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HOPES AND FEARS

OR
SCENES FROM THE LIFE OF A SPINSTER
BY
CHARLOTTE M. YONGE



ILLUSTRATED BY HERBERT GANDY

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PART I

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CHAPTER I

Who ought to go then and who ought to stay!
 Where do you draw an obvious border line?

Cecil and Mary

Among the numerous steeples counted from the waters of the Thames, in the heart of the City, and grudged by modern economy as cumberers of the soil of Mammon, may be remarked an abortive little dingy cupola, surmounting two large round eyes which have evidently stared over the adjacent roofs ever since the Fire that began at Pie-corner and ended in Pudding-lane.

Strange that the like should have been esteemed the highest walk of architecture, and yet Honora Charlecote well remembered the days when St. Wulstan's was her boast, so large, so clean, so light, so Grecian, so far surpassing damp old Hiltonbury Church. That was at an age when her enthusiasm found indiscriminate food in whatever had a hold upon her affections, the nearer her heart being of course the more admirable in itself, and it would be difficult to say which she loved the most ardently, her city home in Woolstone-lane, or Hiltonbury Holt, the old family seat, where her father was a welcome guest whenever his constitution required relaxation from the severe toils of a London rector.

Woolstone-lane was a locality that sorely tried the coachmen of Mrs. Charlecote's West End connections, situate as it was on the very banks of the Thames, and containing little save offices and warehouses, in the midst of which stood Honora's home. It was not the rectory, but had been inherited from City relations, and it antedated the Fire, so that it was one of the most perfect remnants of the glories of the merchant princes of ancient London. It had a court to itself, shut in by high walls, and paved with round-headed stones, with gangways of flags in

mercy to the feet; the front was faced with hewn squares after the pattern of Somerset House, with the like ponderous sashes, and on a smaller scale, the Louis XIV. pediment, apparently designed for the nesting-place of swallows and sparrows. Within was a hall, panelled with fragrant softly-tinted cedar wood, festooned with exquisite garlands of fruit and flowers, carved by Gibbons himself, with all his peculiarities of rounded form and delicate edge. The staircase and floor were of white stone, tinted on sunny days with reflections from the windows' three medallions of yellow and white glass, where Solomon, in golden mantle and crowned turban, commanded the division of a stout lusty child hanging by one leg; superintended the erection of a Temple worthy of Haarlem; or graciously welcomed a recoiling stumpy Vrow of a Queen of Sheba, with golden hair all down her back.

The river aspect of the house had come to perfection at the Elizabethan period, and was sculptured in every available nook with the chevron and three arrows of the Fletchers' Company, and a merchant's mark, like a figure of four with a curly tail. Here were the oriel windows of the best rooms, looking out on a grassplat, small enough in country eyes, but most extensive for the situation, with straight gravelled walks, and low lilac and laburnum trees, that came into profuse blossom long before their country cousins, but which, like the crocuses and snowdrops of the flower borders, had better be looked at than touched by such as dreaded sooty fingers. These shrubs veiled the garden from the great river thoroughfare, to which it sloped down, still showing traces of the handsome stone steps and balustrade that once had formed the access of the gold-chained alderman to his sumptuous barge.

Along those paths paced, book in hand, a tall, well-grown maiden, of good straight features, and clear, pale skin, with eyes and rich luxuriant hair of the same colour, a peculiarly bright shade of auburn, such as painters of old had loved, and Owen Sandbrook called golden, while Humfrey Charlecote would declare he was always glad to see Honor's carrots.

More than thirty years ago, personal teaching at a London parish school or personal visiting of the poor was less common than at present, but Honora had been bred up to be helpful, and she had newly come in from a diligent afternoon of looking at the needlework, and hearing Crossman's Catechism and Sellon's Abridgment from a demurely dressed race of little girls in tall white caps, bibs and tuckers, and very stout indigo-blue frocks. She had been working hard at the endeavour to make the little Cockneys, who had never seen a single ear of wheat, enter into Joseph's dreams, and was rather weary of their town sharpness coupled with their indifference and want of imagination, where any nature, save human nature, was concerned. 'I will bring an ear of Hiltonbury wheat home with me—some of the best girls shall see me sow it, and I will take them to watch it growing up—the blade, the ear, the full corn in the ear—poor dears, if they only had a Hiltonbury to give them some tastes that are not all for this hot, busy, eager world! If I could only see one with her lap full of bluebells; but though in this land of Cockaigne of ours, one does not actually pick up gold and silver, I am afraid they are our flowers, and the only ones we esteem worth the picking; and like old Mr. Sandbrook, we neither understand nor esteem those whose aims are otherwise! Oh! Owen, Owen, may you only not be withheld from your glorious career! May you show this hard, money-getting world that you do really, as well as only in word, esteem one soul to be reclaimed above all the wealth that can be laid at your feet! The nephew and heir of the great Firm voluntarily surrendering consideration, ease, riches, unbounded luxury for the sake of the heathen—choosing a wigwam instead of a West End palace; parched maize rather than the banquet; the backwoods instead of the luxurious park; the Red Indian rather than the club and the theatre; to be a despised minister rather than a magnate of this great city; nay, or to take his place among the influential men of the land. What has this worn, weary old civilization to offer like the joy of sitting beneath one of the glorious aspiring pines of America, gazing out on the blue waters of her limpid inland seas, in her fresh pure air, with the simple children of the forest round him, their princely forms in attitudes of attention, their dark soft liquid eyes fixed upon him, as he tells them "Your Great Spirit, Him whom ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you," and then, some glorious old chief bows his stately head, and throws aside his marks of superstition. "I believe," he says, and the hearts of all bend with him; and Owen leads them to the lake, and baptizes them, and it is another St. Sacrament! Oh! that is what it is to have nobleness enough truly to overcome the world, truly to turn one's back upon pleasures and honours—what are they to such as this?'

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So mused Honora Charlecote, and then ran indoors, with bounding step, to her Schiller, and her hero-worship of Max Piccolomini, to write notes for her mother, and practise for her father the song that was to refresh him for the evening.

Nothing remarkable! No; there was nothing remarkable in Honor, she was neither more nor less than an average woman of the higher type. Refinement and gentleness, a strong appreciation of excellence, and a love of duty, had all been brought out by an admirable education, and by a home devoted to unselfish exertion, varied by intellectual pleasures. Other influences—decidedly traceable in her musings—had shaped her principles and enthusiasms on those of an ardent Oxonian of the early years of William IV.; and so bred up, so led by circumstances, Honora, with her abilities, high cultivation, and tolerable sense, was a fair specimen of what any young lady might be, appearing perhaps somewhat in advance of her contemporaries, but rather from her training than from intrinsic force of character. The qualities of womanhood well developed, were so entirely the staple of her composition, that there is little to describe in her. Was not she one made to learn; to lean; to admire; to support; to enhance every joy; to soften every sorrow of the object of her devotion?

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Another picture from Honora Charlecote's life. It is about half after six, on a bright autumnal morning; and, rising nearly due east, out of a dark pine-crowned hill, the sun casts his slanting beams over an undulating country, clothed in gray mist of tints differing with the distance, the farther hills confounded with the sky, the nearer dimly traced in purple, and the valleys between indicated by the whiter, woollier vapours that rise from their streams, a goodly land of fertile field and rich wood, cradled on the bosoms of those soft hills.

Nestled among the woods, clothing its hollows on almost every side, rises a low hill, with a species of table land on the top, scattered over with large thorns and scraggy oaks that cast their shadows over the pale buff bents of the short soft grass of the gravelly soil. Looking southward is a low, irregular, old-fashioned house, with two tall gable ends like eyebrows, and the lesser gable of a porch between them, all covered with large chequers of black timber, filled up with cream-coloured cement. A straight path leads from the porch between beds of scarlet geraniums, their luxuriant horse-shoe leaves weighed down with wet, and china asters, a drop in every quilling, to an old-fashioned sun-dial, and beside that dial stands Honora Charlecote, gazing joyously out on the bright morning, and trying for the hundredth time to make the shadow of that green old finger point to the same figure as the hand of her watch.

'Oh! down, down, there's a good dog, Fly; you'll knock me down! Vixen, poor little doggie, pray! Look at your paws,' as a blue greyhound and rough black terrier came springing joyously upon her, brushing away the silver dew from the shaven lawn.

'Down, down, lie down, dogs!' and with an obstreperous bound, Fly flew to the new-comer, a young man in the robust strength of eight-and-twenty, of stalwart frame, very broad in the chest and shoulders, careless, homely, though perfectly gentleman-like bearing, and hale, hearty, sunburnt face. It was such a look and such an arm as would win the most timid to his side in certainty of tenderness and protection, and the fond voice gave the same sense of power and of kindness, as he called out, 'Holloa, Honor, there you are! Not given up the old fashion?'

'Not till you give me up, Humfrey,' she said, as she eagerly laid her neatly gloved fingers in the grasp of the great, broad, horny palm, 'or at least till you take your gun.'

'So you are not grown wiser?'

'Nor ever will be.'

'Every woman ought to learn to saddle a horse and fire off a gun.'

'Yes, against the civil war squires are always expecting. You shall teach me when the time comes.'

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'You'll never see that time, nor any other, if you go out in those thin boots. I'll fetch Sarah's clogs; I suppose you have not a reasonable pair in the world.'

'My boots are quite thick, thank you.'

'Brown paper!' And indeed they were a contrast to his mighty nailed soles, and long, untanned buskins, nor did they greatly resemble the heavy, country-made galoshes which, with an elder brother's authority, he forced her to put on, observing that nothing so completely evinced the Londoner as her obstinacy in never having a pair of shoes that could keep anything out.

'And where are you going?'

'To Hayward's farm. Is that too far for you? He wants an abatement of his rent for some improvements, and I want to judge what they may be worth.'

'Hayward's—oh, not a bit too far!' and holding up her skirts, she picked her way as daintily as her weighty *chaussure* would permit, along the narrow green footway that crossed the expanse of dewy turf in which the dogs careered, getting their noses covered with flakes of thick gossamer, cemented together by dew. Fly scraped it off with a delicate forepaw, Vixen rolled over, and doubly entangled it in her rugged coat. Humfrey Charlecote strode on before his companion with his hands in his pockets, and beginning to whistle, but pausing to observe, over his shoulder, 'A sweet day for getting up the roots! You're not getting wet, I hope?'

