always been half scorn, half thorn, to the old county families, and the fast airs of the daughter had been offensive enough to destroy all pity for her. If an action in a Court of Justice were, as Miles and Julius told her, impossible,—and she would not believe it, except on the word of a lawyer,—public exposure was the only alternative for righting Archie, and she could not, or would not, understand that they would have undergone an action for libel rather than not do their best to clear their cousin, but that they thought it due to Mr. Moy to give him the opportunity of doing the thing himself; she thought it folly, and only giving him time and chance for baffling them.

The strange thing was, that not only when she argued with the two brothers, but when she brooded and gave way to these thoughts as she kept her watch, it probably made her less calm—for an access of restlessness and fever never failed to come on—with Herbert. Probably she was less calm externally, and the fret of face and manner communicated itself to him, for the consequences were so invariable that Cranstoun thought they proved additionally what she of course believed, that Miss Joan could not be trusted with her brother. At last Jenny, in her distress and unwillingness to abandon Herbert to Cranky's closed windows, traced cause and effect, and made a strong resolution to banish the all-pervading thought, and indeed his ever-increasing weakness and danger filled her mind so as to make this easier and easier, so that she might no longer have to confess to herself that Rollo was a safer companion, since Herbert, with a hand on that black head, certainly only derived soothing influences from those longing sympathetic eyes. And he could not but like the testimony of strong affection that came to him. The whole parish was in consternation, and inquiries, and very odd gifts, which he was supposed to 'fancy,' came from all over Compton as well as from Strawyers, and were continually showering upon his nurses, so that Mrs. Hornblower and Dilemma spent their lives in mournful replies over the counter, and fifty times a day he was pronounced to be 'as bad as he could be to be alive.' Old servants and keepers made progresses from Strawyers, to see Master Herbert, and were terribly aggrieved because Miss Bowater kept them out of his room, as much for their sake as his; and Mrs. Cranstoun pointed to the open lattice which she believed to be killing him, as surely as it gave aches to her rheumatic shoulder.

Julius thought almost as much as Jenny could do of the means of recalling Archie; but it was necessary to wait until he could communicate with Mr. Moy, and his hands were still over-full, for though much less fatal, the fever smouldered on, both in Wil'sbro' and Compton, and as St. Nicholas was a college living which had hitherto been viewed as a trump card, it might be a long time going the round of the senior fellows.

Julius had just been at poor Mrs. Fuller's, trying to help her to put her complicated affairs in order, so as to be ready for a move as soon as one daughter, who had the fever slightly, could be taken away, and he was driving home again, when he overtook Mrs. Duncombe and offered her a lift, for her step was weary. She was indeed altered, pale, with cheek-bones showing, and all the lustre and sparkle gone out of her, while her hat was as rigidly dowdy as Miss Slater's.

She roused herself to ask feebly after the remaining patients.

"Cecil is really getting better at last," he said. "Her father wants to take her to Portishead next week."

"And young Bowater?"

"No change. His strength seems to be going."

"I wouldn't pity him," sighed Bessie Duncombe; "he has only seen the best end of life, and has laid it down for something worth! I'm sure he and your brother are the enviable ones."

"Nay, Mrs. Duncombe, you have much to work for and love in this life."

"And I must go away from everything just as I had learnt to value it. Bob has taken a house at Monaco, and writes to me to bring the children to join him there!"

"At Monaco?"

"At Monaco! Yes, and I know that it is all my own fault. I might have done anything with him if I had known how. But what could you expect? I never saw my mother; I never knew a home; I was bred up at a French school, where if one was not a Roman Catholic there was not a shred of religion going. I married after my first ball. Nobody taught me anything; but I could not help having brains, so I read and caught the tone of the day, and made my own line, while he went on his."

"And now there is a greater work for you to do, since you have learnt to do it."

"Ah! learnt too late. When habits are confirmed, and home station forfeited—What is there left for him or my poor boys to do?"

"A colony perhaps—"

"Damaged goods," she said, smiling sadly.

"Then are you going?"

"As soon as I have seen this fever out, and can dispose of the things here. I have just been to Moy's office to see about getting rid of the lease."

"Is Mr. Moy come home?"

"Yes. Have you not heard?"

"What?—Not the fever?"

"No. Worse I should say. Gussie has gone off and got married to Harry Simmonds."

"The man at the training stables?"

"Yes. They put up their banns at the Union at Brighton, and were married by the Registrar, then went off to Paris. They say it will kill her mother. The man is a scoundrel, who played Bob false, and won largely by that mare. And the girl has had the cheek to write to me," said Mrs. Duncombe, warming into her old phraseology—"to *me!*—to thank me for opportunities of meeting, and to tell me she has followed up the teaching of last year."

"What—the rights of women?"

"Ay. This is a civil marriage—not mocking her with antiquated servile vows," she says. "Ah, well, it was my doing, I suppose. Clio Tallboys held forth in private, I believe, to poor Gussie, on theories that were mere talk in her, but which this poor girl has taken in earnest."

"Very sad earnest she may find it, I fear. Can I do anything for you?" as they reached the gate of Aucuba Villa.

"No, thank you, unless to get the house off my hands."

"You are alone. Will you not come and spend the evening with us?"

"That is very kind, but I have too much to do, and besides, Sister Margaret is coming to spend the night with me."

"I am glad to hear it."

"Yes, Mr. Charnock, I trust I have learnt something in this spell of work. I've not been for nothing in such scenes with those Sisters and young Bowater. I'm more ignorant than half the poor things that I've heard talk of their faith and hope; but I see it is not the decorous humbug it once looked like. And now that I would have learnt, here I go to Monaco."

"You will learn. You have a work before you that will teach you."

"My boys are young enough to start with on a different tack," she said. "You will tell me—no—I'll not hinder you now. I shall see you again."

Julius was too anxious to get home to refuse to be released, much as he felt for this brave woman. The day before, Herbert had been frightfully faint and exhausted by the morning's attack of fever, but had been so still ever since that there was a shade of hope that the recurrence might not take place; and this hope grew stronger, when Jenny came into the outer room to say that the usual time for the fever was passing so quietly in a sort of sleep that Dr. Worth seemed to think rally possible, if only there was no fresh access.

They stood over the fire, and Julius asked, "Can't you lie on the sofa, Jenny? I can stay."

"No," said Jenny, restlessly. "No, I can't. I know you have something to tell me."

"Moy has come home, Jenny. He is in terrible trouble. His daughter has eloped with young Simmonds at the training stables."

"The most appropriate end of her bringing up," said Jenny, in the hard tone it was so difficult to

answer—it was so unlike herself—and her thought was that weak pity and forbearance would hinder exertions in Archie's cause. "Generous at other folks' expense," said she to herself. "Sparing the guilty and leaving the innocent to exile!"

But a moaning murmur, and Cranstoun's movement at once summoned them both to the bedside.

Alas! here was the attack that the doctor had evidently apprehended as likely to be fatal. Hour after hour did sister, nurse, and friend stand watching, and doing their best, their piteously little best, while consciousness, if there was any, was far out of their reach.

Late into the night it went on, and then followed the collapse, with locked teeth, which could hardly be drawn asunder to put the stimulus hopelessly between them, and thus came the tardy December dawn, when the church-bell made Jenny bid Julius not stay, but only first read the commendatory prayer.

"I thought there was a little more revival just now," he said; "his hands are warmer, and he really did swallow."

The old nurse shook her head. "That's the way before they go," said she. "Don't ye wish him, poor lamb, it makes it the harder for him."

Julius prayed the prayer, and as he tenderly laid his hand on the brow, he wondered whether he should find the half-closed eyes shut for ever on his return.

But as he went, there was a quiver of lip and flicker of eyelid, the lightening, as Cranky called it, was evidently gaining ground. Herbert's faint whisper was heard again—"Jenny!"

"Dearest!"

"The Lord's Prayer!"

She began,—his fingers tightened on hers. "Pray it for old Moy," he said; and as she paused, scarce hearing or understanding, "He—he wants it," gasped Herbert. "No! One can't pray it, without—" another pause. "Help me, Jenny. Say it—O Lord, who savedst us—forgive us. Help us to forgive from our hearts that man his trespasses. Amen."

Jenny said it. Herbert's voice sank in the Amen. He lay breathing in long gasps; but he thus breathed still when Julius came back, and Jenny told him that a few words had passed, adding—

"Julius, I will say nothing bitter again. God help me not to think it."

Did Herbert hear? Was that the reason of the calm which made the white wasted face so beautiful, and the strange soft cool hush throughout the room?

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### Silver Hair

And how should I your true love know  
From another man?—Friar of Orders Gray

"Please God, I can try again."

Those were the words with which Herbert Bowater looked into his Rector's face on awaking in the evening of that same December day from one of a series of sleeps, each sweeter and longer than the last, and which had borne him over the dreaded hours, without fever, and with strengthening pulse.

Julius had not ventured to leave the sick-room that whole day, and when at last he went home and sank into the chair opposite Terry, for the first time through all these weeks of trouble and tension, he burst into a flood of tears.

He had hardly made the startled lad understand that life, not death, had thus overcome him, when the door flew open, and in rushed Rosamond, crying, "Julius, Julius, come! It is he or his ghost!"

"Who? What?"

"It is your hair! At Mrs. Douglas's grave! He'll be gone! Make haste—make haste!"

He started up, letting her drag him along, but under protest. "My dear, men *do* come to have hair like mine."

"I tell you it was at our graves—our own—I touched him. I had this wreath for Raymond, and there he was, with his hat off, at the railing close to Mrs. Douglas's. I thought his back was yours, and called your name, and he started, and I saw—he had a white beard, but he was not old. He just bowed, and then went off very fast by the other gate, towards Wil'sbro'. I did call, 'Wait, wait,' but he didn't seem to hear. Oh, go, go, Julius! Make haste!"



Infected by the wild hope, Julius hurried on the road where his wife had turned his face, almost deriding himself for obeying her, when he would probably only overtake some old family retainer; but as, under the arch of trees that overhung the road, he saw a figure in the moonlight, a thrill of recognition came over him as he marked the vigorous tread of the prime of life, and the white hair visible in the moonlight, together with something utterly indescribable, but which made him call out, "Archie! Archie Douglas! wait for me!"

The figure turned. "Julius!" came in response; the two cousins' hands clasped, and there was a sob on either side as they kissed one another as brothers.

"Archie! How could you!—Come back!" was all that Julius could say, leaning breathlessly against him and holding him tight.

"No! Do not know that I have been here. I was sent to London on business. I could not help running home in the dark. No one must know it. I am dead to them."

"No, Archie, you are not. Gadley has confessed and cleared you. Come home!"

"Cleared me!" The two arms were stretched up to the sky, and there was the sound of a mighty sob, as though the whole man, body, soul, and spirit, were relieved from an unspeakable burthen. "Say it again, Julius!"

"Gadley, on his death-bed, has confessed that Moy and Proudfoot took that money, incited by Tom Vivian."

Archie Douglas could not speak, but he turned his face towards Compton again, strode swiftly into the churchyard, and fell on his knees by his mother's grave. When at last he rose, he pointed to the new and as yet unmarked mound, and said, "Your mother's?"

"Oh no! Raymond's! We have had a terrible fever here—almost a pestilence—and we are scarcely breathing after it."

"Ah! some one in the train spoke of sickness at Wil'sbro', but I would ask no questions, for I saw faces I knew, and I would lead to no recognition. I could not stay away from getting one sight of the old place. Miles made it all burn within me; but here's my return-ticket for the mail-train."

"Never mind return-tickets. Come home with me."

"I shall startle your mother."

"I meant my home—the Rectory. It was my wife who saw you in the churchyard, and sent me after you. She is watching for you."

Archie, still bewildered, as if spell-bound by his ticket, muttered, "I thought I should have time to walk over and look at Strawyers."

"Joanna is here."

"Julius! It is too much. You are sure I am awake? This is not the old dream!" cried the exile, grasping his cousin's arm quite gainfully.

"I am a waking man, and I trust you are," said Julius. "Come into the light. No, that is not Jenny on the step. It is my Rose. Yes, here he is!"

And as they came into the stream of light from the porch, Irish Rosamond, forgetting that Archie was not a brother, caught him by both hands, and kissed him in overpowering welcome, exclaiming, "Oh, I am so glad! Come in—come in!"

There he stood, blinking in the lamplight, a tall, powerful, broad-chested figure, but hardly a hero of romance to suit Terry's fancy, after a rapid summary of the history from Rosamond. His hair and beard were as white as Julius's, and the whole face was tanned to uniform red, but no one could mistake the dazed yet intense gladness of the look. He sank into a chair, clasped his hands over his face for a moment, then surveyed them all one by one, and said, "You told me she was here."

"She is with her brother Herbert, at Mrs. Hornblower's lodgings. No, you must wait, Archie; he has barely in the last few hours, by God's great mercy, taken a turn for the better in this fever, and I don't see how she can leave him."

"But she must hear it," cried Rosamond. "I'm going to make her or Cranky get some rest; but you ought to be the one to tell her, Julius, you that have stood by her through all."

"And aren't you burning to do so, Rosey, woman? and I think you had better, rather than that I should startle Herbert by returning; but stay, mind your own rules—eat and drink before you go, and give the same to Archie. I shall send up a note to Miles. How is Cecil?"

"Very silent and broken, poor thing. She is to see your mother to-morrow. How well it was that she kept me so late over her wreath of camellias!"

Archie submitted to wait for food and fuller information,—indeed the lady of the house manifested more impatience than he did, as she flitted about making preparations, and he sat with hands locked together over his knee, gazing fixedly at Julius, scarcely speaking, though eagerly listening; and when the meal was brought in, he could not eat, only eagerly drank off a

cup of scalding tea, and watched Rosamond, as if jealous of any delay over her outlet. She did not abuse his patience.

"Now then?" she said, rising. "You shall hear something of her before long."

"Let me come to her door," entreated Archie.

And as the light shone from the window of the sick-room, Rosamond said, "Stand under that tree in the moonlight, and I will make her look out."

All was intensely quiet; Cranky fast asleep in the arm-chair in the outer-room, and Jenny sitting by the bed, watching the smooth quiet breath.

"You are to lie down on the sofa and sleep," said Rosamond, kissing her, and she shook her head, "You must. People want strength for joy as well as grief. Trust him to me, for there is some one for you to see to-morrow."