'I couldn't through this rhinoceros hide, thank you. How exquisitely the mist is curling up, and showing the church-spire in the valley.'

'And I suppose you have been reading all manner of books?'

'I think the best was a great history of France.'

'France!' he repeated in a contemptuous John Bull tone.

'Ay, don't be disdainful; France was the centre of chivalry in the old time.'

'Better have been the centre of honesty.'

'And so it was in the time of St. Louis and his crusade. Do you know it, Humfrey?'

'Eh?'

That was full permission. Ever since Honora had been able to combine a narration, Humfrey had been the recipient, though she seldom knew whether he attended, and from her babyhood

upwards had been quite contented with trotting in the wake of his long strides, pouring out her ardent fancies, now and then getting an answer, but more often going on like a little singing bird, through the midst of his avocations, and quite complacent under his interruptions of calls to his dogs, directions to his labourers, and warnings to her to mind her feet and not her chatter. In the full stream of crusaders, he led her down one of the multitude of by-paths cleared out in the hazel coppice for sporting; here leading up a rising ground whence the tops of the trees might be overlooked, some flecked with gold, some blushing into crimson, and beyond them the needle point of the village spire, the vane flashing back the sun; there bending into a ravine, marshy at the bottom, and nourishing the lady fern, then again crossing glades, where the rabbits darted across the path, and the battle of Damietta was broken into by stern orders to Fly to come to heel, and the eating of the nuts which Humfrey pulled down from the branches, and held up to his cousin with superior good nature. p. 6

'A Mameluke rushed in with a scimitar streaming with blood, and—'

'Take care; do you want help over this fence?'

'Not I, thank you—And said he had just murdered the king—'

'Vic! ah! take your nose out of that. Here was a crop, Nora.'

'What was it?'

'You don't mean that you don't know wheat stubble?'

'I remember it was to be wheat.'

'Red wheat, the finest we ever had in this land; not a bit beaten down, and the colour perfectly beautiful before harvest; it used to put me in mind of your hair. A load to the acre; a fair specimen of the effect of drainage. Do you remember what a swamp it was?'

'I remember the beautiful loose-strifes that used to grow in that corner.'

'Ah! we have made an end of that trumpery.'

'You savage old Humfrey—beauties that they were.'

'What had they to do with my cornfields? A place for everything and everything in its place—French kings and all. What was this one doing wool-gathering in Egypt?'

'Don't you understand, it had become the point for the blow at the Saracen power. Where was I? Oh, the Mameluke justified the murder, and wanted St. Louis to be king, but—'

'Ha! a fine covey, I only miss two out of them. These carrots, how their leaves are turned—that ought not to be.'

Honora could not believe that anything ought not to be that was as beautiful as the varied rosy tints of the hectic beauty of the exquisitely shaped and delicately pinked foliage of the field carrots, and with her cousin's assistance she soon had a large bouquet where no two leaves were alike, their hues ranging from the deepest purple or crimson to the palest yellow, or clear scarlet, like seaweed, through every intermediate variety of purple edged with green, green picked out with red or yellow, or *vice versâ*, in never-ending brilliancy, such as Humfrey almost seemed to appreciate, as he said, 'Well, you have something as pretty as your weeds, eh, Honor?'

'I can't quite give up mourning for my dear long purples.'

'All very well by the river, but there's no beauty in things out of place, like your Louis in Egypt—well, what was the end of this predicament?' p. 7

So Humfrey had really heard and been interested! With such encouragement, Honora proceeded swimmingly, and had nearly arrived at her hero's ransom, through nearly a mile of field paths, only occasionally interrupted by grunts from her auditor at farming not like his own, when crossing a narrow foot-bridge across a clear stream, they stood before a farmhouse, timbered and chimneyed much like the Holt, but with new sashes displacing the old lattice.

'Oh! Humfrey, how could you bring me to see such havoc? I never suspected you would allow it.'

'It was without asking leave; an attention to his bride; and now they want an abatement for improvements! Whew!'

'You should fine him for the damage he has done!'

'I can't be hard on him, he is more or less of an ass, and a good sort of fellow, very good to his labourers; he drove Jem Hurd to the infirmary himself when he broke his arm. No, he is not a man to be hard upon.'

'You can't be hard on any one. Now that window really irritates my mind.'

'Now Sarah walked down to call on the bride, and came home full of admiration at the place being so lightsome and cheerful. Which of you two ladies am I to believe?'

'You ought to make it a duty to improve the general taste! Why don't you build a model farmhouse, and let me make the design?'

'Ay, when I want one that nobody can live in. Come, it will be breakfast time.'

'Are not you going to have an interview?'

'No, I only wanted to take a survey of the alterations; two windows, smart door, iron fence, pulled down old barn, talks of another. Hm!'

'So he will get his reduction?'

'If he builds the barn. I shall try to see his wife; she has not been brought up to farming, and whether they get on or not, all depends on the way she may take it up. What are you looking at?'

'That lovely wreath of Traveller's Joy.'

'Do you want it?'

'No, thank you, it is too beautiful where it is.'

'There is a piece, going from tree to tree, by the Hiltonbury Gate, as thick as my arm; I just saved it when West was going to cut it down with the copsewood.'

'Well, you really are improving at last!'

'I thought you would never let me hear the last of it; besides, there was a thrush's nest in it.'

By and by the cousins arrived at a field where Humfrey's portly shorthorns were coming forth after their milking, under the pilotage of an old white-headed man, bent nearly double, uncovering his head as the squire touched his hat in response, and shouted, 'Good morning.'

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'If you please, sir,' said the old man, trying to erect himself, 'I wanted to speak to you.'

'Well.'

'If you please, sir, chimney smokes so as a body can scarce bide in the house, and the blacks come down terrible.'

'Wants sweeping,' roared Humfrey, into his deaf ears.

'Have sweep it, sir; old woman's been up with her broom.'

'Old woman hasn't been high enough. Send Jack up outside with a rope and a bunch o' furze, and let her stand at bottom.'

'That's it, sir!' cried the old man, with a triumphant snap of the fingers over his shoulder. 'Thank ye!'

'Here's Miss Honor, John;' and Honora came forward, her gravity somewhat shaken by the domestic offices of the old woman.

'I'm glad to see you still able to bring out the cows, John. Here's my favourite Daisy as tame as ever.'

'Ay! ay!' and he looked at his master for explanation from the stronger and more familiar voice. 'I be deaf, you see, ma'am.'

'Miss Honor is glad to see Daisy as tame as ever,' shouted Humfrey.

'Ay! ay!' maundered on the old man; 'she ain't done no good of late, and Mr. West and I—us wanted to have fatted her this winter, but the squire, he wouldn't hear on it, because Miss Honor was such a terrible one for her. Says I, when I hears 'em say so, we shall have another dinner on the la-an, and the last was when the old squire was married, thirty-five years ago come Michaelmas.'

Honora was much disposed to laugh at this freak of the old man's fancy, but to her surprise Humfrey coloured up, and looked so much out of countenance that a question darted through her mind whether he could have any such step in contemplation, and she began to review the young ladies of the neighbourhood, and to decide on each in turn that it would be intolerable to see her as Humfrey's wife; more at home at the Holt than herself. She had ample time for contemplation, for he had become very silent, and once or twice the presumptuous idea crossed her that he might be actually about to make her some confidence, but when he at length spoke, very near the house, it was only to say, 'Honor, I wanted to ask you if you think your father would wish me to ask young Sandbrook here?'

'Oh! thank you, I am sure he would be glad. You know poor Owen has nowhere to go, since his uncle has behaved so shamefully.'

'It must have been a great mortification—'

'To Owen? Of course it was, to be so cast off for his noble purpose.'

'I was thinking of old Mr. Sandbrook—'

'Old wretch! I've no patience with him!'

'Just as he has brought this nephew up and hopes to make him useful and rest some of his cares upon him in his old age, to find him flying off upon this fresh course, and disappointing all his

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hopes.'

'But it is such a high and grand course, he ought to have rejoiced in it, and Owen is not his son.'

'A man of his age, brought up as he has been, can hardly be expected to enter into Owen's views.'

'Of course not. It is all sordid and mean, he cannot even understand the missionary spirit of resigning all. As Owen says, half the Scripture must be hyperbole to him, and so he is beginning Owen's persecution already.'

It was one of Humfrey's provoking qualities that no amount of eloquence would ever draw a word of condemnation from him; he would praise readily enough, but censure was very rare with him, and extenuation was always his first impulse, so the more Honora railed at Mr. Sandbrook's interference with his nephew's plans, the less satisfaction she received from him. She seemed to think that in order to admire Owen as he deserved, his uncle must be proportionably reviled, and though Humfrey did not imply a word save in commendation of the young missionary's devotion, she went indoors feeling almost injured at his not understanding it; but Honora's petulance was a very bright, sunny piquancy, and she only appeared the more glowing and animated for it when she presented herself at the breakfast-table, with a preposterous country appetite.

Afterwards she filled a vase very tastefully with her varieties of leaves, and enjoyed taking in her cousin Sarah, who admired the leaves greatly while she thought they came from Mrs. Mervyn's hothouse; but when she found they were the product of her own furrows, voted them coarse, ugly, withered things, such as only the simplicity of a Londoner could bring into civilized society. So Honora stood over her gorgeous feathery bouquet, not knowing whether to laugh or to be scornful, till Humfrey, taking up the vase, inquired, 'May I have it for my study?'

'Oh! yes, and welcome,' said Honora, laughing, and shaking her glowing tresses at him; 'I am thankful to any one who stands up for carrots.'

Good-natured Humfrey, thought she, it is all that I may not be mortified; but after all it is not those very good-natured people who best appreciate lofty actions. He is inviting Owen Sandbrook more because he thinks it would please papa, and because he compassionates him in his solitary lodgings, than because he feels the force of his glorious self-sacrifice.

* * * * *

The northern slope of the Holt was clothed with fir plantations, intersected with narrow paths, which gave admission to the depths of their lonely woodland palace, supported on rudely straight columns, dark save for the snowy exuding gum, roofed in by aspiring beam-like arms, bearing aloft their long tufts of dark blue green foliage, floored by the smooth, slippery, russet needle leaves as they fell, and perfumed by the peculiar fresh smell of turpentine. It was a still and lonely place, the very sounds making the silence more audible (if such an expression may be used), the wind whispering like the rippling waves of the sea in the tops of the pines, here and there the cry of a bird, or far, far away, the tinkle of the sheep-bell, or the tone of the church clock; and of movement there was almost as little, only the huge horse ants soberly wending along their highway to their tall hillock thatched with pine leaves, or the squirrel in the ruddy, russet livery of the scene, racing from tree to tree, or sitting up with his feathery tail erect to extract with his delicate paws the seed from the base of the fir-cone scale. Squirrels there lived to a good old age, till their plummy tails had turned white, for the squire's one fault in the eyes of keepers and gardeners was that he was soft-hearted towards 'the varmint.'

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A Canadian forest on a small scale, an extremely miniature scale indeed, but still Canadian forests are of pine, and the Holt plantation was fir, and firs were pines, and it was a lonely musing place, and so on one of the stillest, clearest days of 'St. Luke's little summer,' the last afternoon of her visit at the Holt, there stood Honora, leaning against a tree stem, deep, very deep in a vision of the primeval woodlands of the West, their red inhabitants, and the white man who should carry the true, glad tidings westward, westward, ever from east to west. Did she know how completely her whole spirit and soul were surrendered to the worship of that devotion? Worship? Yes, the word is advisedly used; Honora had once given her spirit in homage to Schiller's self-sacrificing Max; the same heart-whole veneration was now rendered to the young missionary, multiplied tenfold by the hero being in a tangible, visible shape, and not by any means inclined to thwart or disdain the allegiance of the golden-haired girl. Nay, as family connections frequently meeting, they had acted upon each other's minds more than either knew, even when the hour of parting had come, and words had been spoken which gave Honora something more to cherish in the image of Owen Sandbrook than even the hero and saint. There then she stood and dreamt, pensive and saddened indeed, but with a melancholy trenching very nearly on happiness in the intensity of its admiration, and the vague ennobling future of devoted usefulness in which her heart already claimed to share, as her person might in some far away period on which she could not dwell.

A sound approached, a firm footstep, falling with strong elasticity and such regular cadences, that it seemed to chime in with the pine-tree music, and did not startle her till it came so near that there was distinctive character to be discerned in the tread, and then with a strange, new shyness, she would have slipped away, but she had been seen, and Humfrey, with his timber race in his hand, appeared on the path, exclaiming, 'Ah, Honor, is it you come out to meet me, like old times? You have been so much taken up with your friend Master Owen that I have scarcely seen you of late.'

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Honor did not move away, but she blushed deeply as she said, 'I am afraid I did not come to meet you, Humfrey.'

'No? What, you came for the sake of a brown study? I wish I had known you were not busy, for I have been round all the woods marking timber.'

'Ah!' said she, rousing herself with some effort, 'I wonder how many trees I should have saved from the slaughter. Did you go and condemn any of my pets?'

'Not that I know of,' said Humfrey. 'I have touched nothing near the house.'

'Not even the old beech that was scathed with lightning? You know papa says that is the touchstone of influence; Sarah and Mr. West both against me,' laughed Honora, quite restored to her natural manner and confiding ease.

'The beech is likely to stand as long as you wish it,' said Humfrey, with an unaccustomed sort of matter-of-fact gravity, which surprised and startled her, so as to make her bethink herself whether she could have behaved ill about it, been saucy to Sarah, or the like.

'Thank you,' she said; 'have I made a fuss—?'

'No, Honor,' he said, with deliberate kindness, shutting up his knife, and putting it into his pocket; 'only I believe it is time we should come to an understanding.'

More than ever did she expect one of his kind remonstrances, and she looked up at him in expectation, and ready for defence, but his broad, sunburnt countenance looked marvellously heated, and he paused ere he spoke.

'I find I can't spare you, Honora; you had better stay at the Holt for good.' Her cheeks flamed, and her heart galloped, but she could not let herself understand.



'I find I can't spare you, Honora; you had better stay at the Holt for good.'—Page 11

'Honor, you are old enough now, and I do not think you need fear. It is almost your home already, and I believe I can make you happy, with the blessing of God—' He paused, but as she could not frame an answer in her consternation, continued, 'Perhaps I should not have spoken so suddenly, but I thought you would not mind me; I should like to have had one word from my little Honor before I go to your father, but don't if you had rather not.'

'Oh, don't go to papa, please don't,' she cried, 'it would only make him sorry.'

Humfrey stood as if under an unexpected shock.

'Oh! how came you to think of it?' she said in her distress; 'I never did, and it can never be—I am so sorry!'

'Very well, my dear, do not grieve about it,' said Humfrey, only bent on soothing her; 'I dare say you are quite right, you are used to people in London much more suitable to you than a stupid homely fellow like me, and it was a foolish fancy to think it might be otherwise. Don't cry, Honor dear, I can't bear that!'

'Oh, Humfrey, only understand, please! You are the very dearest person in the world to me after papa and mamma; and as to fine London people, oh no, indeed! But—'

'It is Owen Sandbrook; I understand,' said Humfrey, gravely.

She made no denial.

'But, Honor,' he anxiously exclaimed, 'you are not going out in this wild way among the backwoods, it would break your mother's heart; and he is not fit to take care of you. I mean he cannot think of it now.'

'O no, no, I could not leave papa and mamma; but some time or other—'

'Is this arranged? Does your father know it?'

'Oh, Humfrey, of course!'

'Then it is an engagement?'

'No,' said Honora, sadly; 'papa said I was too young, and he wished I had heard nothing about it. We are to go on as if nothing had happened, and I know they think we shall forget all about it! As if we could! Not that I wish it to be different. I know it would be wicked to desert papa and mamma while she is so unwell. The truth is, Humfrey,' and her voice sank, 'that it cannot be while they live.'

'My poor little Honor!' he said, in a tone of the most unselfish compassion.

She had entirely forgotten his novel aspect, and only thought of him as the kindest friend to whom she could open her heart.

'Don't pity me,' she said in exultation; 'think what it is to be his choice. Would I have him give up his aims, and settle down in the loveliest village in England? No, indeed, for then it would not be Owen! I am happier in the thought of him than I could be with everything present to enjoy.'

'I hope you will continue to find it so,' he said, repressing a sigh.

'I should be ashamed of myself if I did not,' she continued with glistening eyes. 'Should not I have patience to wait while he is at his real glorious labour? And as to home, that's not altered, only better and brighter for the definite hope and aim that will go through everything, and make me feel all I do a preparation.'

'Yes, you know him well,' said Humfrey; 'you saw him constantly when he was at Westminster.'

'O yes, and always! Why, Humfrey, it is my great glory and pleasure to feel that he formed me! When he went to Oxford, he brought me home all the thoughts that have been my better life. All my dearest books we read together, and what used to look dry and cold, gained light and life after he touched it.'

'Yes, I see.'

His tone reminded her of what had passed, and she said, timidly, 'I forgot! I ought not! I have vexed you, Humfrey.'

'No,' he said, in his full tender voice; 'I see that it was vain to think of competing with one of so much higher claims. If he goes on in the course he has chosen, yours will have been a noble choice, Honor; and I believe,' he added, with a sweetness of smile that almost made her forgive the *if*, 'that you are one to be better pleased *so* than with more ordinary happiness. I have no doubt it is all right.'

'Dear Humfrey, you are so good!' she said, struck with his kind resignation, and utter absence of acerbity in his disappointment.

'Forget this, Honora,' he said, as they were coming to the end of the pine wood; 'let us be as we were before.'

Honora gladly promised, and excepting for her wonder at such a step on the part of the cousin whose plaything and pet she had hitherto been, she had no temptation to change her manner. She loved him as much as ever, but only as a kind elder brother, and she was glad that he was wise enough to see his immeasurable inferiority to the young missionary. It was a wonderful thing, and she was sorry for his disappointment; but after all, he took it so quietly that she did not think it could have hurt him much. It was only that he wanted to keep his pet in the country. He was not capable of love like Owen Sandbrook's.

* * * * *

Years passed on. Rumour had bestowed Mr. Charlecote of Hiltonbury on every lady within twenty miles, but still in vain. His mother was dead, his sister married to an old college fellow, who had waited half a lifetime for a living, but still he kept house alone.

And open house it was, with a dinner-table ever expanding for chance guests, strawberry or syllabub feasts half the summer, and Christmas feasts extending wide on either side of the twelve days. Every one who wanted a holiday was free of the Holt; young sportsmen tried their inexperienced guns under the squire's patient eye; and mammas disposed of their children for weeks together, to enjoy the run of the house and garden, and rides according to age, on pony, donkey, or Mr. Charlecote. No festivity in the neighbourhood was complete without his sunshiny presence; he was wanted wherever there was any family event; and was godfather, guardian,

friend, and adviser of all. Every one looked on him as a sort of exclusive property, yet he had room in his heart for all. As a magistrate, he was equally indispensable in county government, and a charity must be undeserving indeed that had not Humfrey Charlecote, Esq., on the committee. In his own parish he was a beneficent monarch; on his own estate a mighty farmer, owning that his relaxation and delight were his turnips, his bullocks, and machines; and so content with them, and with his guests, that Honora never recollected that walk in the pine woods without deciding that to have monopolized him would have been an injury to the public, and perhaps less for his happiness than this free, open-hearted bachelor life. Seldom did she recall that scene to mind, for she had never been by it rendered less able to trust to him as her friend and protector, and she stood in need of his services and his comfort, when her father's death had left him the nearest relative who could advise or transact business for her and her mother. Then, indeed, she leant on him as on the kindest and most helpful of brothers.

p. 14

Mrs. Charlecote was too much acclimatized to the city to be willing to give up her old residence, and Honor not only loved it fondly, but could not bear to withdraw from the local charities where her tasks had hitherto lain; and Woolstone-lane, therefore, continued their home, though the summer and autumn usually took them out of London.