"Not papa!" said Jenny, startled. "No, nor Phil! Tell me, Rosamond. There is only one you could look at me like that for!"

"Look out at the window."

Trembling all over, Jenny went and put her face to the lattice. The figure under the tree came nearer. Archie must have been able clearly to see her face in the moonlight. He stretched up his arms to her, then folded them together on his breast, and let himself be led away by Julius, while Jenny slid down on her knees, with her face buried, and the suppressed choking sobs made Herbert look up at Rosamond, and whisper, "It is?"

"It is," repeated Rosamond, who had thought him asleep, or entirely absorbed in the trouble of living.

"Go to her," he added.

Rosamond put her arm round her, and supported her into the next room; for, after the month of hopeless watching, the long sleeplessness and the struggle of this silent day to force her spirit to the forgiveness she had promised, and then the sudden reaction, had overpowered her, and the suppression and silence were beyond endurance. She did not even know that Herbert was awake when Rosamond brought her out into Mrs. Hornblower's room, and said, "Have it out now, my dear, no one will hear. Scream comfortably. It will do you good."

But Jenny could not even scream. She was in the excited agony when the mind is far too much for the body, and joy, unrealized, is like grief. If her brother had that day passed away, and if nothing had been heard of her lover, she would have been all calmness and resignation; but the revulsion had overcome her, and at the moment she was more conscious of strangulation than of anything else. Rosamond tended her for full half an hour, and then she seemed almost asleep, though she resisted the attempt to undress her, with the words, "I must go to Herbert."

"I will take care of Herbert," and Jenny was too much spent not to acquiesce, and fell asleep almost before she was laid down on the bed their landlady had given up to the watchers.

Rosamond's task was a comfortable one, for every hour of sleep, every mouthful of food seemed to do its work of restoration on the sound, healthy frame, and a smile and word of thanks met her whenever she roused her patient with the inevitable spoon.

When he awoke towards morning, he asked what day it was, and when she told him, answered, "So I thought. Then I have not lost count of time."

"No, you have been wonderfully clear-headed."

"I can't see how there can have been time to write," he said. "It is true that he is come, is it not?"

"Quite true; but he came independently on business," and Rosamond told of Julius's chase, bringing a look of amusement on his face.

Jenny came in with the rising sun, pale indeed, but another creature after her rest and in the sight of the restful countenance that greeted her with a smile. The moaning, hoarse voice was gone too, it was a faint shadow of Herbert's own tones that said, "Is not this good, Jenny? I didn't think to have seen it."

"My Herbert, you have given him back! You have given me the heart to be glad!"

"You must go and see him," said Herbert.

Jenny looked wistful and undecided; but Julius entered to say that she must come at once, for Archie must go back to London by the ten o'clock train to an appointment, and could not return for two days.

Herbert smiled her away, for he was still in a state where it was not possible to bear any engrossing of his head-nurse, and the lover's absence was, even to his unselfishness, good news.

Rosamond could not refrain from the pleasure of peeping down the little dark stair as Archie and his Jenny met in the doorway, and she walked demurely in their rear, wondering whether other

eyes saw as much as she did in the manner in which Jenny hung on his arm. She left them to their dewy walk in the Rectory garden to the last minute at which breakfast could be swallowed, and told Jenny that she was to drive him in the pony-carriage to Hazlett's Gate; she would take care of Herbert.

"You ought to be asleep, you know," said Jenny.

"My dear, I couldn't sleep! There's a great deal better than sleep! Is not Herbert going to get well? and aren't you jolly again and Archie back again? Sleep!—why I want to have wings and clap them—and more than all, is not Mr. Charnock off and away to-morrow? Sleep indeed!—I should like to see myself so stupid."

"Mr. Charnock?" interrogatively said Archie.

"The head of the family—the original Charnock of Dunstone," said Rosamond, who was in wild spirits, coming on a worn-out body and mind, and therefore perfectly unguarded. "Don't shake your head at me, Jenny, Archie is one of the family, and that makes you so, and I must tell you of his last performance. You know he is absolutely certain that his dear daughter is more infallible than all the Popes, even since the Council, or than anybody but himself, and that whatever goes wrong here is the consequence of Julius's faith in Dr. Easterby. So, when poor Cecil, uneasy in her mind, began asking about the illness at Wil'sbro', he enlivened her with a prose about misjudging, through well-intentioned efforts of clerical philanthropy to interfere with the sanitary condition of the town—so that wells grew tainted, &c., all from ignorant interference. Poor man he heard a little sob, and looked round, and there was Cecil in a dead faint. He set all the bells ringing, and sent an express for me."

"But wasn't he furious with Anne for mentioning drains at all?"

"My dear Joan, don't you know how many old women there are of both sorts, who won't let other people look over the wall at what they gloat on in private? However, he had his punishment, for he really thought that the subject had been too much for her delicacy, and simply upset her nerves."

"When was this?"

"Four or five days ago. She is better, but has said not a word more about it. She is nothing like strong enough, even for so short a journey as to Portishead; but they say change will be the best thing for her, and the coming down into the family would be too sad."

"Poor thing! Yes indeed," said Jenny; and feeling universally benevolent, she added, "give her my love," a thing which so sincere a person could hardly have said a few weeks ago.

Reserve was part of Cecil's nature, and besides, her father was almost always with her; but when she had been for the first time dressed in crape up to her waist, with the tiniest of caps perched toy-like on the top of her passive head, the sight upset him completely, and muttering, "Good heavens!—a widow at twenty-two!" he hid himself from the sight over some business transactions with Mrs. Poyntsett and Miles.

Rosamond seized the opportunity of bringing Julius in to pay his farewell visit, and presently Cecil said, "Julius, I should be much obliged if you would tell me the real facts about this illness."

"Do," said Rosamond. "Her half knowledge is most wearing."

He gently told her what science had pronounced.

"Then it was Pettitt's well?" she said.

"They tell us that this was the immediate cause of the outbreak; but there would probably have been quite as much fatal illness the first time any infectious disease came in. The whole place was in a shameful state, and you were the only people who tried to mitigate it."

"And did worse harm, because we would not listen to advice," said Cecil. "Julius, I have a great deal of money; can't I do anything now? My father wants me to give a donation to the church as a memorial of *him*, but, somehow, I don't feel as if I deserved to do that."

"I see what you mean, Cecil, but the town is being rated to set the drainage to rights, and it will thus be done in the most permanent and effectual way. There are some orphans who might be saved from the Union, about whom I thought of asking you to help."

Cecil asked the details of the orphans, and the consultation over them seemed to be prolonged by her because, even now, she could not resolve to go below the surface. It lasted until her father came to ask whether she were ready to go with him to Mrs. Poyntsett's sitting-room. She looked very fragile and childish as she stood up, clinging to his arm to help her wavering, uncertain step, holding out her hand to Julius and saying, "I shall see you again."

He was a little disappointed to see her no older, and no warmer; having gone thus far, it seemed as if she might have gone further and opened more. Perhaps he did not understand how feelings, naturally slow, were rendered slower by the languor of illness, which made them more oppressive than acute. As Mr. Charnock and his daughter knocked, the door was opened by Miles, who merely gave his hand, and went down. Frank, who had been reading in a low easy-chair by the fire, drew it close to his mother for her, and retreated to another seat, and the mother and daughter-in-law exchanged a grave kiss. Cecil attempted some civility about the

chair, to which poor Frank replied, "I'm afraid it is of no use to speak to me, Cecil, Miles can only just make me hear."

Regret for his misfortune, and inquiry as to the chance of restoration, were a possible topic. Mr. Charnock gave much advice about aurists, and examples of their success or non-success; and thence he diverged to the invalid-carriage he had secured, and his future plans for expediting his daughter's recovery. Meanwhile Mrs. Poyntsett and Cecil sat grave, dry-eyed, and constrained, each feeling that in Mr. Charnock's presence the interview was a nullity, yet neither of them able to get rid of him, nor quite sure that she would have done so if she could.

He, meanwhile, perfectly satisfied with his own considerate tact, talked away the allotted half-hour, and then pronounced his daughter pale and tired. She let him help her to rise, but held Mrs. Poyntsett's hand wistfully, as if she wished to say something but could not; and all Mrs. Poyntsett could bring out was a hope of hearing how she bore the journey. It was as if they were both frozen up. Yet the next moment Cecil was holding Frank's hand in a convulsive clasp, and fairly pulling him down to exchange a kiss, when he found her tears upon his cheek. Were they to his misfortune, or to his much-increased resemblance to his brother?

Mr. Charnock kept guard over her, so that her other farewells were almost as much restrained as these, and though she hung on Rosamond's neck, and seemed ready to burst forth with some fervent exclamation, he hovered by, saying, "My dear child, don't, don't give way to agitation. It does you honour, but it cannot be permitted at such a moment. Lady Rosamond, I appeal to your unfailing good sense to restrain her emotion."

"I haven't any good sense, and I think it only hurts her to restrain her emotion," said Rosamond, with one of her little stamps, pressing Cecil in her arms. "There, there, my dear, cry,—never mind, if it will comfort your poor heart."

"Lady Rosamond! This is—Cecil, my dear child! Your resolution—your resignation. And the boxes are packed, and we shall be late for the train!"

Mr. Charnock was a little jealous of Lady Rosamond as a comforter preferred to himself, and he spoke in a tone which Cecil had never resisted. She withdrew herself from Rosamond, still tearless, though her chest heaved as if there were a great spasm in it; she gave her hand to Miles, and let him lead her to the carriage; and so Raymond's widowed bride left Compton Poyntsett enfolded in that strange silence which some called sullenness and pride; others, more merciful, stunned grief.

Poor Cecil! there was less pity to be spared to her because of the intense relief it was to be free from her father, and to be able to stand in a knot consulting on the steps, without his coming out to find out what they were talking about, and to favour them with some Dunstone counsel.

The consultation was about Mr. Moy. It was determined that since Archie was in England, it would be better not to wait till Herbert was recovered, but that Miles and Julius should go together at once to see what effect they could produce on him.

They drove together to his office. He was a tall man, a few years over forty, and had hitherto been portly and well-preserved, with a certain serene air of complacent prosperity about him, that had always been an irritation to the county families, with whom he tried to assert an equality; but as he rose to greet the brothers, there was a bent and shrunken look about him: the hair on his temples had visibly whitened, his cheeks seemed to have sunk in, and there were deep furrows on them. Altogether he had grown full twenty years older in appearance since he had stood proposing a popular toast at the dinner at the town-hall. There was something nervous and startled in his gray eye, as he saw them enter, though he tried to assume his usual half-bland, half-easy, manner.

"Good morning, Captain Charnock Poyntsett. Good morning, Mr. Charnock, I hope I see you well?" the words faltering a little, as neither sailor nor clergyman took notice of his proffered hand; but he continued his inquiries after the convalescents, though neither inquired in return after Mrs. Moy, feeling, perhaps, that they would rather not hear a very sad account of her state just before letting their inevitable Nemesis descend; also, not feeling inclined for reciprocal familiarity, and wanting to discourage the idea that Miles came for political purposes.

"It has been a terrible visitation," said Moy, when he had been reduced to replying to himself.

"It has," said Julius. "Perhaps you have heard that your tenant, Gadley, is dead?"

"Yes, I did hear it. A very melancholy thing—the whole family swept-away," said Mr. Moy, his eye again betraying some uneasiness, which Julius increased by saying—

"We thought it right that you should hear that he made a disclosure on his death-bed."

"Indeed!" Mr. Moy sat erect—the hard, keen, watchful lawyer.

"A disclosure that nearly affects the character of Mr. Archibald Douglas," proceeded Julius.

"May I ask what this may be?"

"Mr. Gadley then informed me that he had been in the outer room, behind his desk, at the time when Mr. Douglas brought in the letter from my mother, containing the missing cheque, and that after Douglas was gone, he heard Mr. Vivian propose to those within to appropriate the amount

to their own debts.”

“Pardon me, Mr. Charnock, this is a very serious charge to bring on the authority of a man in a raving fever. Was any deposition taken before a magistrate?”

“No,” said Julius. “Mr. Lipscombe was fetched, but he was unable to speak at the time. However, on reviving, he spoke as is thus attested,” and he showed Herbert Bowater’s slip of paper.

“Mr. Charnock,” said Mr. Moy, “without the slightest imputation on the intentions of yourself or of young Mr. Bowater, I put it to yourself and Captain Charnock Poyntsett, whether you could go before a jury with no fuller attestation than you have in your hand. We know what Mr. Charnock and Mr. Bowater are. To a jury they would simply appear—pardon me—a young clergyman, his still more youthful curate, and a sister of mercy, attaching importance to the words of a delirious man; and juries have become very incredulous in such cases.”

“We shall see that,” said Miles sharply.

“The more cautious,” added Mr. Moy, “when it is the raking up of a matter eleven years old, where the witnesses are mostly dead, and where the characters of two gentlemen, also deceased, would be implicated. Believe me, sir, this firm—I speak as its present head—will be rejoiced to make any compensation to Mrs. Poyntsett for what went astray while coming to their hands. It has been our desire to do so from the very first, as letters of which I have copies testify; but our advances were met in a spirit of enmity, which may perhaps be laid aside now.”

“No so-called compensation can be accepted, but the clearing of Douglas’s character,” said Miles.

“It is a generous feeling,” said Mr. Moy, speaking apparently most dispassionately, though Julius saw his hands trembling below the table; “but even if the word of this delirious man were sufficient, have you reflected, Captain Charnock Poyntsett, on the unequal benefit of justifying—allowing that you could justify—a young man who has been dead and forgotten these eleven years, and has no relation living nearer than yourself, at the expense of those also gone, but who have left relations who could ill bear to suffer from such a revelation?”

“Justice is justice, whether a man be dead or alive,” said Miles; “and Douglas is alive to demand his right.”

“Alive!” cried Mr. Moy, starting violently. “Alive! Archie Douglas alive!”

“Alive, and in England,” said Julius. “He slept in my house the night before last. He never was in the *Hippolyta*, at all, but has been living in Africa all these years of exile.”