Such was the change in Honora's outward life. How was it with that inmost shrine where dwelt her heart and soul? A copious letter writer, Owen Sandbrook's correspondence never failed to find its way to her, though they did not stand on such terms as to write to one another; and in those letters she lived, doing her day's work with cheerful brightness, and seldom seeming preoccupied, but imagination, heart, and soul were with his mission.

Very indignant was she when the authorities, instead of sending him to the interesting children of the forests, thought proper to waste him on mere colonists, some of them Yankee, some Presbyterian Scots. He was asked insolent, nasal questions, his goods were coolly treated as common property, and it was intimated to him on all hands that as Englishman he was little in their eyes, as clergyman less, as gentleman least of all. Was this what he had sacrificed everything for?

By dint of strong complaints and entreaties, after he had quarrelled with most of his flock, he accomplished an exchange into a district where red men formed the chief of his charge; and Honora was happy, and watched for histories of noble braves, gallant hunters, and meek-eyed squaws.

Slowly, slowly she gathered that the picturesque deer-skins had become dirty blankets, and that the diseased, filthy, sophisticated savages were among the worst of the pitiable specimens of the effect of contact with the most evil side of civilization. To them, as Owen wrote, a missionary was only a white man who gave no brandy, and the rest of his parishioners were their obdurate, greedy, trading tempters! It had been a shame to send him to such a hopeless set, when there were others on whom his toils would not be thrown away. However, he should do his best.

And Honor went on expecting the wonders his best would work, only the more struck with admiration by hearing that the locality was a swamp of luxuriant vegetation, and equally luxuriant fever and ague; and the letter he wrote thence to her mother on the news of their loss did her more good than all Humfrey's considerate kindness.

p. 15

Next, he had had the ague, and had gone to Toronto for change of air. Report spoke of Mr. Sandbrook as the most popular preacher who had appeared in Toronto for years, attracting numbers to his pulpit, and sending them away enraptured by his power of language. How beautiful that a man of such talents, always so much stimulated by appreciation, should give up all this most congenial scene, and devote himself to his obscure mission!

Report said more, but Honora gave it no credit till old Mr. Sandbrook called one morning in Woolstone-lane, by his nephew's desire, to announce to his friends that he had formed an engagement with Miss Charteris, the daughter of a general officer there in command.

Honor sat out all the conversation; and Mrs. Charlecote did not betray herself; though, burning with a mother's wrath, she did nothing worse than hope they would be happy.

Yet Honor had not dethroned the monarch of her imagination. She reiterated to herself and to her mother that she had no ground of complaint, that it had been understood that the past was to be forgotten, and that Owen was far more worthily employed than in dwelling on them. No blame could attach to him, and it was wise to choose one accustomed to the country and able to carry out his plans. The personal feeling might go, but veneration survived.

Mrs. Charlecote never rested till she had learnt all the particulars. It was a dashing, fashionable family, and Miss Charteris had been the gayest of the gay, till she had been impressed by Mr. Sandbrook's ministrations. From pope to lover, Honor knew how easy was the transition; but she zealously nursed her admiration for the beauty, who was exchanging her gaities for the forest missions; she made her mother write cordially, and send out a pretty gift, and treated as a personal affront all reports of the Charteris disapprobation, and of the self-will of the young people. They were married, and the next news that Honora heard was, that the old general had had a fit from passion; thirdly, came tidings that the eldest son, a prosperous M.P., had not only effected a reconciliation, but had obtained a capital living for Mr. Sandbrook, not far from the family seat.

Mrs. Charlecote declared that her daughter should not stay in town to meet the young couple,

and Honora's resistance was not so much dignity, as a feverish spirit of opposition, which succumbed to her sense of duty, but not without such wear and tear of strained cheerfulness and suppressed misery, that when at length her mother had brought her away, the fatigue of the journey completed the work, and she was prostrated for weeks by low fever. The blow had fallen. He had put his hand to the plough and looked back. Faithlessness towards herself had been passed over unrecognized, faithlessness towards his self-consecration was quite otherwise. That which had absorbed her affections and adoration had proved an unstable, excitable being! Alas! would that long ago she had opened her eyes to the fact that it was her own lofty spirit, not his steadfastness, which had first kept it out of the question that the mission should be set aside for human love. The crash of her idolatry was the greater because it had been so highly pitched, so closely intermingled with the true worship. She was long ill, the past series of disappointments telling when her strength was reduced; and for many a week she would lie still and dreamy, but fretted and wearied, so as to control herself with difficulty when in the slightest degree disturbed, or called upon to move or think. When her strength returned under her mother's tender nursing the sense of duty revived. She thought her youth utterly gone with the thinning of her hair and the wasting of her cheeks, but her mother must be the object of her care and solicitude, and she would exert herself for her sake, to save her grief, and hide the wound left by the rending away of the jewel of her heart. So she set herself to seem to like whatever her mother proposed, and she acted her interest so well that insensibly it became real. After all, she was but four-and-twenty, and the fever had served as an expression of the feeling that would have its way: she had had a long rest, which had relieved the sense of pent-up and restrained suffering, and vigour and buoyancy were a part of her character; her tone and manner resumed their cheerfulness, her spirits came back, though still with the dreary feeling that the hope and aim of life were gone, when she was left to her own musings; she was little changed, and went on with daily life, contented and lively over the details, and returning to her interest in reading, in art, poetry, and in all good works, while her looks resumed their brightness, and her mother congratulated herself once more on the rounded cheek and profuse curls.

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At the year's end Humfrey Charlecote renewed his proposal. It was no small shock to find herself guilty of his having thus long remained single, and she was touched by his kind forbearance, but there was no bringing herself either to love him, or to believe that he loved her, with such love as had been her vision. The image around which she had bound her heart-strings came between him and her, and again she begged his pardon, and told him she liked him too well as he was to think of him in any other light. Again he, with the most tender patience and humility, asked her to forgive him for having harassed her, and betrayed so little chagrin that she ascribed his offer to generous compassion at her desertion.

CHAPTER II

He who lets his feelings run
In soft luxurious flow,
Shrinks when hard service must be done,
And faints at every woe.

p. 17

Seven years more, and Honora was in mourning for her mother. She was alone in the world, without any near or precious claim, those clinging tendrils of her heart rent from their oldest, surest earthly stay, and her time left vacant from her dearest, most constant occupation. Her impulse was to devote herself and her fortune at once to the good work which most engaged her imagination, but Humfrey Charlecote, her sole relation, since heart complaint had carried off his sister Sarah, interfered with the authority he had always exercised over her, and insisted on her waiting one full year before pledging herself to anything. At one-and-thirty, with her golden hair and light figure, her delicate skin and elastic step, she was still too young to keep house in solitude, and she invited to her home a friendless old governess of her own, sick at heart with standing for the Governess's Institution, promising her a daughter's care and attendance on her old age. Gentle old Miss Wells was but too happy in her new quarters, though she constantly averred that she knew she should not continue there; treated as injuries to herself all Honora's assertions of the dignity of age and old maidishness, and remained convinced that she should soon see her married.

Honora had not seen Mr. Sandbrook since his return from Canada, though his living was not thirty miles from the City. There had been exchanges of calls when he had been in London, but these had only resulted in the leaving of cards; and from various causes she had been unable to meet him at dinner. She heard of him, however, from their mutual connection, old Mrs. Sandbrook, who had made a visit at Wrapworth, and came home stored with anecdotes of the style in which he lived, the charms of Mrs. Sandbrook, and the beauty of the children. As far as Honora could gather, and very unwillingly she did so, he was leading the life of an easy-going, well-beneficed clergyman, not neglecting the parish, according to the requirements of the day, indeed slightly exceeding them, very popular, good-natured, and charitable, and in great request in a numerous, demi-suburban neighbourhood, for all sorts of not unclerical gaieties. The Rev. O. Sandbrook was often to be met with in the papers, preaching everywhere and for everything, and whispers went about of his speedy promotion to a situation of greater note. In the seventh year of his marriage, his wife died, and Honora was told of his overwhelming grief, how he utterly refused all comfort or alleviation, and threw himself with all his soul into his parish and his children. People spoke of him as going about among the poor from morning to night, with his little ones by his side, shrinking from all other society, teaching them and nursing them himself,

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and endeavouring to the utmost to be as both parents in one. The youngest, a delicate infant, soon followed her mother to the grave, and old Mrs. Sandbrook proved herself to have no parent's heart by being provoked with his agonizing grief for the 'poor little sickly thing,' while it was not in Honora's nature not to feel the more tenderly towards the idol of her girlish days, because he was in trouble.

It was autumn, the period when leaves fall off and grow damp, and London birds of passage fly home to their smoky nests. Honora, who had gone to Weymouth chiefly because she saw Miss Wells would be disappointed if she did otherwise; when there, had grown happily at home with the waves, and in talking to the old fishermen; but had come back because Miss Wells thought it chilly and dreary, and pined for London warmth and snugness. The noonday sun had found the way in at the oriel window of the drawing-room, and traced the reflection of the merchant's mark upon the upper pane in distorted outline on the wainscoted wall; it smiled on the glowing tints of Honora's hair, but seemed to die away against the blackness of her dress, as she sat by the table, writing letters, while opposite, in the brightness of the fire, sat the pale, placid Miss Wells with her morning nest of sermon books and needlework around her.

Honor yawned; Miss Wells looked up with kind anxiety. She knew such a yawn was equivalent to a sigh, and that it was dreary work to settle in at home again this first time without the mother.

Then Honor smiled, and played with her pen-wiper. 'Well,' she said, 'it is comfortable to be at home again!'

'I hope you will soon be able to feel so, my dear,' said the kind old governess.

'I mean it,' said Honor cheerfully; then sighing, 'But do you know, Mr. Askew wishes his curates to visit at the asylum instead of ladies.'

Miss Wells burst out into all the indignation that was in her mild nature. Honor not to visit at the asylum founded chiefly by her own father!

'It is a parish affair now,' said Honor; 'and I believe those Miss Stones and their set have been very troublesome. Besides I think he means to change its character.'