Mr. Moy’s self-command and readiness were all gone. He sank back in his chair, with his hands over his face. The brothers looked at one another, fearing he might have a stroke; but he revived in a moment, yet with a totally different expression on his countenance. The keen, defensive look was gone, there was only something piteously worn and supplicating in the face, as he said—

“Then, gentlemen, I cannot resent anything you may do. Believe me, but for the assurance of his death, I should have acted very differently long ago. I will assist you in any way you desire in reinstating Mr. Douglas in public opinion, only, if it be possible, let my wife be spared. She has recently had the heaviest possible blow; she can bear no more.”

“Mr. Moy, we will do nothing vindictive. We can answer for my mother and Douglas,” began Julius; but Miles, more sternly, would not let his brother hold out his hand, and said—

“You allow, then, the truth of Gadley’s confession?”

“What has he confessed?” said Moy, still too much the lawyer not to see that his own complicity had never yet been stated.

Julius laid before him his own written record of Gadley’s words, not only involving Moy in the original fraud, but showing how he had bribed the only witness to silence ever since. The unhappy man read it over, and said—

“Yes, Mr. Charnock, it is all true. I cannot battle it further. I am at your mercy. I would leave you to proclaim the whole to the world; if it were not for my poor wife and her father, I would be glad to do so. Heaven knows how this has hung upon me for years.”

“I can well believe it,” said Julius, not to be hindered now from grasping Mr. Moy’s hand.

It seemed to be a comfort now to tell the whole story in detail. Moy, the favoured and trusted articled clerk at first, then the partner, the lover and husband of the daughter, had been a model of steadiness and success so early, that when some men’s youthful follies are wearing off, he had begun to weary of the monotony of the office, and after beginning as Mentor to his young brother-in-law, George Proudfoot, had gradually been carried along by the fascination of Tom Vivian’s society to share in the same perilous pursuits, until both had incurred a debt to him far beyond their powers, while he was likewise so deeply involved, that no bonds of George Proudfoot would avail him.

Then came the temptation of Mrs. Poyntsett’s cheque, suggested, perhaps in jest, by Vivian, but growing on them as the feasibility of using it became clear. It was so easy to make it appear to Archie Douglas that the letter was simply an inquiry for the lost one. Mr. Proudfoot, the father,

was out of reach; Mrs. Poyntsett would continue to think the cheque lost in the post; and Tom Vivian undertook to get it presented for payment through persons who would guard against its being tracked. The sum exceeded the debt, but he would return the overplus to them, and they both cherished the hope of returning it with interest. Indeed, it had been but a half consent on the part of either, elicited only by the dire alternative of exposure; the envelope and letter were destroyed, and Vivian carried off the cheque to some of the Jews with whom he had had only too many transactions, and they never met him again.

Moy's part all along had been half cowardice, half ambition. The sense of that act and of its consequences had gnawed at his heart through all his success; but to cast himself down from his position as partner and son-in-law of Mr. Proudfoot, the keen, clever, trusted, confidential agent of half the families around—to let his wife know his shame and that of her brother, and to degrade his daughter into the daughter of a felon—was more than he could bear; and he had gone on trying to drown the sense of that one lapse in the prosperity of his career and his efforts to place his daughter in the first ranks of society. No doubt the having done an injury to the Poyntsett family had been the true secret of that enmity, more than political, which he had always shown to Raymond; and after thinking Gadley safer out of that office, and having yielded to his solicitations and set him up at the Three Pigeons, he had been almost compelled to bid for popularity by using his position as a magistrate to protect the blackguardism of the town. He had been meant for better things, and had been dragged on against his conscience and judgment by the exigencies of his unhappy secret; and when the daughter, for whose sake he had sacrificed his better self, had only been led by her position into the follies and extravagances of the worst part of the society into which she had been introduced, and threw herself into the hands of a dissipated gambler, to whom her fortune made her a desirable prey—truly his sin had found him out.

His fight at first had been partly force of habit, but he was so entirely crushed that they could only have pity on him when he put himself so entirely in their hands, only begging for forbearance to his wife and her aged father, and entreating that principal, interest, and compound interest might at once be tendered to Mrs. Poyntsett.

The brothers could answer for nothing. Archie must decide for himself what he would accept as restoration of his character, and Mrs. Poyntsett could alone answer as to whether she would accept the compensation. But neither of them could be hard on one so stricken and sorrowful, and they did not expect hardness from their mother and cousin, especially so far as old Mr. Proudfoot and his daughter were concerned.

That the confession was made, and that Archie should be cleared, was enough for Julius to carry to Herbert's room, while Miles repaired to his mother. It was known in the sick-room where the brothers had been, and Julius was watched as he crossed the street by Jenny's eager eye, and she met him at the door of the outer room with a face of welcome.

"Come in and tell us all," she said. "I see it is good news." Herbert was quite well enough to bear good news in full detail as he lay, not saying much, but smiling his welcome, and listening with ears almost as eager as his sister's. And as Julius told of the crushed and broken man, Jenny's tears rose to her eyes, and she pressed her brother's hand and whispered, "Thanks, dear boy!"

"Small thanks to me."

"Yes, I can enjoy it now," said Jenny; "thanks to you for forcing the bitterness out of me."

"Can you bear a little more good news, Herbert?" said Julius. "Who do you think is to have St. Nicholas?"

"Not William Easterby? That's too good to be true."

"But so it is. All the Senior Fellows dropped it like a red-hot coal."

"I thought Dwight wanted to marry?"

"Yes, but the lady's friends won't hear of his taking her there; so it has come down to young Easterby. He can't be inducted of course yet; but he has written to say he will come down on Saturday and take matters in hand."

"The services on Sunday? Oh!" said Herbert, with as great a gasp of relief as if he had been responsible for them; and, indeed, Rosamond declared that both her husband and Mr. Bindon looked like new men since Wil'sbro' was off their backs. Archie was coming back that evening. Jenny much longed to show her two treasures to each other, for it was a useless risk for the healthy man, and the sick one was too weak and tired to wish for a new face, or the trouble of speaking; nay, he could not easily bring himself to cheerful acquiescence in even his favourite Lady Rose taking his sister's place to set her free for an evening with Archie at the Hall.

Mrs. Poyntsett was in the drawing-room. She had taken courage to encounter the down-stair associations, saying she would make it no sadder for the dear boy than she could help, and so Miles had carried her down to meet one who had been always as one of her own sons.

And thus it was that she gathered him into her embrace, while the great strong man, only then fully realizing all the changes, sobbed uncontrollably beside her.

"My boy, my poor Archie," she said, "you are come at last. Did you not know you still had a mother to trust to?"

"I ought to have known it," said Archie, in a choked voice. "Oh that I had seen Jenny in London!"

For indeed it had become plain that it had been his flight that had given opportunity and substance to the accusation. If he had remained, backed by the confidence of such a family as the Poysetts, Gadley would have seen that testimony in his favour would be the safer and more profitable speculation; and Moy himself, as he had said, would have testified to the innocence of a living man on the spot, though he had let the blame rest on one whom he thought in the depths of the sea. Archie's want of moral courage had been his ruin. It had led him to the scene of temptation rather than resist his companions, and had thus given colour to the accusation, and in the absence of both Joanna and of his cousins, it had prevented him from facing the danger.

This sense made him the more willing to be forbearing, when, after dinner, the whole council sat round to hear in full the history of the interview with Mr. Moy; Anne taking up her position beside Frank, with whom, between her pencil and the finger-alphabet, she had established such a language as to make her his best interpreter of whatever was passing in the room.

"One could not help being sorry for Moy," said Miles, as he concluded; "he turns out to be but half the villain after all, made so rather by acquiescence than by his own free will."

"But reaping the profit," said Mrs. Poysett.

"Yes, though in ignorance of the injury he was doing, and thus climbing to a height that makes his fall the worse. I am sorry for old Proudfoot too," added Julius. "I believe they have not ventured to tell him of his granddaughter's marriage."

"I do not think the gain to me would be at all equal to the loss to them," said Archie. "Exposure would be ruin and heartbreak there, and I don't see what it would do for me."

"My dear Archie!" exclaimed both Mrs. Poysett and Joanna, in amazement.

"So long as you and Mr. Bowater are satisfied, I care for little else," said Archie.

"But your position, my dear," said Mrs. Poysett.

"We don't care much about a man's antecedents, within a few years, out in the colonies, dear Aunt Julia," said Archie, smiling.

"You aren't going back?"

"That depends," said Archie, his eyes seeking Joanna's; "but I don't see what there is for me to do here. I'm spoilt for a solicitor anyway—"

"We could find an agency, Miles, couldn't we?—or a farm—"

"Thank you, dear aunt," said Archie; "I don't definitely answer, because Mr. Bowater must be consulted; but I have a business out there that I can do, and where I can make a competence that I can fairly offer to Jenny here. If I came home, as I am now, I should only prey on you in some polite form, and I don't think Jenny would wish for that alternative. I must go back any way, as I have told her, and whether to save for her, or to make a home for her there, it must be for her to decide."

They looked at Jenny. She was evidently prepared; for though her colour rose a little, her frank eyes looked at him with a confiding smile.

"But we must have justice done to you, my dear boy, whether you stay with us or not," said Mrs. Poysett.

"That might have been done if I had not been fool enough to run away," said Archie; "having done so, the mass of people will only remember that there has been something against me, in spite of any justification. It is not worth while to blast Moy's character, and show poor old Proudfoot what a swindler his son was, just for that. The old man was good to me. I should like to let it rest while he lives. If Moy would sign such an exculpation of me as could be shown to Mr. Bowater, and any other whom it might concern, I should be quite willing to have nothing told publicly, at least as long as the old gentleman lives."

"I think Archie is right," said Miles, in the pause, with a great effort.

"Yes, right in the highest sense of the word," said Julius.

"It is Christian," Anne breathed across to her husband.

"I don't like it," said Mrs. Poysett.

"Let that scoundrel go unhung!" burst from Frank, who had failed to catch the spirit of his interpreter.

"I don't like it in the abstract, mother," said Miles; "but you and Frank have not seen the scoundrel in his beaten down state, and, as Archie says, it is hard to blacken the memory of either poor George Proudfoot or Tom Vivian, who have fathers to feel it for them."

"Poor Tom Vivian's can hardly be made much blacker," said Mrs. Poysett, "nor are Sir Harry's

feelings very acute; but perhaps poor old Proudfoot ought to be spared, and there are considerations as to the Vivian family. Still, I don't see how to consent to Archie going into exile again with this stigma upon him. I am sure Raymond would not, and I do not think Mr. Bowater will."

"Dear Aunt Julia," said Archie, affectionately, coming across to her, "it was indeed exile before, when I was dead to all of you; but can it be so now the communication is open, and when I am making or winning my home?" and his eyes brought Jenny to him by her side.

"Yes, dear Mrs. Poyntsett," she said, holding her hand, "I am sure he is right, and that it would spoil all our own happiness to break that poor old father's heart, and bring him and his wife to disgrace and misery. When I think of the change in everything since two days back—dear Herbert wrung a sort of forgiveness out of me—I can't bear to think of anybody being made miserable."

"And what will your papa say, child?"

"I think he will feel a good deal for old Proudfoot," said Jenny. "He rather likes the old man, and has laughed at our hatred of Miss Moy's pretensions."

"Then it is settled," said Archie; "I will write to Moy, for I suppose he had rather not see me, that I will say nothing about it publicly while Mr. Proudfoot lives, and will not show this confession of his, unless it should be absolutely necessary to my character. Nor after old Proudfoot's death, will I take any step without notice to him."

"Much more than he ought to expect," said Mrs. Poyntsett.

"I don't know," said Archie. "If he had refused, it would not have been easy to bring him to the point, I suppose I must have surrendered to take my trial, but after so many years, and with so many deaths, it would have been awkward."

"And the money, mother," said Miles, producing a cheque. "Poor Moy, that was a relief to him. He said he had kept it ready for years." Mrs. Poyntsett waved it off as if she did not like to touch it.

"I don't want it! Take it, Archie. Set up housekeeping on it," she said. "You are not really going back to that place?"

"Yes, indeed I am; I sail on Tuesday. Dear good Aunt Julia, how comfortable it is to feel any one caring for me again; but I am afraid even this magnificent present, were it ten times as much, could not keep me; I must go back to fulfil my word to my partner out there, even if I returned at once."

"And you let him go, Jenny?"

"I must!" said Jenny. "And only think how different it is now! For the rest, whether he comes back for me at once, or some years hence, must depend on papa and mamma."

She spoke with grave content beaming in her eyes, just like herself. The restoration was still swallowing up everything else.

## **CHAPTER XXXV**

### **Herbert's Christmas**

And when the self-aborring thrill  
Is past—as pass it must,  
When tasks of life thy spirit fill,  
Then be the self-renouncing will  
The seal of thy calm trust.—Lyra Apostolica

By Christmas Day Archie Douglas was in the Bay of Biscay; but even to Joanna it was not a sorrowful day, for did not Herbert on that day crawl back into his sitting-room, full dressed for the first time, holding tight by her shoulder, and by every piece of furniture on his way to the sofa, Rollo attending in almost pathetic delight, gazing at him from time to time, and thumping the floor with his tail? He had various visitors after his arrival—the first being his Rector, who came on his way back from church to give his congratulations, mention the number of convalescents who had there appeared, and speak of the wedding he had celebrated that morning, that of Fanny Reynolds and her Drake, who were going forth the next day to try whether they could accomplish a hawker's career free from what the man, at least, had only of late learnt to be sins. It was a great risk, but there had been a penitence about both that Julius trusted was genuine. A print of the Guardian Angel, which had been her boy's treasure, had been hung by Fanny in her odd little bedroom, and she had protested with tears that it would seem like her boy calling her back if she were tempted again.

"Not that I trust much to that," said Julius. "Poor Fanny is soft, and likes to produce an effect; but I believe there is sterling stuff in Drake."



"And he never had a chance before," said Herbert.

"No. Which makes a great difference—all indeed between the Publicans, or the Heathens, and the Pharisees. He can't read, and I doubt whether he said the words rightly after me; but I am sure he meant them."

"I suppose all this has done great good?" said Jenny.

"It will be our fault if it do not do permanent good. It ought," said Julius, gravely. "No, no, Herbert, I did not mean to load you with the thought. Getting well is your business for the present—not improving the occasion to others."

To which all that Herbert answered was, "Harry Hornblower!" as if that name spoke volumes of oppression of mind.

That discussion, however, was hindered by Mrs. Hornblower's own arrival with one of her lodger's numerous meals, and Julius went off to luncheon. The next step on the stairs made Herbert start and exclaim, "That's the dragoon! Come in, Phil."

And there did indeed stand the eldest brother, who had obtained a few days' leave, as he told them, and had ridden over from Strawyers after church. He came in with elaborate caution in his great muddy boots, and looked at Herbert like a sort of natural curiosity, exclaiming that he only wanted a black cap and a pair of bands to be exactly like Bishop Bowater, a Caroline divine, with a meek, oval, spiritual face, and a great display of delicate attenuated fingers, the length of which had always been a doubt and marvel to his sturdy descendants.

"Hands and all," quoth Philip; "and what are you doing with them?" as he spied a Greek Testament in the fingers, and something far too ponderous for them within reach. "Jenny, how dare you?" he remonstrated, poising the bigger book as if to heave it at her head. "That's what comes of your encouraging followers, eh?"

"Ah!" said Jenny, pretending to dodge the missile, while Rollo exercised great forbearance in stifling a bark, "Greek is not quite so severe to some folks as dragoon captains think."

"Severe or not he might let it alone," said Phil, looking much disposed to wrest away the little book, which Herbert thrust under his pillow, saying—

"It was only the Lesson."

"Why can't you read the Lesson like a sensible man in its native English? Don't laugh, children, you know what I mean. There's no good in this fellow working his brain. He can't go up again before September, and according to the Bishop's letter to my father, he is safe to pass, if he could not construe a line, after what he did at Wil'sbro'. The Bishop and Co. found they had made considerable donkeys of themselves. Yes, 'tis the ticket for you to be shocked; but it is just like badgering a fellow for his commission by asking him how many facets go to a dragon-fly's eye, instead of how he can stand up to a battery."

"So I thought," said Herbert; "but I know now what it is to be in the teeth of the battery without having done my best to get my weapons about me."

"Come now! Would any of those poor creatures have been the better for your knowing

"How many notes a sackbut has,  
Or whether shawms have strings,"

or the Greek particles, which I believe were what sacked you?"

"They would have been the better if I had ever learnt to think what men's souls are, or my own either," said Herbert, with a heavy sigh.

"Ah! well, you have had a sharp campaign," said Phil; "but you'll soon get the better of it when you are at Nice with the old folks. Jolly place—lots of nice girls—something always going on. I'll try and get leave to take you out; but you'll cut us all out! Ladies won't look at a fellow when there's an interesting young parson to the fore."

Herbert made an action of negation, and his sister said—

"The doctors say Nice will not do after such an illness as this. Papa asked the doctor there, and he said he could not advise it."

"Indeed! Then I'll tell you what, Herbs, you shall come into lodgings at York, and I'll look after you there. You shall ride Pimento, and dine at the mess."

"Thank you, Phil," said Herbert, to whom a few months ago this proposal would have been most seducing, "but I am going home, and that's all the change I shall want."

"Home! Yes, Ellen is getting ready for you. Not your room—oh, no! but the state bedroom! When will you come? My leave is only till Tuesday."

"Oh! I don't know how to think of the drive," sighed Herbert wearily.

"We must wait for a fine day, when he feels strong enough," said Jenny.

"All right," said Phil; "but ten days or a fortnight there will be quite enough, and then you'll come. There are some friends of yours, that only looked at me, I can tell you, for the sake of your name—eh, Master Herbs?"

Herbert did not rise to the bait; but Jenny said, "The Miss Strangeways?"

"Yes. Wouldn't he be flattered to hear of the stunning excitement when they heard of Captain Bowater, and how the old lady, their mother, talked by the yard about him? You'll get a welcome indeed when you come, old fellow. When shall it be?"

"No, thank you, Phil," said Herbert, gravely. "I shall come back here as soon as I am well enough. But there is one thing I wish you would do for me."

"Well, what? I'll speak about having any horse you please taken up for you to ride; I came over on Brown Ben, but he would shake you too much."

"No, no, it's about a young fellow. If you could take him back to York to enlist—"

"My dear Herbert, I ain't a recruiting-sergeant."

"No, but it might be the saving of him," said Herbert, raising himself and speaking with more animation. "It is Harry Hornblower."

"Why, that's the chap that bagged your athletic prizes! Whew! Rather strong, ain't it, Joan!"

"He did no such thing," said Herbert, rather petulantly; "never dreamt of it. He only was rather a fool in talking of them—vaunting of me, I believe, as not such a bad fellow for a parson; so his friends got out of him where to find them. But they knew better than to take him with them. Tell him, Jenny; he won't believe me."

"It is quite true, Phil," said Jenny, "the poor fellow did get into bad company at the races, but that was all. He did not come home that night, but he was stupefied with drink and the beginning of the fever, and it was proved—perfectly proved—that he was fast asleep at a house at Backsworth when the robbery was committed, and he was as much shocked about it as any one—more, I am sure, than Herbert, who was so relieved on finding him clear of it, that he troubled himself very little about the things. And now he has had the fever—not very badly—and he is quite well now, but he can't get anything to do. Truelove turned him off before the races for hanging about at the Three Pigeons, and nobody will employ him. I do think it is true what they say—his mother, and Julius, and Herbert, and all—that he has had a lesson, and wants to turn over a new leaf, but the people here won't let him. Julius and Herbert want him to enlist, and I believe he would, but his mother—as they all do—thinks that the last degradation; but she might listen if Captain Bowater came and told her about his own regiment—cavalry too—and the style of men in it—and it is the only chance for him."

Philip made a wry face.

"You see I took him up and let him down," said Herbert, sadly and earnestly.

"I really do believe," said Jenny, clenching the matter, "that Herbert would get well much faster if Harry Hornblower were off his mind."

Phil growled, and his younger brother and sister knew that they would do their cause no good by another word. There was an odd shyness about them all. The elder brother had not yet said anything about Jenny's prospects, and only asked after the party at the Hall.

"All nearly well, except Frank's deafness," said Jenny. "In a day or two he is going up to London to consult an aurist, and see whether he can keep his clerkship. Miles is going with him, and Rosamond takes Terry up to see his brother in London, and then, I believe, she is going on to get rooms at Rockpier, while Miles comes home to fetch his mother there."

"Mrs. Poyntsett!" with infinite wonder.

"Oh yes, all this has really brought out much more power of activity in her. You know it was said that there was more damage to the nervous system than anything else, and the shock has done her good. Besides, Miles is so much less timid about her than dear Raymond, who always handled her like a cracked teapot, and never having known much of any other woman, did not understand what was good for her."

"Miles has more pith in him than ever poor old Raymond had," said Phil. "Poor old Poyntsett, I used to think he wanted to be spoony on you, Joan, if he had only known his own mind. If he had, I suppose he would have been alive now!"

"What a pleasing situation for Jenny!" Herbert could not help muttering.

"Much better than running after ostriches in the wilderness," quoth Philip. "You ride them double, don't you?"

"Two little negro boys at a time," replied Jenny, "according to the nursery-book. Will you come and try, Phil?"

"You don't mean to go out?"

"I don't know," said Jenny; "it depends on how mamma is, and how Edith gets on."

Philip gave a long whistle of dismay. Herbert looked at him wistfully, longing to hear him utter some word of congratulation or sympathy with his sister; but none was forthcoming. Philip had disliked the engagement originally—never had cared for Archie Douglas, and was not melted now that Jenny was more valuable than ever. She knew him too well to expect it of him, and did not want to leave him to vex Herbert by any expression of his opinion on the matter, and on this account, as well as on that of the fatigue she saw on her patient's features, she refused his kind offer of keeping guard while she went in the afternoon to church, adding that Herbert must rest, as Mrs. Duncombe was coming afterwards to take leave of him.

Philip shrugged his shoulders in horror, and declared that he should not return again till *that* was over; but he should look in again before he went home to settle about Herbert's coming to York.

"York!" said Herbert, with a gasp, as Jenny brought his jelly, and arranged his pillows for a rest, while the dragoon's boots resounded on the stairs. "Please tell him to say no more about it. I want them all to understand that I'm not going in for that sort of thing any more."

"My dear, I think you had better not say things hotly and rashly; you may feel so very differently by and by."

"I know that," said Herbert; "but after all it is only what my ordination vows mean, though I did not see it then. And this year must be a penance year; I had made up my mind to that before I fell ill."

"Only you must get well," said Jenny.

"That takes care of itself when one is sound to begin with," said Herbert. "And now that I have been brought back again, and had my eyes opened, and have got another trial given me, it would be double shame to throw it away."

"I don't think you will do that."

"I only pray that all that seems burnt out of me by what I have seen, and heard, and felt, may not come back with my strength."

"I could hardly pray that for you, Herbert," said Jenny. "Spirits are wanted to bear a clergyman through his work, and though you are quite right not to *go in* for those things, I should be sorry if you never enjoyed what came in your way."

"If I never was tempted."

"It need not be temptation. It would not be if your mind were full of your work—it would only be refreshment. I don't want my boy to turn stern, and dry, and ungenial. That would not be like your Rector."

"My Rector did not make such a bad start, and can trust himself better," said Herbert. "Come, Jenny, don't look at me in that way. You can't wish me to go to York, and meet those rattling girls again?"

"No, certainly not, though Sister Margaret told Rosamond they had never had such a sobering lesson in their lives as their share in the mischief to you."

"It was not their fault," said Herbert. "It was deeper down than that. And they were good girls after all, if one only had had sense."

"Oh!—"

"Nonsense, Jenny," with a little smile, as he read her face, "I'm not bitten—no—but they, and poor Lady Tyrrell, and all are proof enough that it is easy to turn my head, and that I am one who ought to keep out of that style of thing for the future. So do silence Phil, for you know when he gets a thing into his head how he goes on, and I do not think I can bear it now."

"I am sure you can't," said Jenny, emphatically, "and I'll do my best. Only, Herbie, dear, do one thing for me, don't bind yourself by any regular renunciations of moderate things now your mind is excited, and you are weak. I am sure Julius or Dr. Easterby would say so."

"I'll think," said Herbert. "But if I am forgiven for this year, nothing seems to me too much to give up to the Great Shepherd to show my sorrow. 'Feed My sheep' was the way He bade St. Peter prove his love."

Jenny longed to say it was feeding the sheep rather than self-privation, but she was not sure of her ground, and Herbert's low, quiet, soft voice went to her heart. There were two great tears on his cheeks, he shut his eyes as if to keep back any more, and turned his face inwards on the sofa, his lips still murmuring over 'Feed My sheep.' She looked at him, feeling as if, while her heart had wakened to new glad hopes of earth, her brother, in her fulfilled prayer, had soared beyond her. They were both quite still till Mrs. Duncombe came to the door.

She was at the Rectory, her house being dismantled, and she, having stayed till the last case of fever was convalescent, and the Sisters recalled, was to go the next day to her mother-in-law's. She was almost as much altered as Herbert himself. Her jaunty air had given way to something equally energetic, but she looked wiry and worn, and her gold pheasant's crest had become little more than a sandy wisp, as she came quietly in and took the hand that Herbert held out to her, saying how glad she was to see him on the mend.

He asked after some of the people whom they had attended together, and listened to the details, asking specially after one or two families, where one or both parents had been taken away. "Poor Cecil Poyntsett is undertaking them," was the answer in each case. Some had been already sent to orphanages; others were boarded out till places could be found for them; and the Sisters had taken charge of two.

Then one widow was to 'do for' the Vicar, who had taken solitary possession of the Vicarage, but would soon be joined there by one or more curates. He had been inducted into the ruinous chancel of the poor old church, had paid the architect of the Rat-house fifty pounds (a sum just equalling the proceeds of the bazaar) to be rid of his plans; had brought down a first-rate architect; and in the meantime was working the little iron church vigorously.

"Everything seems to be beginning there just as I go into exile!" said Mrs. Duncombe. "It seems odd that I should have to go from what I have only just learnt to prize. But you have taught me a good deal—"

"Every one must have learnt a good deal," said Herbert wearily. "If one only has!"

"I meant you yourself, and that is what I came to thank you for. Yes, I did; even if you don't like to hear it, your sister does, and I must have it out. I shall recollect you again and again standing over all those beds, and shrinking from nothing, and I shall hold up the example to my boys."

"Do hold up something better!"

"Can you write?" she said abruptly.

"I have written a few lines to my mother."

"Do you remember what you said that night, when you had to hold that poor man in his delirium, and his wife was so wild with fright that she could not help?"

"I am not sure what you mean."

"You said it three or four times. It was only—"

"I remember," said Herbert, as she paused; "it was the only thing I could recollect in the turmoil."

"Would it tire you very much to write it for me in the flyleaf of this Prayer-Book that Mr. Charnock has given me?"

Herbert pulled himself into a sitting posture, and signed to his sister to give him the ink.

"I shall spoil your book," he said, as his hand shook.

"Never mind," she said, eagerly, "the words come back to me whenever I think of the life I have to face, and I want them written; they soothe me, as they soothed that frightened woman and raving man."

And Herbert wrote. It was only—"The Lord is a very present help in trouble."

"Yes," she said; "thank you. Put your initials, pray. There—thank you. No, you can never tell what it was to me to hear those words, so quietly, and gravely, and strongly, in that deadly struggle. It seemed to me, for the first time in all my life, that God is a real Presence and an actual Help. There! I see Miss Bowater wants me gone; so I am off. I shall hear of you."

Herbert was exhausted with the exertion, and only exchanged a close pressure of the hand, and when Jenny came back, after seeing the lady to the door, she thought there were tears on his cheek, and bent down to kiss him.

"That was just the way, Jenny," his low, tired voice said. "I never could recollect what I wanted to say. Only just those few Psalms that you did manage to teach me before I went to school, they came back and back."

Jenny had no time to answer, for the feet of Philip were on the stairs. He had been visiting Mrs. Hornblower, and persuading her that to make a dragoon of her son was the very best thing for him—great promotion, and quite removed from the ordinary vulgar enlistment in the line—till he had wiled consent out of her. And though Philip declared it was blarney, and was inclined to think it *infra dig.* to have thus exerted his eloquence, it was certain that Mrs. Hornblower would console herself by mentioning to her neighbours that her son was gone in compliment to Captain Bowater, who had taken a fancy to him.

The relief to Herbert was infinite; but he was by this time too much tired to do anything but murmur his thanks, and wish himself safe back in his bed, and Philip's strong-armed aid in reaching that haven was not a little appreciated.