'It is very inconsiderate of him,' said Miss Wells; 'he ought to have consulted you.'

'Every one loves his own charity the best,' said Honora; 'Humfrey says endowments are generally a mistake, each generation had better do its own work to the utmost. I wish Mr. Askew had not begun now, it was the work I specially looked to, but I let it alone while—and he cannot be expected—'

'I should have expected it of him though!' exclaimed Miss Wells, 'and he ought to know better! How have you heard it?' p. 19

'I have a note from him this morning,' said Honora; 'he asks me Humfrey Charlecote's address; you know he and Mr. Sandbrook are trustees,' and her voice grew the sadder.

'If I am not much mistaken, Mr. Charlecote will represent to him his want of consideration.'

'I think not,' said Honora; 'I should be sorry to make the clergyman's hard task here any harder for the sake of my feelings. Late incumbent's daughters are proverbially inconvenient. No, I would not stand in the way, but it makes me feel as if my work in St. Wulstan's were done,' and the tears dropped fast.

'Dear, dear Honora!' began the old lady, eagerly, but her words and Honora's tears were both checked by the sound of a bell, that bell within the court, to which none but intimates found access.

'Strange! It is the thought of old times, I suppose,' said Honor, smiling, 'but I could have said that was Owen Sandbrook's ring.'

The words were scarcely spoken, ere Mr. Sandbrook and Captain Charteris were announced; and there entered a clergyman leading a little child in each hand. How changed from the handsome, hopeful youth from whom she had parted! Thin, slightly bowed, grief-stricken, and worn, she would scarcely have known him, and as if to hide how much she felt, she bent quickly, after shaking hands with him, to kiss the two children, flaxen-curl'd creatures in white, with black ribbons. They both shrank closer to their father. 'Cilly, my love, Owen, my man, speak to Miss Charlecote,' he said; 'she is a very old friend of mine. This is my bonny little housekeeper,' he added, 'and here's a sturdy fellow for four years old, is not he?'

The girl, a delicate fairy of six, barely accepted an embrace, and clung the faster to her father, with a gesture as though to repel all advance. The boy took a good stare out of a pair of resolute gray eyes, with one foot in advance, and offered both hands. Honora would have taken him on her knee, but he retreated, and both leant against their father as he sat, an arm round each, after shaking hands with Miss Wells, whom he recollected at once, and presenting his brother-in-law, whose broad, open, sailor countenance, hardy and weather-stained, was a great contrast to his pale, hollow, furrowed cheeks and heavy eyes.

'Will you tell me your name, my dear?' said Honora, feeling the children the easiest to talk to; but the little girl's pretty lips pouted, and she nestled nearer to her father.

'Her name is Lucilla,' he answered with a sigh, recalling that it had been his wife's name. 'We

are all somewhat of little savages,' he added, in excuse for the child's silence. 'We have seen few strangers at Wrapworth of late.'

'I did not know you were in London.'

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'It was a sudden measure—all my brother's doing,' he said; 'I am quite taken out of my own guidance.'

'I went down to Wrapworth and found him very unwell, quite out of order, and neglecting himself,' said the captain; 'so I have brought him up for advice, as I could not make him hear reason.'

'I was afraid you were looking very ill,' said Honora, hardly daring to glance at his changed face.

'Can't help being ill,' returned Captain Charteris, 'running about the village in all weathers in a coat like that, and sitting down to play with the children in his wet things. I saw what it would come to, last time.'

Mr. Sandbrook could not repress a cough, which told plainly what it was come to.

Miss Wells asked whom he intended to consult, and there was some talk on physicians, but the subject was turned off by Mr. Sandbrook bending down to point out to little Owen a beautiful carving of a brooding dove on her nest, which formed the central bracket of the fine old mantelpiece.

'There, my man, that pretty bird has been sitting there ever since I can remember. How like it all looks to old times! I could imagine myself running in from Westminster on a saint's day.'

'It is little altered in some things,' said Honor. The last great change was too fresh!

'Yes,' said Mr. Sandbrook, raising his eyes towards her with the look that used to go so deep of old, 'we have both gone through what makes the unchangeableness of these impassive things the more striking.'

'I can't see,' said the little girl, pulling his hand.

'Let me lift you up, my dear,' said Honora; but the child turned her back on her, and said, 'Father.'

He rose, and was bending, at the little imperious voice, though evidently too weak for the exertion, but the sailor made one step forward, and pouncing on Miss Lucilla, held her up in his arms close to the carving. The two little feet made signs of kicking, and she said in anything but a grateful voice, 'Put me down, Uncle Kit.'

Uncle Kit complied, and she retreated under her papa's wing, pouting, but without another word of being lifted, though she had been far too much occupied with struggling to look at the dove. Meantime her brother had followed up her request by saying 'me,' and he fairly put out his arms to be lifted by Miss Charlecote, and made most friendly acquaintance with all the curiosities of the carving. The rest of the visit was chiefly occupied by the children, to whom their father was eager to show all that he had admired when little older than they were, thus displaying a perfect and minute recollection and affection for the place, which much gratified Honora. The little girl began to thaw somewhat under the influence of amusement, but there was still a curious ungraciousness towards all attentions. She required those of her father as a right, but shook off all others in a manner which might be either shyness or independence; but as she was a pretty and naturally graceful child, it had a somewhat engaging air of caprice. They took leave, Mr. Sandbrook telling the children to thank Miss Charlecote for being so kind to them, which neither would do, and telling her, as he pressed her hand, that he hoped to see her again. Honora felt as if an old page in her history had been reopened, but it was not the page of her idolatry, it was that of the fall of her idol! She did not see in him the champion of the truth, but his presence palpably showed her the excitable weakness which she had taken for inspiration, while the sweetness and sympathy warmed her heart towards him, and made her feel that she had underrated his attractiveness. His implications that he knew she sympathized with him had touched her greatly, and then he looked so ill!

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A note from old Mrs. Sandbrook begged her to meet him at dinner the next day, and she was glad of the opportunity of learning the doctor's verdict upon him, though all the time she knew the meeting would be but pain, bringing before her the disappointment not *of* him, but *in* him.

No one was in the drawing-room but Captain Charteris, who came and shook hands with her as if they were old friends; but she was somewhat amazed at missing Mrs. Sandbrook, whose formality would be shocked by leaving her guests in the lurch.

'Some disturbance in the nursery department, I fancy,' said the captain; 'those children have never been from home, and they are rather exacting, poor things.'

'Poor little things!' echoed Honora; then, anxious to profit by the *tête-a-tête*, 'has Mr. Sandbrook seen Dr. L.?'

'Yes, it is just as I apprehended. Lungs very much affected, right one nearly gone. Nothing for it but the Mediterranean.'

'Indeed!'

'It is no wonder. Since my poor sister died he has never taken the most moderate care of his health, perfectly revelled in dreariness and desolateness, I believe! He has had this cough about him ever since the winter, when he walked up and down whole nights with that poor child, and never would hear of any advice till I brought him up here almost by force.'

'I am sure it was time.'

'May it be in time, that's all.'

'Italy does so much! But what will become of the children?'

'They must go to my brother's of course. I have told him I will see him there, but I will not have the children! There's not the least chance of his mending, if they are to be always lugging him about—'

The captain was interrupted by the entrance of Mrs. Sandbrook, who looked a good deal worried, though she tried to put it aside, but on the captain saying, 'I'm afraid that you have troublesome guests, ma'am,' out it all came, how it had been discovered late in the day that Master Owen *must* sleep in his papa's room, in a crib to himself, and how she had been obliged to send out to hire the necessary articles, subject to his nurse's approval; and the captain's sympathy having opened her heart, she further informed them of the inconvenient rout the said nurse had made about getting new milk for them, for which Honor could have found it in her heart to justify her; 'and poor Owen is just as bad,' quoth the old lady; 'I declare those children are wearing his very life out, and yet he will not hear of leaving them behind.'

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She was interrupted by his appearance at that moment, as usual, with a child in either hand, and a very sad picture it was, so mournful and spiritless was his countenance, with the hectic tint of decay evident on each thin cheek, and those two fair healthful creatures clinging to him, thoughtless of their past loss, unconscious of that which impended. Little Owen, after one good stare, evidently recognized a friend in Miss Charlecote, and let her seat him upon her knee, listening to her very complacently, but gazing very hard all the time at her, till at last, with an experimental air, he stretched one hand and stroked the broad golden ringlet that hung near him, evidently to satisfy himself whether it really was hair. Then he found his way to her watch, a pretty little one from Geneva, with enamelled flowers at the back, which so struck his fancy that he called out, 'Cilly, look!' The temptation drew the little girl nearer, but with her hands behind her back, as if bent on making no advance to the stranger.

Honora thought her the prettiest child she had ever seen. Small and lightly formed, there was more symmetry in her little fairy figure than usual at her age, and the skin was exquisitely fine and white, tinted with a soft eglantine pink, deepening into roses on the cheeks; the hair was in long flaxen curls, and the eyelashes, so long and fair that at times they caught a glossy light, shaded eyes of that deep blue upon that limpid white, which is like nothing but the clear tints of old porcelain. The features were as yet unformed, but small and delicate, and the upright Napoleon gesture had something peculiarly quaint and pretty in such a soft-looking little creature. The boy was a handsome fellow, with more solidity and sturdiness, and Honora could scarcely continue to amuse him, as she thought of the father's pain in parting with two such beings—his sole objects of affection. A moment's wish flashed across her, but was dismissed the next moment as a mere childish romance.

Old Mr. Sandbrook came in, and various other guests arrived, old acquaintance to whom Owen must be re-introduced, and he looked fagged and worn by the time all the greetings had been exchanged and all the remarks made on his children. When dinner was announced, he remained to the last with them, and did not appear in the dining-room till his uncle had had time to look round for him, and mutter something discontentedly about 'those brats.' The vacant chair was beside Honora, and he was soon seated in it, but at first he did not seem inclined to talk, and leant back, so white and exhausted, that she thought it kinder to leave him to himself.