Julius looked in with his mother's entreaty that Philip, and if possible his sister, should come up to eat their Christmas dinner at the Hall; and Herbert, wearily declaring that sleep was all he needed, and that Cranky would be more than sufficient for him, insisted on their accepting the invitation; and Jenny was not sorry, for she did not want a *tête-à-tête* with Philip so close to her patient's room, that whatever he chose to hear, he might.

She had quite enough of it in the walk to the Hall. Phil, with the persistency of a person bent on

doing a kind thing, returned to his York plan, viewing it as excellent relaxation for a depressed, over-worked man, and certain it would be a great treat to 'little Herb.' He still looked on the tall young man as the small brother to be patronized, and protected, and dragged out of home-petting; so he pooh-poohed all Jenny's gentler hints as to Herbert's need of care and desire to return to his work, until she was obliged to say plainly that he had entreated her to beg it might not be argued with him again, as he was resolved against amusement for the present.

Then Phil grew very angry both with Herbert and Jenny.

"Did they suppose he wanted the boy to do anything unclerical?"

"No; but you know it was by nothing positively unclerical that he was led aside before."

Phil broke out into a tirade against the folly of Jenny's speech. In his view, Herbert's conduct at Wil'sbro' had confuted the Bishop's censure, and for his own part, he only wished to amuse the boy, and give him rest, and if he did take him to a ball, or even out with the hounds, he would be on leave, and in another diocese, where the Bishop had nothing to do with him.

Jenny tried to make him understand that dread of the Bishop was the last thing in Herbert's mind. It was rather that he did not think it right to dissipate away a serious impression.

That was worse than before. She was threatened with the most serious displeasure of her father and mother, if she encouraged Herbert in the morbid ascetic notions ascribed to Dr. Easterby.

"It was always the way with the women—they never knew where to stop."

"No," said Jenny, "I did not know there was anywhere to stop in the way of Heaven."

"As if there were no way to Heaven without making a fool of oneself."

This answer made Jenny sorry for her own, as needlessly vexatious, and yet she recollected St. Paul's Christian paradoxes, and felt that poor Herbert might have laid hold of the true theory of the ministry. At any rate, she was glad that they were at that moment hailed and overtaken by the party from the Rectory, and that Phil pounced at once on Julius, to obtain his sanction to giving Herbert a little diversion at York.

Julius answered more warily, "Does he wish it?"

"No; but he is too weak yet, and is hipped and morbid."

"Well, Phil, I would not put it into his head. No doubt you would take very good care of him, but I doubt whether your father would like the Bishop to hear of him—under the circumstances—going to disport himself at the dragoon mess. Besides, I don't think he will be well enough before Lent, and then of course he could not."

This outer argument in a man's voice pacified Phil, as Julius knew it would, much better than the deeper one, and he contented himself with muttering that he should write to his father about it, which every one knew he was most likely not to do.

Who could have foretold last Christmas who would be the party at that dinner? Mrs. Poyntsett at the head of her own table, and Miles in the master's place, and the three waifs from absent families would have seemed equally unlikely guests; while of last year's party—Charlie was in India, Tom De Lancey with the aunts in Ireland, Cecil at Dunstone. Mrs. Duncombe was perfectly quiet, not only from the subduing influence of all she had undergone, but because she felt herself there like an intruder, and would have refused, but that to leave her at home would have distressed her hostess. Mrs. Poyntsett had never seen her before, and after all she had heard about her, was quite amazed at the sight of such an insignificant little person as she was without her dash and sparkle, and in a dress which, when no longer coquettish, verged upon the slovenly.

Poor thing, she was waiting till the Christmas visit of the elder Mrs. Duncombe's own daughter was over, so that there might be room for her, and she was thankful for the reprieve, which left her able to spend Christmas among the privileges she had only learnt to value just as she was deprived of them. She looked at Mrs. Poyntsett, half in curiosity, half in compunction, as she remembered how she had helped to set Cecil against her.

"But then," as she said to Rosamond, in going home, "I had prejudices about the genus *belle-mère*. And mine always knew and said I should ruin her son, in which, alas! she was quite right!"

"She will be pleased now," said Rosamond.

"No, indeed, I believe she had rather I were rapidity personified than owe the change to any one of your Rector's sort. I have had a letter or two, warning me against the Sisters, or thinking there is any merit in works of mercy. Ah, well! I'll try to think her a good old woman! But if she had only not strained the cord till it snapped, how much happier Bob and I should have been!"

What a difference there is between straining the cord for one's self and for other people! So Julius could not help feeling when Herbert, in spite of all that could be said to him, about morbid haste in renunciation, sent for the village captain of the cricket-club, and delivered over to him the bat, which had hitherto been as a knightly sword to him, resigning his place in the Compton Poyntsett Eleven, and replying to the dismayed entreaties and assurances of the young farmer that he would reconsider his decision, and that he would soon be quite strong again, that he had spent too much time over cricket, and liked it too well to trust himself at it again.

That was the last thing before on a New Year's Day, which was like an April day, Herbert came into church once more, and then was carried off in the Strawyers carriage, lying back half ashamed, half astonished, at the shower of strange tears which the ecstatic shouts and cheers of the village boys had called forth.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

### Rockpier

For Love himself took part against himself  
To warn us off.—TENNYSON

Rosamond was to have a taste of her old vocation, and go campaigning for lodgings, the searching for which she declared to be her strongest point. Rockpier was to be the destination of the family; Eleonora Vivian, whose letters had been far fewer than had been expected of her, was known to be there with her father, and this was lure sufficient for Frank. Frank's welfare again was the lure to Mrs. Poyntsett; and the benefit Rosamond was to derive from sea air, after all she had gone through, made Julius willing to give himself the holiday that everybody insisted on his having until Lent.

First, however, was sent off an advanced guard, consisting of Rosamond and Terry, who went up to London with Frank, that he might there consult an aurist, and likewise present himself to his chief, and see whether he could keep his clerkship. All this turned out well, his duties did not depend on his ears, and a month's longer leave of absence was granted to him; moreover, his deafness was pronounced to be likely to yield to treatment, and a tube restored him to somewhat easier intercourse with mankind, and he was in high spirits, when, after an evening spent with Rosamond's friends, the M'Kinnons, the trio took an early train for Rockpier, where Rosamond could not detain Frank even to come to the hotel with them and have luncheon before hurrying off to Verdure Point, the villa inhabited by Sir Harry. All he had done all the way down was to impress upon her, in the fulness of his knowledge of the place, that the only habitable houses in Rockpier were in that direction—the nearer to Verdure Point the more perfect!

Terry listened with smiling eyes, sometimes viewing the lover as a bore, sometimes as a curious study, confirming practical statements. Terry was thoroughly well, only with an insatiable appetite, and he viewed his fellow convalescent's love with double wonder when he found it caused oblivion of hunger, especially as Frank still looked gaunt and sallow, and was avowedly not returned to his usual health.

Rosamond set forth house-hunting, dropping Terry ere long at the Library, where she went to make inquiries, and find the *sine qua non*. When she reached the sitting-room at the hotel, she found Frank cowering over the fire in an arm-chair, the picture of despondency. Of course, he did not hear her entrance, and she darted up to him, and put her hand on his shoulder. He looked up to her with an attempt at indifference.

"Well, Frank!"

"Well, Rose! How have you sped?"

"I have got a house; but it is in Marine Terrace. I don't know what you'll say to me."

"I don't know that it signifies."

"You are shivering! What's the matter?"

"Only, it is very cold!"

(*Aside.* "Ring the bell, Terry, he is as cold as ice.") "Did you see her?"

"Oh yes. Did you have any luncheon?" ("Some port-wine and hot water directly, please.")

"Yes, I believe so. You are not ordering anything for me? There's nothing amiss—only it is so cold."

"It is cold, and you are not to be cold; nor are we to be cold, sir. You must go to bed early in the evening, Terry," said Rosamond, at last. "I shall make nothing of him while you are by, and an hour's more sleep will not be lost on you."

"Will you come and tell me then, Rosey? I deserve something."

"What, for sleeping there instead of here, when you've nothing to do?"

"Indeed, but I have. I want to make out this little Chaucer. I shall go down to the coffee-room and do it."

"Well, if you like poking out your eyes with the gas in the coffee-room, I have no objection, since you are too proud to go to bed. Wish him good night first, and do it naturally."

"Nature would be thrown away on him, poor fellow," said Terry, as he roused Frank with

difficulty to have 'Good night' roared into his ear, and give a listless hand. He was about to deal with Rosamond in the same way, but she said—

"No, I am not going yet," and settled herself opposite to him, with her half-knitted baby's shoe in her hands, and her feet on the fender, her crape drawn up from the fire, disposed for conversation. Frank, on the other hand, fell back into the old position, looking so wretched that she could bear it no longer, picked up the tube, forced it on him, and said, "Do tell me, dear Frank. You used to tell me long ago."

He shook his head. "That's all over. You are very good, Rosamond, but you should not have forced her to come to me."

"Not!"

"My life was not worth saving."

"She has not gone back from you again?—the horrible girl!" (*this last aside*).

"It is not that she has gone back. She has never changed. It is I who have forfeited her."

"You!—You!—She has not cast you off?"

"You know how it was, and the resolution by which she had bound herself, and how I was maddened."

"That! I thought it was all forgiven and forgotten!" cried Rosamond.

"It is not a matter of forgiveness. She put it to me whether it was possible to begin on a broken word."

"Worse and worse! Why, when you've spoken a foolish word, it is the foolishest thing in the world to hold to it."

"If it were a foolish word!" said poor Frank. "I think I could have atoned for that day, if she could have tried me; but when she left me to judge, and those eyes of sweet, sorrowful—"

"Sweet! Sorrowful, indeed! About as sweet and sorrowful as the butcher to the lamb. Left you to judge! A refinement of cruelty! She had better have stayed away when I told her it was the only chance to save your life."

"Would that she had!" sighed Frank. "But that was your doing, Rosamond, and what she did in mere humanity can't be cast back again to bind her against her conscience."

"Plague on her conscience!" was my Lady's imprecation. "I wonder if it is all coquetry!"

"She deserves no blame," said Frank, understanding the manner, though the words were under Rosamond's breath. "Her very troubles in her own family have been the cause of her erecting a standard of what alone she could trust. Once in better days she fancied I came up to it, and when I know how far I have fallen short of it—"

"Nonsense. She had no business to make the condition without warning you."

"She knows more of me than only that," muttered poor Frank. "I was an ass in town last summer. It was the hope of seeing her that drew me; but if I had kept out of that set, all this would never have been."

"It was all for her sake." (A substratum of 'Ungrateful, ungenerous girl'.)

"For her sake, I thought—not her true sake." Then there was a silence, broken by his exclaiming, "Rose, I must get away from here!"

"You can't," she called back. "Here's your mother coming. She would be perfectly miserable to find you gone."

"It is impossible I should stay here."

"Don't be so chicken-hearted, Frank. If she has a heart worth speaking of, she'll come round, if you only press hard enough. If not, you are well quit of her."

He cried out at this, and Rosamond saw that what she called faintness of heart was really reverence and sense of his own failings; but none the less did she scorn such misplaced adoration, as it seemed to her, and scold him in her own fashion, for not rushing on to conquer irresistibly; or else being cool and easy as to his rejection. He would accept neither alternative, was depressed beyond the power of comfort, bodily weariness adding to his other ills, and went off at last to bed, without retracting his intention of going away.

"Well, Terry, it is a new phase, and a most perplexing one!" said Rosamond, when her brother came back with arch curiosity in his brown eyes. "The girl has gone and turned him over, and there he lies on his back prostrate, just like Ponto, when he knows he deserves it!"

"Turned him over—you don't mean that she is off? I thought she was a perfect angel of loveliness and goodness."

"Goodness! It is enough to make one hate goodness, unless this is all mere pretence on her part. But what I am afraid of is his setting off, no one knows where, before any one is up, and leaving

us to confront his mother, while he falls ill in some dog-hole of a place. He is not fit to go about by himself, and I trust to you to watch him, Terry."

"Shall I lie on the mat outside his door?" said Terry, half meaning it, and somewhat elated by the romantic situation.

"No, we are not come to quite such extremities. You need not even turn his key by mistake; only keep your ears open. He is next to you, is he not?—and go in on pretext of inquiry—if you hear him up to mischief."

Nothing was heard but the ordinary summons of Boots; and it turned out in the morning that the chill had exasperated his throat, and reduced him to a condition which took away all inclination to move, besides deafening him completely.

Rosamond had to rush about all day, providing plenishing for the lodging. Once she saw Sir Harry and his daughter in the distance, and dashed into a shop to avoid them, muttering, "I don't believe she cared for him one bit. I dare say she has taken up with Lorimer Strangeways after all! Rather worse than her sister, I declare, for she never pretended to be too *good* for Raymond," and then as a curate in a cassock passed—"Ah! some of them have been working on her, and persuading her that he is not good enough for her. Impertinent prig! He looks just capable of it!"

Frank was no better as to cold and deafness, though somewhat less uncomfortable the next day in the lodging, and Rosamond went up without him to the station to meet the rest of the party, and arrange for Mrs. Poyntsett's conveyance. They had accomplished the journey much better than had been hoped, but it was late and dark enough to make it expedient that Mrs. Poyntsett should be carried to bed at once, after her most unwonted fatigue, and only have one glimpse and embrace of Frank, so as to stave off the knowledge of his troubles till after her night's rest. He seconded this desire, and indeed Miles and Anne only saw that he had a bad cold; but Rosamond no sooner had her husband to herself, than she raved over his wrongs to her heart's content, and implored Julius to redress them, though how, she did not well know, since she by turns declared that Frank was well quit of Lenore, and that he would never get over the loss.

Julius demurred a good deal to her wish of sending him on a mission to Eleonora. All Charnocks naturally swung back to distrust of the Vivians, and he did not like to plead with a girl who seemed only to be making an excuse to reject his brother; while, on the other hand, he knew that Raymond had not been satisfied with Frank's London habits, nor had he himself been at ease as to his religious practices, which certainly had been the minimum required to suit his mother's notions. He had been a communicant on Christmas Day, but he was so entirely out of reach that there was no knowing what difference his illness might have made in him; Eleonora might know more than his own family did, and have good and conscientious reasons for breaking with him; and, aware that his own authority had weight with her, Julius felt it almost too much responsibility to interfere till the next day, when his mother, with tears in her eyes, entreated him to go to Miss Vivian, to find out what was this dreadful misunderstanding, which perhaps might only be from his want of hearing, and implore her, in the name of an old woman, not to break her boy's heart and darken his life, as it had been with his brother.

Mrs. Poyntsett was tremulous and agitated, and grief had evidently told on her high spirit, so that Julius could make no objection, but promised to do his best.

By the time it was possible to Julius to call, Sir Harry and Miss Vivian were out riding, and he had no further chance till at the gaslit Friday evening lecture, to which he had hurried after dinner. A lady became faint in the heated atmosphere, two rows of chairs before him, and as she turned to make her way out, he saw that it was Eleonora, and was appalled by seeing not only the whiteness of the present faintness, but that thinness and general alteration which had changed the beautiful face so much that he asked himself for a moment whether she could have escaped the fever. In that moment he had moved forward to her support; and she, seeming to have no one belonging to her, clung to the friendly arm, and was presently in the porch, where the cool night air revived her at once, and she begged him to return, saying nothing ailed her but gas.

"No, I shall see you home, Lena."

"Indeed, there is no need," said the trembling voice, in which he detected a sob very near at hand.

"I shall use my own judgment as to that," said Julius, kindly.

She made no more resistance, but rose from the seat in the porch, and accepted his arm. He soon felt that her steps were growing firmer, and he ventured to say, "I had been looking for you to-day."

"Yes, I saw your card."

"I had a message to you from my mother." Lenore trembled again, but did not dare to relax her hold on him. "I think you can guess what it is. She thinks poor Frank must have mistaken what you said."

"No—I wrote it," said Lena, very low.

"And you really meant that the resolution made last year is to stand between you and Frank? I



am not blaming you, I do not know whether you may not be acting rightly and wisely, and whether you may not have more reason than I know of to shrink from intrusting yourself to Frank; but my mother cannot understand it, and when she sees him heartbroken, and too unwell to act for himself—”

“Oh! is he ill?”

“He has a very bad cold, and could not get up till the afternoon, and he is deafer than ever.”

Lena moaned.

He proceeded: “So as he cannot act for himself, my mother begged me to come to an understanding.”

“I told him to judge,” said Lena faintly, but turning Julius so as to walk back along the parade instead of to her abode.

“Was not that making him his own executioner?” said Julius.

“A promise is binding,” she added.

“Yet, is it quite fair?” said Julius, sure now which way her heart went, and thinking she was really longing to be absolved from a superstitious feeling; “is it fair to expect another person to be bound by a vow of which you have not told him?”

“I never thought he could,” sighed she.

“And you know he was entrapped!” said Julius, roused to defend his brother.

“And by whom?” she said in accents of deep pain.

“I should have thought it just—both by your poor sister and by him—to undo the wrong then wrought,” said Julius, “unless, indeed, you have some further cause for distrusting him?”

“No! no!” cried she. “Oh, Julius! I do it for his own good. Your mother knows not what she wishes, in trying to entangle him again with me.”

“Lenore, will you tell me if anything in him besides that unhappy slip makes you distrust him?”

“I must tell the whole truth,” gasped the poor girl, as they walked along in the sound of the sea, the dark path here and there brightened by the gas-lights, “or you will think it is his fault! Julius, I know more about my poor father than ever I did before. I was a child when I lived here before, and then Camilla took all the management. When we came to London, two months ago, I soon saw the kind of people he got round him for his comforters. I knew how he spent his evenings. It is second nature to him—he can’t get put of it, I believe! I persuaded him to come down here, thinking it a haven of peace and safety. Alas! I little knew what old habits there were to resume, nor what was the real reason Camilla brought us away after paying our debts. I was a happy child *then*, when I only knew that papa was gone to his club. Now I know that it is a billiard-room—and that it is doing all the more harm because he is there—and I see him with people whom he does not like me to speak to. I don’t know whether I could get him away, and it would be as bad anywhere else. I don’t think he can help it. And he is often unwell; he can’t do without me when he has the gout, and I ought not to leave him to himself. And then, if—if we did marry and he lived with us in London, think what it would be for Frank to have such a set brought about him. I don’t see how he could keep them off. Or even an engagement bringing him down here—or anywhere, among papa’s friends would be very bad for him. I saw it in London, even with Camilla to keep things in check.” She was almost choked with suppressed agony.

“I see,” said Julius, gravely and pitifully, “it would take a man of more age and weight than poor Frank to deal with the habits of a lifetime. The risk is great.”

“And when I saw it,” added Eleonora, “I felt I must never, never bring him into it. And how could I tell him? Your mother does not know, or she could not wish it!”

“It is plain that in the present state of things you ought not to marry, and so far you are judging nobly,” said Julius; “but next comes the question—how far it is well to make that day at the races the pretext?”

“Don’t call it a pretext,” said Lenore, quickly. “I meant what I said a year ago, with all my soul. Perhaps it was hasty, when poor Camilla drove me into saying I did not mean only an habitual gambler, but one who had ever betted. And now, well as I know how cruelly she used that presumptuous vow of mine, and how she repented of it at last, still I feel that to fly in its face might be so wrong, that I should have no right to expect not to drag Frank down.”

“Perhaps I am too much interested to judge fairly,” said Julius. “I should like you to consult some one—say Dr. Easterby—but it seems to me that it is just such a vow as you may well be absolved from.”

“But is it not Frank’s protection?”

“Put yourself in that poor fellow’s place, Lena, and see what it is to him to be cast off for such a reason. He did the wrong, I know. He knew he ought not, apart from your resolution, and he did thus prove his weakness and unfitness—”

"Oh no, no—it was not his fault."

Julius laughed a little, and added, "I am not saying he deserves you—hush!—or that it would be well to take him now, only that I think to find himself utterly rejected for so insufficient a reason, and when he was really deceived, would not only half kill him now, but do his whole nature cruel harm."

"What is to be done then?" sighed Eleonora.

"I should say, and I think my mother would put him on some probation if you like, even before you call it an engagement; but give him hope. Let him know that your attachment is as true and unselfish as ever, and do not let him brood in misery, enhanced by his deafness."

"I can't marry while poor papa is like what he is," said she, as if trying to keep hold of her purpose.

"But you can be Frank's light and hope—the prize for which he can work."

"If—your mother will have it so—then," said Eleonora, and the sigh that followed was one to relieve, not exhaust.

"May I tell her then?"

"You must, I suppose," said the poor girl; "but she can never wish it to go on!"

Julius left her at her own door and went home.

As Mrs. Poyntsett said, she could expect nothing better of him. "It is quite clear," she said, "that poor Lena is right, that Frank must not set up housekeeping with him. Even if he were certain to be proof against temptation, it would be as bad a connection as could be. I never thought of his being with them; but I suppose there is nothing else to be done with him."

"Frank ought not to be exposed to the trial. The old man has a certain influence over him."

"Though I should have thought such a hoary old wreck was nothing but a warning. It has been a most unhappy affair from first to last; but Lena is a good, unselfish girl, and nothing else will give Frank a chance of happiness. Waiting will do them no harm, they are young enough, and have no great sum to marry upon, so if you can bring her to me to-morrow, Julius, I will ask her to grant my poor boy leave to wait till she can see her way to marrying."

Julius ventured to write down, 'Hope on!'

To this Frank replied with rather a fiery look, "Mind, I will not have her persuaded or worked on. It must be all her own doing. Yes," answering a look of his brother, "I see what you are about. You want to tell her it is a superstition about her vow and not using me fairly. So it may be in some points of view; but the fact remains. She thought she might trust to my good sense and principle, and it proved that she was wrong. After that it is not right to force myself on her. I don't dare to do it, Julius. I have not been shut up with myself all these weeks for nothing. I know now how unworthy I ever was to think of her as mine. If I can ever prove my repentance she might in time forgive me; but for her to be driven to take me out of either supposed justice or mercy, I will not stand! A wretched deaf being like me! It is not fitting, and I *will* not have it done!"

Julius wrote—"She is suffering greatly. She nearly fainted at church, and I had to take her out."

Frank's face worked, and he put his hand over it as he said, "You are all torturing her; I shall write a letter and settle it myself."

Frank did write the letter that very night, and when Julius next saw Eleonora her eyes were swollen with weeping, and she said—

"Take me to him! I must comfort him!"

"You have heard from him?"

"Yes. Such a beautiful letter. But he must not think it *that*."

She did show the letter, reserved though she was. She was right about it; Julius was struck with the humble sweetness, which made him think more highly of poor Frank than ever he had done before. He had decided against himself, feeling how much his fall at the race-ground had been the effect of the manner in which he had allowed himself to be led during the previous season in London, and owning how far his whole aim in life fell short of what it ought to be, asking nothing for himself, not even hope nor patience, though he could not refrain from expressing his own undying love, and his one desire that if she had not attached herself to one more worthy, he might in time be thought to have proved his repentance. In the meantime she would and could be only his beacon star.

Julius could not but take her home, and leave her with Frank, though his mother was a little annoyed not to have first seen her; but when Frank himself brought her to Mrs. Poyntsett's arms, it turned out that the two ladies were quite of one mind as to the inexpediency of Sir Harry living with Frank. They said it very covertly, but each understood the other, and Eleonora went home wonderfully happier, and looking as if her fresh beauty would soon return.

There was quite enough to dazzle Miles, whose first opinion was that they were hard on Sir Harry, and that two ladies and a clergyman might be making a great deal too much of an old man's form of loitering, especially in a female paradise of ritualism, as he was pleased to call Rockpier, where all the male population seemed to be invalids.

However, it was not long before he came round to their view. He found that Sir Harry, in spite of his gentlemanly speech and bearing, was a battered old *roué*, who was never happy but when gambling, and whose air and title were baits to victims of a lower class than himself; young clerks and medical students who were flattered by his condescension. He did not actually fleece them himself, he had too little worldly wisdom for that; but he was the decoy of a coterie of Nymms, Pistols, and Bardolphs, who gathered up the spoil of these and any unwary youth who came to Rockpier in the wake of an invalid, or to 'see life' at a fashionable watering-place. Miles thought the old man was probably reduced to a worse style of company by the very fact of the religious atmosphere of the place, where he himself found so little to do that he longed for the opening of the Session; but he was strongly impressed with the impracticability of a *ménage* for Frank, with the baronet as father-in-law.

Not so, Sir Harry. He was rather fond of Frank, and had been glad to be no longer bound to oppose the match, and he had benignantly made up his mind to the great sacrifice of living in his house in London, surrounding himself with all his friends, and making the young couple supply him with pocket-money whenever he had a run of ill-luck. They would grant it more easily than Camilla, and would never presume to keep him under regulation as she had done. They would be too grateful to him.

So, after a day or two, he demanded of Eleonora whether her young man had given her up, or what he meant by his coolness in not calling? Lena answered the last count by explaining how unwell he had been, and how his hearing might be lost by a renewal of his cold. She was however further pressed, and obliged to say how matters stood, namely, that they were engaged, but meant to wait.

Whereupon, Sir Harry, quite sincerely, poor old man, grew compassionate and grandly benignant. The young people were prudent, but he would come to their aid. His pittance added to theirs—even now would set all things straight. He would never stand in the way of their happiness!

Mrs. Poyntsett had bidden Lena cast the whole on her shoulders. The girl was too truthful and generous to do this, fond as she still was of her father.

"No, dear papa," she said, "it is very kind in you," for she knew that so he meant it, "but I am afraid it will not quite do. You see Frank must be very careful in his situation—and I don't think so quiet a way of life would suit you."

"Nonsense, child; I'm an old man, and I want no racketing. Just house-room for myself and Victor. That fellow is worth two women in a house. You'll keep a good cook. I'll never ask for more than a few old friends to dinner, when I don't feel disposed to have them at the club."

Old friends! Yes, Lenore knew them, and her flesh crept to think of Frank's chief hearing of them constantly at his house.

"I don't think we should afford it, dear papa," she said. "We have agreed that I had better stay with you for the present, and let Frank make his way."

Then a thought occurred to Sir Harry. "Is this the Poyntsetts' doing?"

"No," said Eleonora, stoutly. "It is mine. I know that—oh! papa, forgive me!—the things and people you like would not be good for Frank, and I will not leave you nor bring him into them. Never!"

Sir Harry swore—almost for the first time before her—that this was that old hag Mrs. Poyntsett's doing, and that she would make his child abandon him in his old age. He would not have his daughter dragged into a long engagement. Wait—he knew what waiting meant—wait for his death; but they should have her now or not at all; and he flung away from her and her entreaties to announce his determination to the suitor's family.

He did not find this very easy to accomplish. Frank's ears were quite impervious to all his storming, and if he was to reduce his words to paper, they came less easily. Miles, to whom he tried to speak as a man of the world, would only repeat that his mother would never consent to the marriage, unless the young couple were to live alone; nay, he said, with a grain of justice, he thought that had been Sir Harry's own view in a former case. Would he like to see Mrs. Poyntsett? she is quite ready.

Again Sir Harry quailed at the notion of encountering Mrs. Poyntsett; but Miles, who had a great idea that his mother could deal with everybody, and was the better for doing so, would not let him off, and ushered him in, then stood behind her chair, and thoroughly enjoyed the grand and yet courteous way in which she reduced to nothing Sir Harry's grand beneficence in eking out the young folks' income with his own. She knew very well that even when the estate was sold, at the highest estimate, Eleonora would have the barest maintenance, and that he could hardly expect what the creditors now allowed him, and she made him understand that she knew this, and that she had a right to make conditions, since Frank, like her other sons, could not enter into possession of his share of his father's fortune unless he married with her consent.

And when he spoke of breaking off the engagement, she was callous, and said that he must do as he pleased, though after young people were grown up, she thought the matter ought to rest with themselves. She did not wish her son to marry till his character was more confirmed.

He went home very angry, and yet crest-fallen, sought out Eleonora, and informed her of his command, that her engagement should be broken off.

"I do not know how that can be done, papa," said Eleonora. "We have never exactly made an engagement; we do not want to marry at once, and we could not help loving each other if we tried."

"Humph! And if I laid my commands on you never to marry into that family?"

"I do not think you will do that, papa, after your promise to Camilla."