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When, somewhat recruited, he said in a low voice something of his hopes that his little Cilly, as he called her, would be less shy another time, and Honora responding heartily, he quickly fell into the parental strain of anecdotes of the children's sayings and doings, whence Honora collected that in his estimation Lucilla's forte was decision and Owen's was sweetness, and that he was completely devoted to them, nursing and teaching them himself, and finding his whole solace in them. Tender pity moved her strongly towards him, as she listened to the evidences of the desolateness of his home and his heavy sorrow; and yet it was pity alone, admiration would not revive, and indeed, in spite of herself, her judgment *would* now and then respond 'unwise,' or 'weak,' or 'why permit this?' at details of Lucilla's *mutinerie*. Presently she found that his intentions were quite at variance with those of his brother. His purpose was fixed to take the children with him.

'They are very young,' said Honora.

'Yes; but their nurse is a most valuable person, and can arrange perfectly for them, and they will always be under my eye.'

'That was just what Captain Charteris seemed to dread.'

'He little knows,' began Mr. Sandbrook, with a sigh. 'Yes, I know he is most averse to it, and he is one who always carries his point, but he will not do so here; he imagines that they may go to their aunt's nursery, but,' with an added air of confidence, 'that will never do!'

Honora's eyes asked more.

'In fact,' he said, as the flush of pain rose on his cheeks, 'the Charteris children are not brought up as I should wish to see mine. There are influences at work there not suited for those whose home must be a country parsonage, if— Little Cilly has come in for more admiration there already than is good for her.'

'It cannot be easy for her not to meet with that.'

'Why, no,' said the gratified father, smiling sadly; 'but Castle Blanch training might make the mischief more serious. It is a gay household, and I cannot believe with Kit Charteris that the children are too young to feel the blight of worldly influence. Do not you think with me, Nora?' he concluded in so exactly the old words and manner as to stir the very depths of her heart, but woe worth the change from the hopes of youth to this premature fading into despondency, and the implied farewell! She did think with him completely, and felt the more for him, as she believed that these Charterises had led him and his wife into the gaities, which since her death he had forsworn and abhorred as temptations. She thought it hard that he should not have his children with him, and talked of all the various facilities for taking them that she could think of, till his face brightened under the grateful sense of sympathy.

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She did not hold the same opinion all the evening. The two children made their appearance at dessert, and there began by insisting on both sitting on his knees; Owen consented to come to her, but Lucilla would not stir, though she put on some pretty little coquettish airs, and made herself extremely amiable to the gentleman who sat on her father's other hand, making smart replies, that were repeated round the table with much amusement.

But the ordinance of departure with the ladies was one of which the sprite had no idea; Honor held out her hand for her; Aunt Sandbrook called her; her father put her down; she shook her curls, and said she should not leave father; it was stupid up in the drawing-room, and she hated ladies, which confession set every one laughing, so as quite to annihilate the effect of Mr. Sandbrook's 'Yes, go, my dear.'

Finally, he took the two up-stairs himself—the stairs which, as he had told Honora that evening, were his greatest enemies, and he remained a long time in their nursery, not coming down till tea was in progress. Mrs. Sandbrook always made it herself at the great silver urn, which had been a testimonial to her husband, and it was not at first that she had a cup ready for him. He looked even worse than at dinner, and Honora was anxious to see him resting comfortably; but he had hardly sat down on the sofa, and taken the cup in his hand, before a dismal childish wail was heard from above, and at once he started up, so hastily as to cough violently. Captain Charteris, breaking off a conversation, came rapidly across the room just as he was moving to the door. 'You're not going to those imps—'

Owen moved his head, and stepped forward.

'I'll settle them.'

Renewed cries met his ears. 'No—a strange place—' he said. 'I must—'

He put his brother-in-law back with his hand, and was gone. The captain could not contain his vexation, 'That's the way those brats serve him every night!' he exclaimed; 'they will not attempt to go to sleep without him! Why, I've found him writing his sermon with the boy wrapped up in blankets in his lap; there's no sense in it.'

After about ten minutes, during which Mr. Sandbrook did not reappear, Captain Charteris muttered something about going to see about him, and stayed away a good while. When he came down, he came and sat down by Honora, and said, 'He is going to bed, quite done for.'

'That must be better for him than talking here.'

'Why, what do you think I found? Those intolerable brats would not stop crying unless he told them a story, and there was he with his voice quite gone, coughing every two minutes, and romancing on with some allegory about children marching on their little paths, and playing on their little fiddles. So I told Miss Cilly that if she cared a farthing for her father, she would hold her tongue, and I packed her up, and put her into her nursery. She'll mind me when she sees I will be minded; and as for little Owen, nothing would satisfy him but his promising not to go away. I saw that chap asleep before I came down, so there's no fear of the yarn beginning again; but you see what chance there is of his mending while those children are at him day and night.'

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'Poor things! they little know.'

'One does not expect them to know, but one does expect them to show a little rationality. It puts one out of all patience to see him so weak. If he is encouraged to take them abroad, he may do so, but I wash my hands of him. I won't be responsible for him—let them go alone!'

Honora saw this was a reproach to her for the favour with which she had regarded the project. She saw that the father's weakness quite altered the case, and her former vision flashed across her again, but she resolutely put it aside for consideration, and only made the unmeaning answer, 'It is very sad and perplexing.'

'A perplexity of his own making. As for their not going to Castle Blanch, they were always there in my poor sister's time a great deal more than was good for any of them, or his parish either, as

I told him then; and now, if he finds out that it is a worldly household, as he calls it, why, what harm is that to do to a couple of babies like those? If Mrs. Charteris does not trouble herself much about the children, there are governesses and nurses enough for a score!

'I must own,' said Honora, 'that I think he is right. Children are never too young for impressions.'

'I'll tell you what, Miss Charlecote, the way he is going on is enough to ruin the best children in the world. That little Cilly is the most arrant little flirt I ever came across; it is like a comedy to see the absurd little puss going on with the curate, ay, and with every parson that comes to Wrapworth; and she sees nothing else. Impressions! All she wants is to be safe shut up with a good governess, and other children. It would do her a dozen times more good than all his stories of good children and their rocky paths, and boats that never sailed on any reasonable principle.'

'Poor child,' said Honora, smiling, 'she is a little witch.'

'And,' continued the uncle, 'if he thinks it so bad for them, he had better take the only way of saving them from it for the future, or they will be there for life. If he gets through this winter, it will only be by the utmost care.'

Honora kept her project back with the less difficulty, because she doubted how it would be received by the rough captain; but it won more and more upon her, as she rattled home through the gas-lights, and though she knew she should learn to love the children only to have the pang of losing them, she gladly cast this foreboding aside as selfish, and applied herself impartially as she hoped to weigh the duty, but trembling were the hands that adjusted the balance. Alone as she stood, without a tie, was not she marked out to take such an office of mere pity and charity? Could she see the friend of her childhood forced either to peril his life by his care of his motherless children, or else to leave them to the influences he so justly dreaded? Did not the case cry out to her to follow the promptings of her heart? Ay, but might not, said caution, her assumption of the charge lead their father to look on her as willing to become their mother? Oh, fie on such selfish prudery imputing such a thought to yonder broken-hearted, sinking widower! He had as little room for such folly as she had inclination to find herself on the old terms. The hero of her imagination he could never be again, but it would be weak consciousness to scruple at offering so obvious an act of compassion. She would not trust herself, she would go by what Miss Wells said. Nevertheless she composed her letter to Owen Sandbrook between waking and sleeping all night, and dreamed of little creatures nestling in her lap, and small hands playing with her hair. How coolly she strove to speak as she described the dilemma to the old lady, and how her heart leapt when Miss Wells, her mind moving in the grooves traced out by sympathy with her pupil, exclaimed, 'Poor little dears, what a pity they should not be with you, my dear, they would be a nice interest for you!'

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Perhaps Miss Wells thought chiefly of the brightening in her child's manner, and the alert vivacity of eye and voice such as she had not seen in her since she had lost her mother; but be that as it might, her words were the very sanction so much longed for, and ere long Honora had her writing-case before her, cogitating over the opening address, as if her whole meaning were implied in them.

'My dear Owen' came so naturally that it was too like an attempt to recur to the old familiarity. 'My dear Mr. Sandbrook?' So formal as to be conscious! 'Dear Owen?' Yes that was the cousinly medium, and in diffident phrases of restrained eagerness, now seeming too affectionate, now too cold she offered to devote herself to his little ones, to take a house on the coast, and endeavour to follow out his wishes with regard to them, her good old friend supplying her lack of experience.

With a beating heart she awaited the reply. It was but few lines, but all Owen was in them.

'MY DEAR NORA—You always were an angel of goodness. I feel your kindness more than I can express. If my darlings were to be left at all, it should be with you, but I cannot contemplate it. Bless you for the thought!

'Yours ever, O. SANDBROOK.'

She heard no more for a week, during which a dread of pressing herself on him prevented her from calling on old Mrs. Sandbrook. At last, to her surprise, she received a visit from Captain Charteris, the person whom she looked on as least propitious, and most inclined to regard her as an enthusiastic silly young lady. He was very gruff, and gave a bad account of his patient. The little boy had been unwell, and the exertion of nursing him had been very injurious; the captain was very angry with illness, child, and father.

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'However,' he said, 'there's one good thing, L. has forbidden the children's perpetually hanging on him, sleeping in his room, and so forth. With the constitutions to which they have every right, poor things, he could not find a better way of giving them the seeds of consumption. That settles it. Poor fellow, he has not the heart to hinder their always pawing him, so there's nothing for it but to separate them from him.'

'And may I have them?' asked Honor, too anxious to pick her words.

'Why, I told him I would come and see whether you were in earnest in your kind offer. You would find them no sinecure.'

'It would be a great happiness,' said she, struggling with tears that might prevent the captain

from depending on her good sense, and speaking calmly and sadly; 'I have no other claims, nothing to tie me to any place. I am a good deal older than I look, and my friend, Miss Wells, has been a governess. *She* is really a very wise, judicious person, to whom he may quite trust. Owen and I were children together, and I know nothing that I should like better than to be useful to him.'

'Humph!' said the captain, more touched than he liked to betray; 'well, it seems the only thing to which he can bear to turn!'

'Oh!' she said, breaking off, but emotion and earnestness looked glistening and trembling through every feature.