She had conquered. No further objection was made to her being as much as she pleased with the Charnocks as long as they remained at Rockpier, nor to her correspondence with Frank when he went away, not to solitary lodgings as before, but to the London house, which Miles and Anne only consented to keep on upon condition of their mother sharing it with them.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

### The Third Autumn

A good man ther was of religion,  
That was a poure Persone of a toune;  
But rich he was of holy thought and work,  
He also was a learned man a clerk.—CHAUCER

Autumn came round again, and brought with it a very different September from the last.

Willansborough was in a state of commotion. That new Vicar had not only filled the place with curates, multiplied services in the iron church, and carried on the building of St. Nicholas in a style of beauty that was quite affronting to those who were never asked to contribute to it, but he gave people no peace in their easy conventional sins, pricked them in their hearts with personal individual stings, and, worse than all, protested against the races, as conducted at Wil'sbro'.

And their Member was just as bad! Captain Charnock Poyntsett, instead of subscribing, as part of his duty to his constituents, had replied by sending his brother Raymond's half-finished letter to the club, with an equally strong and resolute one of his own, and had published both in all the local papers.

Great was the fury and indignation of Wil'sbro', Backsworth, and all the squires around. Of course it was a delirious fancy of poor Raymond Poyntsett, and Miles had been worked upon by his puritanical wife and ritualistic brother to publish it. Newspapers teemed with abuse of superstition and pharisaism, and praise of this wholesome, moral, and 'truly English' sport. Gentlemen, and ladies too, took the remonstrance as a personal offence, and threatened to visit no more at Compton; the electors bade him look to his seat, and held meetings to invite 'Mr. Simmonds Proudfoot,' as he now called himself, to represent them; and the last week, before the races, the roughs mobbed him in Water Lane. He rode quietly through them, with his sailor face set as if against a storm, but when he was out of the place, he stopped his horse at Herbert Bowater's lodgings, that his black eye might be washed, and the streams of rotten egg removed from his coat before he presented himself at home. Not that he had much fear of startling his wife and mother. It was more from the Englishman's hatred of showing himself a hero, for Anne was perfectly happy in the persecution he had brought on himself, for she never had been so sure before that he was not of the world, worldly.

The races were exceptionally brilliant, and fully attended, but the triumph of the roughs had made them more outrageously disgraceful in their conduct than ever; and when Miles went to the quarter-sessions, rather doubting whether he should not find himself landed in Coventry, not only did the calendar of offences speak for itself, but sundry country gentlemen shook him by the hand, lamenting that railways and rowdyism had entirely altered races from what they used to be, that he was in the right, and what they had seen so recently proved that the only thing to be done was to withdraw from what respectable people could no longer keep within bounds. Such withdrawal will not prevent them, but it will hinder the demoralization from being so extensive as formerly, since no one of much character to lose will attend them.

Mr. Bowater rejoiced in Miles's triumph. None of that family had been at these same races. They had all been much too anxious about Herbert not to view Ember Week in a very different light from that in which they had thought of it before.

Lent had brought the junior curate back from Strawyers, not much more than a convalescent, but with his sister to look after him, and both Rector and senior anxious to spare him; he had gone on well till the family returned and resumed Jenny, when he was left to his own devices, namely, 'all work and no play.' He was as fixed as ever in his resolution of making this a penance year, and believed himself so entirely recovered as to be able to do without relaxations. Cricket, riding,

dinners, and garden-parties alike he had given up, and divided his time entirely between church and parish work and study. Hard reading had never been congenial, and took a great deal out of him, and in fact, all his theological study had hitherto been little more than task-work, into which he had never fully entered, whereas these subjects had now assumed such a force, depth, and importance, that he did in truth feel constrained to go to the very foundation, and work through everything again, moved and affected by them in every fibre of his soul, which vibrated now at what it had merely acquiesced in before. It was a phase that had come suddenly on him, when his mind was in full vigour of development, and his frame and nerves below par, and the effect could not but be severe. He was wrapped up in these great realities, and seemed to care for no talk, except discussing them with Julius or the senior curate, and often treated things of common life like the dream that they really are.

Julius laid as little parish work on him as possible, only, indeed, what seemed actually beneficial by taking him out; but it may be feared, that in his present fervid state he was not nearly so winning to his young clients as when he was less 'terribly in earnest,' although the old women were perhaps more devoted to him, from the tender conviction 'that the poor dear young gentleman would not be here long.'

For indeed it was true that he had never advanced in strength or looks since his return, but rather lost ground, and thus every change of weather, or extra exertion, told on him, till in August he was caught in a thunder-storm, and the cold that ensued ran on into a feverish attack, which barely left him in time for the Ordination, and then with a depressed system, and nerves morbidly sensitive.

So sensible (or more than sensible) was he of his deficiencies, that he would willingly have held back, and he was hardly well enough to do himself justice; but there was no doubt that he would pass, and it was plain that three more months of the strain of preparation might leave permanent effects on his health.

As it was, the examining chaplain did not recognize the lean, pale, anxious man, for the round-faced, rosy, overgrown boy of a year ago. His scholarship and critical knowledge were fairly above the mark, in spite of a racking headache; and his written sermon, together with all that was elicited from him, revealed, all unconsciously to himself, what treasures he had brought back from the deep waters which had so nearly closed over him.

So superior had he shown himself, that he was appointed to read the Gospel, a choice that almost shocked him, knowing that what had made him excel had been an experience that the younger men had happily missed. But the mark of approval was compensation to his parents and sisters for the disappointment of the last year, and the only drawback was fear of the effect of the long ceremonial, so deeply felt.

He met them afterwards, very white-faced, with head aching, and weary almost beyond speech, but with a wonderfully calm, restful look on his face, such as reminded Jenny of those first hours of his recovery.

They took him home and put him to bed, and there he lay, hardly speaking, and generally sleeping. There he still was on the Monday, when Julius came to inquire after him, and was taken up-stairs at once by Jenny, with the greeting, "So the son and heir is come, Julius?"

"Yes, and I never saw my mother more exulting. When Rosamond ran down to tell her, she put her arms round her neck and cried. She who never had a tear through all last year. I met your father and mother half-way, and they told me I might come on."

"I think nothing short of such news would have made mamma leave this boy," said Jenny; "but she must have her jubilee with Mrs. Poyntsett."

"And I'm quite well," said Herbert, who had been grasping Julius's hand, with a wonderful look in his eyes; "yes, really—the doctor said so."

"Yes, he did," said Jenny, "only he said we were to let him alone, and that he was not to get up till he felt quite rested."

"And I shall get up to dinner," said Herbert, so sleepily, that Julius doubted it. "I hope to come back before Sunday."

"What does your doctor say to that?"

"He says," replied Jenny, "that this gentleman must be rational; that he has nothing the matter with him now, but that he is low, and ripe for anything. Don't laugh, you naughty boy, he said you were ripe for anything, and that he must—yes, he *must*—be turned out to grass somehow or other for the winter, and do nothing at all."

"I begin to see what you are driving at, Mrs. Joan, you look so triumphant."

"Yes," said Jenny, blushing a little, and looking quite young again; "I believe poor mamma would be greatly reconciled to it, if Herbert were to see me out to Natal."

"Is that to be the way?"

"It would be very absurd to make Archie come home again for me," said Jenny. "And everything else is most happily smoothed for me, you know; Edith has come quite to take my place at home;

mamma learnt to depend on her much more than on me while I was with Herbert."

"And it has made her much more of a woman," added Herbert.

"Then you know that full statement poor Mr. Moy put forth when he left the place, on his wife's death, quite removed all lingering hesitation on papa's part," added Jenny.

"It ought, I am sure!" said Julius.

"So, now, if Herbert will go out with me, it seems to me to be all right," said Jenny, colouring deeply, as she made this lame and impotent conclusion.

"My father wishes it," said Herbert. "I believe he meant to see you to-day to ask leave of absence for me. That is what he wishes; but I have made up my mind that I ought to resign the curacy—where I have never been any use to you—though, if I had been well, I meant to have worked a year with you as a priest."

"I don't like to lose you, but I think you are right. Your beginning with me was a mistake. There is not enough work for three of us; but you know Easterby would be delighted to have you at St. Nicholas. He says his most promising people talk of what you said to them when they were ill, and he asked me if you could possibly come to him."

"I think it would be better to begin in a new place, further from home," said Herbert, quietly.

And both knew what he meant, and how hard it would be to be the clergyman he had learnt to wish to be, if his mother were at hand to be distressed by all he did or did not do.

"But, any way," added Herbert, "I hope to have some time longer at Compton before I go. Next Sunday, if I only *can*."

His mind was evidently full of the Feast of the Sunday, and Julius answered, "Whichever Sunday you are strong enough, of course, dear fellow. You had better come with him, Jenny, and sleep at the Rectory."

"Oh! thank you. I should like nothing so much; and I think they will spare me that one day."

"You will come in for a grand gathering, that is, if poor Cecil accepts. Miles thinks she ought to be godmother."

"Oh!"

"And no one has said a word of any cloud. It is better he should know nothing."

"And oh! Julius, is it true that her father has bought Sirenwood for her?"

"Quite true. You know it was proposed at first, but the trustees doubted of the title; but when all that was cleared up, it turned out to be a better investment than Swanslea, and so they settled it, without much reference to her."

"She will let it, of course?"

"I suppose so."

"You don't think she will come to the christening?"

"I cannot tell; Rose has had one or two very sad letters from her. She wanted us very much to come to Dunstone, and was much disappointed that we were prevented. I fancy her heart has turned to us, and that it is very sore, poor thing."

Julius was right. Cecil did return an answer, whose warmth quite amazed all but Miles and Anne, who thought nothing too much for their son; and she gladly came to attend the christening of the young Raymond. Gladly—yes, she was glad to leave Dunstone. She had gone home weary and sick of her lodging and convalescence, and hoping to find relief in the home that had once been all-sufficient for her, but Dunstone was not changed, and she was. She had not been able to help outgrowing its narrow opinions and formal precisions; and when she came home, crushed with her scarcely realized grief, nothing there had power to comfort her.

There was soothing at first in her step-mother's kindness, and she really loved her father; but their petting admiration soon grew oppressive, after the more bracing air of Compton; and their idolatry of her little brother fretted and tried her all the more, because they thought he must be a comfort to her, and any slight from her might be misconstrued. Mr. Venn's obsequiousness, instead of rightful homage, seemed deprivation of support, and she saw no one, spoke to no one, without the sense of Raymond's vast superiority and her own insensibility to it, loving him a thousand times more than she had loved him in life, and mourning him with an anguish beyond what the most perfect union would have left. She had nothing to do. Self-improvement was a mere oppression, and she longed after nothing so much as the sight of Rosamond, Anne, Julius, or even Frank, and her amiable wishes prevailed to have them invited to Dunstone; but at the times specified there were hindrances. Anne had engagements at home, and Rosamond appeared to the rest of the family to be a perpetual refuge for stray De Lanceys, while Frank had to make up for his long enforced absence by a long unbroken spell of work.

Cecil therefore had seen none of the family till she arrived at Compton. She was perfectly well, she said, and had become a great walker, and so, indeed, she showed herself, for she went out

directly after breakfast every morning, and never appeared again till luncheon time; and would take long rides in the afternoon. "It was her only chance of sleep," she said, when remonstrated with. She did not look ill, but there was a restless, worn air that was very distressing on her young features, and was the more piteous to her relations, that she was just as constrained as ever in her intercourse with them. She was eagerly attentive to Mrs. Poyntsett, and evidently so anxious to wait on her that Anne left to her many little services, but if they were alone together, they were tongue-tied, and never went deeper than surface subjects. Mrs. Poyntsett never discussed her, never criticized her, never attempted to fathom her, being probably convinced that there was nothing but hard coldness to be met with by probing. Yet there was something striking in Cecil's having made people call her Mrs. Raymond Poyntsett, surrendering the Charnock, which she had once brandished in all their faces, and going by the name by which her husband had been best known.

To Anne she was passively friendly, and neither gave nor sought confidences, and Anne was so much occupied with her baby, and all the little household services that had grown on her, as well as with her busy husband, that there was little leisure for them; and though the meeting with Rosamond was at first the most effusive and affectionate of all, afterwards she seemed to avoid *têtes-à-têtes* with her, and was shyer with her than with Anne.

It was Miles that she got on with best. He had never so fully realized the unhappiness of his brother's married life as those who had watched it; and he simply viewed her as Raymond's loved and loving widow and sincere mourner, and treated her with all brotherly tenderness and reverence for her grief; while she responded with a cordiality and gratitude which made her, when talking to him, a pleasanter person than she had ever been seen at Compton before.

But it was not to Miles, but to Rosamond, that she brought an earnest question, walking in one autumn morning to the Rectory, amid the falling leaves of the Virginian-creeper, and amazing Rosamond, who was writing against time for the Indian mail, by asking—

"Rosamond, will you find out if Mrs. Poyntsett would mind my coming to live at Sirenwood?"

"You, Cecil!"

"Yes, I'm old enough. There's no place for me at home, and though I must be miserable anywhere, it will be better where I have something to do, of some real use to somebody. I've been walking all round every day, and seeing what a state it is in—in the hands of creditors all these years."

"But you would be quite alone!"

"I am quite alone as it is."

"And would your father consent?"

"I think he would. I am a burthen to them now. They cannot feel my grief, nor comfort it, and they don't like the sight of it, though I am sure I trouble them with it as little as possible."

"Dear Cecil!" and the ready tears welled up in Rosamond's gray eyes.

"I don't want to talk of it," said Cecil. "If I felt worthy to grieve it would be less dreadful; but it all seems like hypocrisy. Rosamond, if you were to lose Julius to-morrow, you would not be as unhappy as I am."

"Don't, don't!" cried Rosamond, making a gesture of horror. "But does not coming here make it worse?"

"No, real stabs are better than dull aching; and then you—you, Rosamond, did know how it really was, and that I would—I would—"

Cecil wept now as Rosamond had longed to see her weep when she had left Compton, and Rosamond spoke from her tender heart of comfort; but the outburst did not last long, and Cecil said, recovering herself—

"After all, my most peaceful times of late have been in walking about in those woods at Sirenwood; I should like to live there. You know *he* always wished it to be the purchase, because it joins Compton, and I should like to get it all into perfect order and beauty, and leave it all to little Raymond."