'Very well,' said Captain Charteris, 'I'm glad, at least, that there is some one to have pity on the poor things! There's my brother's wife, she doesn't say no, but she talks of convenience and spoiled children—Sandbrook was quite right after all; I would not tell him how she answered me! Spoiled children to be sure they are, poor things, but she might recollect they have no mother—such a fuss as she used to make with poor Lucilla too. Poor Lucilla, she would never have believed that "dear Caroline" would have no better welcome for her little ones! Spoiled indeed! A precious deal pleasanter children they are than any of the lot at Castle Blanch, and better brought up too.'

The good captain's indignation had made away with his consistency, but Honora did not owe him a grudge for revealing that she was his *pis aller*, she was prone to respect a man who showed that he despised her, and she only cared to arrange the details. He was anxious to carry away his charge at once, since every day of this wear and tear of feeling was doing incalculable harm, and she undertook to receive the children and nurse at any time. She would write at once for a house at some warm watering-place, and take them there as soon as possible, and she offered to call that afternoon to settle all with Owen.

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'Why,' said Captain Charteris, 'I hardly know. One reason I came alone was, that I believe that little elf of a Cilly has some notion of what is plotting against her. You can't speak a word but that child catches up, and she will not let her father out of her sight for a moment.'

'Then what is to be done? I would propose his coming here; but the poor child would not let him go.'

'That is the only chance. He has been forbidden the walking with them in his arms to put them to sleep, and we've got the boy into the nursery, and he'd better be out of the house than hear them roaring for him. So if you have no objection, and he is tolerable this evening, I would bring him as soon as they are gone to bed.'

Poor Owen was evidently falling under the management of stronger hands than his own, and it could only be hoped that it was not too late. His keeper brought him at a little after eight that evening. There was a look about him as if, after the last stroke that had befallen him, he could feel no more, the bitterness of death was past, his very hands looked woe-begone and astray, without the little fingers pressing them. He could not talk at first; he shook Honor's hand as if he could not bear to be grateful to her, and only the hardest hearts could have endured to enter on the intended discussion. The captain was very gentle towards him, and talk was made on other topics but gradually something of the influence of the familiar scene where his brightest days had been passed, began to prevail. All was like old times—the quaint old silver kettle and lamp, the pattern of the china cups, the ruddy play of the fire on the polished panels of the room—and he began to revive and join the conversation. They spoke of Delaroche's beautiful Madonnas, one of which was at the time to be seen at a print-shop—'Yes,' said Mr. Sandbrook, 'and little Owen cried out as soon as he saw it, "That lady, the lady with the flowery watch."'

Honora smiled. It was an allusion to the old jests upon her auburn locks, 'a greater compliment to her than to Delaroche,' she said; 'I saw that he was extremely curious to ascertain what my carrots were made of.'

'Do you know, Nora, I never saw more than one person with such hair as yours,' said Owen, with more animation, 'and oddly enough her name turned out to be Charlecote.'

'Impossible! Humfrey and I are the only Charlecotes left that I know of! Where could it have been?'

'It was at Toronto. I must confess that I was struck by the brilliant hair in chapel. Afterwards I met her once or twice. She was a Canadian born, and had just married a settler, whose name I can't remember, but her maiden name had certainly been Charlecote; I remembered it because of the coincidence.'

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'Very curious; I did not know there had been any Charlecotes but ourselves.'

'And Humfrey Charlecote has never married?'

'Never.'

What made Owen raise his eyes at that moment, just so that she met them? and why did that dreadful uncontrollable crimson heat come mounting up over cheeks and temples, tingling and spreading into her very neck, just because it was the most hateful thing that could happen? And he saw it. She knew he did so, for he dropped his eyes at once, and there was an absolute

silence, which she broke in desperation, by an incoherent attempt to say something, and that ended by blundering into the tender subject—the children; she found she had been talking about the place to which she thought of taking them, a quiet spot on the northern coast of Somersetshire.

He could bear the pang a little better now, and assented, and the ice once broken, there were so many details and injunctions that lay near his heart that the conversation never flagged. He had great reliance on their nurse, and they were healthy children, so that there was not much instruction as regarded the care of their little persons; but he had a great deal to say about the books they were to be taught from, the hymns they were to learn, and the exact management required by Lucilla's peculiar temper and decided will. The theory was so perfect and so beautifully wise that Honora sat by in reverence, fearing her power of carrying it out; and Captain Charteris listened with a shade of satire on his face, and at last broke out with a very odd grunt, as if he did not think this quite what he had seen at Wrapworth parsonage.

Mr. Sandbrook coloured, and checked himself. Then after a pause, he said in a very different tone, 'Perhaps so, Kit. It is only too easy to talk. Nora knows that there is a long way between my intentions and my practice.'

The humble dejection of that tone touched her more than she had been touched since he had wrung her hand, long, long ago.

'Well,' said the captain, perceiving only that he had given pain, 'I will say this for your monkeys, they do *know* what is right at least; they have heard the articles of war, which I don't fancy the other lot ever did. As to the discipline, humph! It is much of a muchness, and I'm not sure but it is not the best at the castle.'

'The children are different at home,' said Owen, quietly; 'but,' he added, with the same sad humility, 'I dare say they will be much the better for the change; I know—'

But he broke off, and put his hand before his eyes.

Honora hoped she should not be left alone with him, but somehow it did happen. The captain went to bring the carriage into the court, and get all imaginable wraps before trusting him out in the air, and Miss Wells disappeared, probably intending kindness. Of course neither spoke, till the captain was almost come back. Then Owen rose from where he had been sitting listlessly, leaning back, and slowly said, 'Nora, we did not think it would end thus when I put my hand to the plough. I am glad to have been here again. I had not remembered what I used to be. I do not ask you to forgive me. You are doing so, returning me good for—shall I say evil?'

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Honora could not speak or look, she drooped her head, and her hair veiled her; she held out her hand as the captain came in, and felt it pressed with a feverish, eager grasp, and a murmured blessing.

Honora did not see Mr. Sandbrook again, but Captain Charteris made an incursion on her the next day to ask if she could receive the children on the ensuing morning. He had arranged to set off before daybreak, embarking for Ostend before the children were up, so as to spare the actual parting, and Honora undertook to fetch them home in the course of the day. He had hoped to avoid their knowing of the impending separation but he could only prevail so far as to extract a promise that they should not know when it was to take place. Their father had told them of their destination and his own as they sat on his bed in the morning before he rose, and apparently it had gone off better than could have been expected; little Owen did not seem to understand, and his sister was a child who never shed tears.

The day came, and Honora awoke to some awe at the responsibility, but with a yearning supplied, a vacancy filled up. For at least six months she should be as a mother, and a parent's prayers could hardly have been more earnest.

She had not long been dressed, when a hasty peal was heard at the bell, and no sooner was the door opened than in hurried Captain Charteris, breathless, and bearing a large plaid bundle with tangled flaxen locks drooping at one end, and at the other rigid white legs, socks trodden down, one shoe wanting.

He deposited it, and there stood the eldest child, her chin buried in her neck, her fingers digging fast into their own palms, her eyes gleaming fiercely at him under the pent-house she had made of her brows.

'There's an introduction!' he said, panting for breath. 'Found her in time—the Strand—laid flat on back seat, under all the plaids and bags—her father put up his feet and found her—we drove to the lane—I ran down with her—not a moment—can't stay, good-bye, little Cilly goose, to think she could go that figure!'

He advanced to kiss her, but she lifted up her shoulder between him and her face, much as a pugnacious pigeon flap its wings, and he retreated.

'Wiser not, maybe! Look here,' as Honora hurried after him into the hall to ask after the patient; 'if you have a bit of sticking-plaster, he had better not see this.'

Lucilla had made her little pearls of teeth meet in the fleshy part of his palm.

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Honora recoiled, shocked, producing the plaster from her pocket in an instant.

'Little vixen,' he said, half laughing; 'but I was thankful to her for neither kicking nor struggling!'

'Poor child!' said Honora, 'perhaps it was as much agony as passion!'

He shrugged his shoulders as he held out his hand for her operations, then hastily thanking her and wishing her good-bye, rushed off again, as the astonished Miss Wells appeared on the stairs. Honor shrank from telling her what wounds had been received, she thought the gentle lady would never get over such a proceeding, and, in fact, she herself felt somewhat as if she had undertaken the charge of a little wild cat, and quite uncertain what the young lady might do next. On entering the breakfast-room, they found her sunk down all in a heap, where her uncle had set her down, her elbows on a low footstool, and her head leaning on them, the eyes still gazing askance from under the brows, but all the energy and life gone from the little dejected figure.

'Poor child! Dear little thing—won't you come to me?' She stirred not.

Miss Wells advanced, but the child's only motion was to shake her frock at her, as if to keep her off; Honora, really afraid of the consequences of touching her, whispered that they would leave her to herself a little. The silver kettle came in, and tea was made.

'Lucilla, my dear, the servants are coming in to prayers.'

She did not offer to move, and still Honora let her alone, and she remained in the same attitude while the psalm was read, but afterwards there was a little approximation to kneeling in her position.

'Lucilla, dear child, you had better come to breakfast—' Only another defying glance.

Miss Wells, with what Honor thought defective judgment, made pointed commendations of the tea, the butter and honey, but they had no effect; Honora, though her heart ached for the wretch the poor child had undergone, thought it best to affect indifference, gave a hint of the kind, and scrupulously avoided looking round at her, till breakfast was finished. When she did so, she no longer met the wary defiant gleam of the blue eyes, they were fast shut, the head had sunk on the arms, and the long breathings of sleep heaved the little frame. 'Poor little dear!' as Miss Wells might well exclaim, she had kept herself wakeful the whole night that her father might not go without her knowledge. And how pretty she looked in that little black frock, so ill and hastily put on, one round white shoulder quite out of it, and the long flaxen locks showing their silky fineness as they hung dispersed and tangled, the pinky flush of sleep upon the little face pillowed on the rosy pair of arms, and with a white unstockinged leg doubled under her. Poor child, there was more of the angel than the tiger-cat in her aspect now, and they had tears in their eyes, and moved softly lest they should startle her from her rest.