"I should have thought the place would have been full of ghosts."

"I tried. I made the woman let me in, and I sat where poor Camilla used to talk to me, and I thought I was the better for facing it out. The question is whether Mrs. Poyntsett will dislike it. She has a right to be consulted."

Perhaps Cecil could not be gracious. Certainly, Raymond would have been thankful for even this admission.

"You wish me to find out?"

"If you would be so good. I would give it up at once if she has any feeling against it, and go somewhere else—and of course she has! She never can forget what I did!"

Rosamond caressed Cecil with that sweetness which saw everything in the most consoling

manner; but when the poor young widow was out of sight, there was a revulsion of feeling.

"No, Mrs Poyntsett must always feel that that wretched marriage broke her son's heart, and murdered him!—murdered him!" said Rosamond to herself, clenching that soft fist of hers. "It ought not to be broached to her!"

But Julius—when she stated it to him rather less broadly, but still saying that she did not know whether she could bear the sight of Cecil, except when she was before her eyes, and how could his mother endure her at all—did not see it in the same light. He thought Sirenwood gave duties to Cecil, and that she ought not to be hindered from fulfilling them. And he said his mother was a large-minded woman, and not likely to have that personal bitterness towards Cecil that both the ladies seemed to expect, as her rival in her son's affections, and the means of his unhappiness and death.

He was right; Mrs. Poyntsett was touched by finding that Cecil clung to them rather than to her sublime family, and especially by the design as to little Raymond, though she said that must never be mentioned; nothing must bind so young a creature as Cecil, who really did not know what love was at all.

"She is afraid the sight of her is distressing to you," said Rosamond.

"Poor child, why should she?" said Mrs. Poyntsett. "She was the victim of an unsuccessful experiment of my dear boy's, and the unsuspecting instrument of poor Camilla's vengeance. That is all I see in her."

"Mrs. Poyntsett, how can you!" cried Rosamond, impetuously. "With all I know of her sorrow, I rage at her whenever I am out of sight of her."

"I can't do that," said Mrs. Poyntsett, half smiling, "any more than I could at a doll. The poor thing was in a false position, and nobody was more sorry for her than Raymond himself; but you see he had fancied that marriage must bring the one thing it would not in that short time."

"It would, if she had not been a little foolish donkey."

"Or if Camilla Tyrrell had let her alone! It is of no use to rake up these things, my dear Rosamond. Let her come to Sirenwood, and do such good as she can there, if it can comfort her. It was for my sake that the unconscious girl was brought here to have her life spoilt, and I would not stand in the way of what seems to be any relief."

"But is it no pain?" persisted Rosamond.

"No, my dear. I almost wish it was. I shall never get on with her; but I am glad she should come and be near you all; and Miles likes her."

Mr. Charnock demurred at first, and wanted to saddle Cecil with her old governess as a companion, but when he found that Mrs. Poyntsett and Miles made no objection, and remembered that she would be under their wing, and would be an inestimable adviser and example to Anne, he consented; and Cecil's arrangements were made with startling rapidity, so that she was in possession before Christmas, which she insisted on spending there. Dunstone had stereotyped hospitalities, which she could not bear, and would not prevent, and now that her first year of widowhood was over, the sorrow was not respected, while it seemed to her more oppressive than ever.

So there she was in vehement activity; restless rather than religious in her beneficence still, though the lesson she had had showed itself in her constantly seeking the advice of Miles, who thought her the most sensible woman in the world, except his Nan. Whether this constant occupation, furnishing, repairing, planning, beautifying her model cottages, her school chapel, and all the rest, were lessening the heartache, no one knew, but the sharp black eyes looked as dry and hard, the lines round the mouth as weary as ever; and Rosamond sometimes thought if Sirenwood were not full of ghosts to her, she was much like a ghost herself who came

"Hovering around her ancient home,  
To find no refuge there."

There was another who could not help seeing her somewhat in that light, and this was Eleonora Vivian, who had come to Compton to be with Frank, when he was at last able to enjoy a well-earned holiday, and with ears restored to their natural powers, though he always declared that his eight months of deafness had done him more good than anything that had ever befallen him in his life. It had thrown him in on his real self, and broken all the unfortunate associations of his first year in London. His first few months, while he was still in need of care, had been spent with Miles and Anne, and that tender ministry to him which his sister-in-law had begun in his illness had been with him when he was tired, dispirited, or beset by the trials of a tardy convalescence. As his interpreter, too, and caterer for the pleasures his infirmity allowed, Anne had been educating herself to a degree that 'self' improvement never would have induced.

And when left alone in London, he was able to take care of himself in all ways, and had followed the real leadings of his disposition, which his misdirected courtship had interrupted for the time, returning to the intellectual pursuits which were likely to be beneficial, not only as pleasures, but in an economical point of view; and he was half shy, half proud of the profits, such as they were, of a few poems and essays which he certainly had not had it in him to write before the ordeal he



had undergone.

Eleonora's elder sister, Mrs. Fanshaw, had come home from India with her husband, newly made a Major-General. Frank had gone to Rockpier early in January, to be introduced to them, and after spending a day or two there, to escort Lena to Compton. Mrs. Poyntsett needed but one glance to assure her that the two were happier than their wooing had ever made them before, save in that one brief moment at Cecil's party. Eleonora looked more beautiful, and the look of wistful pain had left her brow, but it had made permanent lines there, as well had seemed likely, and though her laugh would never have the *abandon* of Rosamond's, still it was not so very rare, and though she was still like a beautiful night, it was a bright moonlight one.

A few private interviews made the cause of the change apparent. The sister, Mary Fanshaw, had something of Camilla's dexterity, but having been early married to a good man, she had found its use instead of its abuse; and though Lena's trust had come very slowly, she had given it at last, and saw that her elders could deal with her father as she could never do. Sir Harry respected the General enough to let himself be restrained by him, and the husband and wife were ready to take the charge—removing, however, from Rockpier, for the religious atmosphere of which they were unprepared, and which General Fanshaw thought very dull. Affairs were in course of being wound up on the sale of Sirenwood, and the General had talked to Frank, as one of the family, in a way that had proved to him his own manhood more than anything that had happened to him. Out of the wreck, nothing remained to the old man, and the portion which had been secured by the mother's marriage settlements to younger children, though hitherto out of reach, was felt by the daughters to be due to the creditors, so that only two thousand pounds apiece had been secured to each of them; and this the General consulted Frank about appropriating for Sir Harry's use during his lifetime, himself retaining the management, so as to secure the attendance of the favourite valet, the keeping of a horse, and a fair amount of *menus plaisirs*.

It was also made plain to Frank that Lena's filial duties and scruples need no longer stand in the way of the marriage. Mrs. Fanshaw had two girls almost come out, and perhaps she did not wish them to be overshadowed by the aunt, who, however retiring, could not help being much more beautiful. So all that remained was that Mrs. Poyntsett should be willing to supplement Frank's official income with his future portion. She was all the more rejoiced, as this visit showed her for the first time what Lena really was when brought into the sunshine without dread of what she might hear or see, or of harm being done by her belongings; and her gratitude for the welcome with which she was received was most touching.

The rest of her family were in course of removing to their new home, where Mrs. Fanshaw would be mistress of the house, and so Eleonora's stay at Compton was prolonged till the general migration to London, which was put off till Easter. Just before this, Herbert Bowater came back from Natal, and walked from Strawyers with all his happy dogs, as strong and hearty and as merry as ever; his boyish outlines gone, but wholesome sunburn having taken the place of his rosiness, and his bonny smile with its old joyousness. He had married Jenny and Archie himself, and stayed a month on their ostrich farm, which he declared was a lesson on woman's rights, since Mrs. Ostrich was heedless and indifferent as to her eggs, but was regularly hunted back to the duties by her husband, who always had two wives, and regularly forced them to take turns in sitting; a system which Herbert observed would be needful if the rights of women were to work. He had brought offerings of eggs and feathers to Lady Rosamond, and pockets full of curiosities for all his village friends; also, he had been at the Cape, had seen Glen Fraser, rejoiced the inhabitants with his accounts of Anne, and brought home a delightful budget for her.

But the special cause of his radiance was a letter he brought from his father to Mr. Bindon. The family living, which had decided his own profession, had fallen vacant, and his father, wishing perhaps not to be thought cruel and unnatural by his wife, had made no appointment until Herbert's return, well knowing that he would decide against himself: and feeling that, as things stood, it would be an awkward exercise of patronage to put him in at once. Herbert had declared that nothing would have induced him to accept what he persuaded his father to let him offer to James Bindon, whom he had found to have an old mother in great need of the comfortable home, which, without interest, or any talent save for hard work, he could scarcely hope to secure to her.

"And you, Herbert," said Julius, "can I ask you to come back to me, now that we shall have a fair amount to do between us?"

Herbert smiled and shook his head, as he took out an advertisement for a curate in one of the blackest parishes of the Black Country. "I've written to answer that," he said.

Julius did not try to hinder him. What had been exaggerated had parsed away, and he was now a brave man going forth in his strength and youth to the service he had learnt to understand; able still keenly to enjoy, but only using pleasure as an incidental episode for the delight of others, and as subordinate to the true work of his life.

He asked for his fellow-worker, Mrs. Duncombe. There were tidings, but disappointing ones. She had written a long letter to Julius, full of her reasons for being received into the Roman Communion, where she rapturously declared she had for the first time found peace. Anne and Rosamond took the change most bitterly to heart, but Julius, though believing he could have saved her from the schism, by showing her the true beauty and efficiency of her own Church, could not wonder at this effect of foreign influences on one so recently and imperfectly taught, and whose ardent nature required strong forms of whatever she took up. And the letters she continued to write to Julius were rapturous in the cause of the Pope and as to all that she had

once most contemned. She had taken her children with her, but her husband remained tolerant, indifferent, and so probably he would do while his health lasted.

Early in the summer Frank and Eleonora were married, and a pretty little house in the outskirts of London found for them, suiting with the grace of the one and the poetry of the other. It was a small, quiet household, but could pleasantly receive those literary friends of Frank's whom he delighted to present to his beautiful and appreciative wife, whose sweetness and brightness grew every day under the influence of affection and confidence. The other augury of poor Lady Tyrrell, that their holidays would be spent at Compton Hall, was fulfilled, but very pleasantly for both parties, for it was as much home to Lena as to Frank.

Miles's geniality made all at ease that came near him, and Anne, though never a conversational person, was a quietly kind hostess, much beloved by all who had experienced her gentleness, and she had Frank and Lena to give distinction in their different ways to her London parties, as at Compton, Rosamond never failed to give everything a charm where she assisted in planning or receiving.

Rosamond would never cease to love society. Even had she been a grandmother she would have fired at the notion of a party, enjoy, and render it enjoyable; and the mere announcement of a new face would be as stimulating to her as it was the reverse to Anne. But she had grown into such union with her husband, and had so forgotten the Rathforlane defence, as to learn that it was pleasanter to do as he liked than to try to make him like what she did, and a look of disapproval from him would open her eyes to the flaws in any scheme, however enchanting at first.

She was too necessary an element in all hospitalities of Cecil or of Anne not to get quite as much diversion as so thorough a wife and mother could find time for, since Julia did not remain by any means an only child, and besides her permanent charge of Terence, relays of De Lanceys were constantly casting up at the Rectory for mothering in some form or other.

Cecil depended on her more than on any one else for sympathy, not expressly in feeling, but in all her pursuits. In three years' time Sirenwood was in perfect order, the once desolate garden blazed with ribbons, triangles and pattipans of verbena, scarlet geranium and calceolaria, with intervals of echiverias, pronounced by Tom to be like cabbages trying to turn into copper kettles; her foliage plants got all the prizes at horticultural shows, her poultry were incomparable at their exhibitions, her cottages were models, her school machinery perfect, and if a pattern in farming apparatus were wanted, people went to Mrs. Raymond Poyntsett's steward. She had people of note to stay with her every winter, went to London for the season, and was made much of, and all the time she looked as little, and pinched, and weary, and heart-hungered as ever, and never seemed to thaw or warm, clinging to no one but to Miles for counsel, and to Rosamond for the fellow-feeling it was not always easy to give—when it was apparently only about an orchid or a churn—and yet Rosamond tried, for she knew it was starvation for sympathy.

The Charnock world murmured a little when, after a succession of De Lancey visitors for four months, the Rectory was invaded by Rosamond's eldest brother, Lord Ballybrehon, always the most hair-brained of the family, and now invalided home in consequence of a concussion of the brain while pigsticking in India. He was but a year older than Rosamond, and her favourite of all, whose scrapes she had shared, befriended, defended, and scolded in turn, very handsome, very lazily daring, droll and mischievous, a sort of concentration of all the other De Lanceys. His sister loved him passionately, he fascinated the Rector, and little Julia was the adorer of Uncle Bally.

But Rosamond was rather aghast to find Bally making such love as only an Irishman could do to the prim little widow at Sirenwood, dismayed and a little bit ashamed of her unspoken conviction that Bally, after all his wild freaks and frolics, had come to have an eye to the needs of the Rathforlane property; and what were her feelings when, instead of finding the wild Irishman contemned, she perceived that he was believed in and met fully half way? The stiffness melted, the eyes softened and sparkled, the lips parted in soft agitated smiles, the cheeks learnt to blush, and Cecil was absolutely and thoroughly in love!

Yes, she had found her heart and was won—won in spite of the Dunstone dislike to the beggarly title—in spite of Miles's well-considered cautions—in spite of all her original self. And if Ballybrehon began from mere desire to try for the well-endowed widow, he had the warm loving nature that was sure to kindle and reciprocate the affection he evoked, enough to make him a kind husband.

And yet, could any one have wished Cecil Poyntsett a more trying life than one of her disposition must needs have with impetuous, unpunctual, uncertain, scatter-brained, open-handed Ballybrehon, always in a scramble, always inviting guests upon guests without classification, and never remembering whom he had invited!

Rosamond herself declared she should be either in a rage or worn to fitters by a month of it. How Cecil liked it never appeared. Some thought that they squabbled and worried each other in private, but it is certain that, as Terry said, Bally had turned the block into living flesh and blood, and Lady Ballybrehon was wondrously livelier, brighter, and sweeter ever since she had been entirely conquered by the tyrant love, and had ceased to be the slave of her own way.

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