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But wakened she must be. Honora was afraid of displeasing her domestic vizier, and rendering him for ever unpropitious to her little guests if she deferred his removal of the breakfast things beyond a reasonable hour. How was the awaking to be managed? Fright, tears, passion, what change would come when the poor little maid must awake to her grief! Honora would never have expected so poetical a flight from her good old governess as the suggestion, 'Play to her;' but she took it eagerly, and going to the disused piano which stood in the room began a low, soft air. The little sleeper stirred, presently raised her head, shook her hair off her ears, and after a moment, to their surprise, her first word was 'Mamma!' Honora was pausing, but the child said, 'Go on,' and sat for a few moments as though recovering herself, then rose and came forward slowly standing at last close to Honora. There was a pause, and she said, 'Mamma did that.'

Never was a sound more welcome! Honora dared to do what she had longed for so much, put an arm round the little creature and draw her nearer, nor did Lucilla resist, she only said, 'Won't you go on?'

'I can make prettier music in the other room, my dear; we will go there, only you've had no breakfast. You must be very hungry.'

Lucilla turned round, saw a nice little roll cut into slices, and remembered that she *was* hungry; and presently she was consuming it so prosperously under Miss Wells's superintendence that Honor ventured out to endeavour to retard Jones's desire to 'take away,' by giving him orders about the carriage, and then to attend to her other household affairs. By the time they were ended she found that Miss Wells had brought the child into the drawing-room, where she had at once detected the piano, and looking up at Honora said eagerly 'Now then!' And Honora fulfilled her promise, while the child stood by softened and gratified, until it was time to propose fetching little Owen, 'your little brother—you will like to have him here.'

'I want my father,' said Lucilla in a determined voice, as if nothing else were to satisfy her.

'Poor child, I know you do; I am so sorry for you, my dear little woman, but you see the doctors think papa is more likely to get better if he has not you to take care of!'

'I did not want my father to take care of *me*,' said the little lady, proudly; 'I take care of father, I always make his tea and warm his slippers, and bring him his coffee in the morning. And Uncle Kit never *will* put his gloves for him and warm his handkerchief! Oh! what will he do? I can't bear it.'

The violent grief so long kept back was coming now, but not freely; the little girl threw herself on

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the floor, and in a tumult of despair and passion went on, hurrying out her words, 'It's very hard! It's all Uncle Kit's doing! I hate him! Yes, I do.' And she rolled over and over in her frenzy of feeling.

'My dear! my dear!' cried Honora, kneeling by her, 'this will never do! Papa would be very much grieved to see his little girl so naughty. Don't you know how your uncle only wants to do him good, and to make him get well?'

'Then why didn't he take me?' said Lucilla, gathering herself up, and speaking sullenly.

'Perhaps he thought you gave papa trouble, and tired him.'

'Yes, that's it, and it's not fair,' cried the poor child again; 'why couldn't he tell me? I didn't know papa was ill! he never told me so, nor Mr. Penty either; or, how I would have nursed him! I wanted to do so much for him; I wouldn't have asked him to tell me stories, nor nothing! No! And now they won't let me take care of him;' and she cried bitterly.

'Yes,' said good, gentle Miss Wells, thinking more of present comfort than of the too possible future; 'but you will go back to take care of him some day, my dear. When the spring comes papa will come back to his little girl.'

Spring! It was a long way off to a mind of six years old, but it made Lucilla look more amiably at Miss Wells.

'And suppose,' proceeded that good lady, 'you were to learn to be as good and helpful a little girl as can be while he is gone, and then nobody will wish to keep you from him. How surprised he would be!'

'And then shall we go home?' said Lucilla.

Miss Wells uttered a somewhat rash assurance to that effect, and the child came near her, pacified and satisfied by the scheme of delightful goodness and progress to be made in order to please her father—as she always called him. Honor looked on, thankful for the management that was subduing and consoling the poor little maid, and yet unable to participate in it, for though the kind old lady spoke in all sincerity, it was impossible to Honora to stifle a lurking fear that the hopes built on the prospect of his return had but a hollow foundation.

However it attracted Lucilla to Miss Wells, so that Honora did not fear leaving her on going to bring home little Owen. The carriage which had conveyed the travellers, had brought back news of his sister's discovery and capture, and Honora found Mrs. Sandbrook much shocked at the enormity of the proceeding, and inclined to pity Honora for having charge of the most outrageous children she had ever seen. A very long letter had been left for her by their father, rehearsing all he had before given of directions, and dwelling still more on some others, but then apparently repenting of laying down the law, he ended by entreating her to use her own judgment, believe in his perfect confidence, and gratitude beyond expression for most unmerited kindness.

Little Owen, she heard, had made the house resound with cries when his father was nowhere to be found, but his nurse had quieted him, and he came running to Honora with an open, confiding face. 'Are you the lady? And will you take me to Cilly and the sea? And may I have a whale?' p. 34

Though Honora did not venture on promising him a tame whale in the Bristol Channel, she had him clinging to her in a moment, eager to set off, to go to Cilly, and the dove he had seen at her house. 'It's a nasty house here—I want to come away,' he said, running backwards and forwards between her and the window to look at the horses, while nurse's interminable boxes were being carried down.

The troubles really seemed quite forgotten; the boy sat on her knee and chattered all the way to Woolstone-lane, and there he and Lucilla flew upon each other with very pretty childish joy; the sister doing the honours of the house in right of having been a little longer an inmate. Nurse caught her and dressed and combed her, shoed her and sashed her, so that she came down to dinner less picturesque, but more respectable than at her first appearance that morning, and except for the wonderful daintiness of both children, dinner went off very well.

All did go well till night, and then Owen's woes began. Oh what a piteous sobbing lamentation was it! 'Daddy, daddy!' not to be consoled, not to be soothed, awakening his sister to the same sad cry, stilled only by exhaustion and sleepiness.

Poor little fellow! Night after night it was the same. Morning found him a happy, bright child, full of engaging ways and innocent sayings, and quite satisfied with 'Cousin Honor,' but bed-time always brought back the same wailing. Nurse, a tidy, brisk personage, with a sensible, deferential tone to her superiors, and a caressing one to the children, tried in vain assurances of papa's soon coming back; nay, it might be feared that she held out that going to sleep would bring the morrow when he was to come; but even this delusive promise failed; the present was all; and Cousin Honor herself was only not daddy, though she nursed him, and rocked him in her arms, and fondled him, and told stories or sung his lullaby with nightly tenderness, till the last sobs had quivered into the smooth heavings of sleep.

Might only sea air and exercise act as a soporific! That was a better chance than the new promise which Honora was vexed to find nurse holding out to poor little Owen, that if he would be a good boy, he was going to papa. She was puzzled how to act towards a person not exactly

under her authority, but she took courage to speak about these false promises, and found the remonstrance received in good part; indeed nurse used to talk at much length of the children in a manner that implied great affection for them, coupled with a sense that it would be an excellent thing for them to be in such judicious hands. Honor always came away from nurse in good humour with herself.

The locality she had chosen was a sheltered village on the north coast of Somerset, just where Exmoor began to give grandeur to the outline in the rear, and in front the Welsh hills wore different tints of purple or gray, according to the promise of weather, Lundy Isle and the two lesser ones serving as the most prominent objects, as they rose from—Well, well! Honor counted herself as a Somersetshire woman, and could not brook hearing much about the hue of the Bristol Channel. At any rate, just here it had been so kind as to wash up a small strip of pure white sand, fit for any amount of digging for her children; and though Sandbeach was watering-place enough to have the lodging-houses, butchers and bakers, so indispensable to the London mind, it was not so much in vogue as to be overrun by fine ladies, spoiling the children by admiring their beauty. So said Miss Charlecote in her prudence—but was not she just as jealous as nurse that people should turn round a second time to look at those lovely little faces?

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That was a very happy charge to her and her good old governess, with some drawbacks, indeed, but not such as to distress her over much. The chief was at first Owen's nightly sorrows, his daily idleness over lessons, Lucilla's pride, and the exceeding daintiness of both children, which made their meals a constant vexation and trouble. But what was this compared with the charm of their dependence on her, and of hearing that newly-invented pet name, 'Sweet Honey,' invoked in every little concern that touched them?

It was little Owen's name for her. He was her special favourite—there was no concealing it. Lucilla did not need her as much, and was of a vigorous, independent nature, that would stand alone to the utmost. Owen gave his affection spontaneously; if Lucilla's was won, it must be at unawares. She was living in and for her absent father now, and had nothing to spare for any one else, or if she had, Miss Wells, who had the less claim on her was preferred to Cousin Honor. 'Father' was almost her religion; though well taught, and unusually forward in religious knowledge, as far as Honora dared to augur, no motive save her love for him had a substantive existence, as touching her feelings or ruling her actions. For him she said her prayers and learnt her hymns; for him she consented to learn to hem handkerchiefs; for him were those crooked letters for ever being written; nay, at the thought of his displeasure alone could her tears be made to flow when she was naughty; and for him she endeavoured to be less fanciful at dinner, as soon as her mind had grasped the perception that her not eating what was set before her might really hinder him from always having her with him. She was fairly manageable, with very high spirits, and not at all a silly or helpless child; but though she obeyed Miss Charlecote, it was only as obeying her father through her, and his constant letters kept up the strong influence. In her most gracious moods, she was always telling her little brother histories of what they should do when they got home to father and Mr. Prendergast; but to Owen, absence made a much greater difference. Though he still cried at night, his 'Sweet Honey' was what he wanted, and with her caressing him, he only dreaded her leaving him. He lavished his pretty endearments upon her, and missed no one when he held her hand or sat in her lap, stroking her curls, and exchanging a good deal of fondling. He liked his hymns, and enjoyed Scripture stories, making remarks that caused her to reverence him; and though backward, idle, and sometimes very passionate, his was exactly the legitimate character for a child, such as she could deal with and love. She was as complete a slave to the two little ones as their father could have been; all her habits were made to conform to their welfare and pleasure, and very happy she was, but the discipline was more decided than they had been used to; there were habits to be formed, and others to be broken, and she was not weak enough not to act up to her duty in this respect, even though her heart was winding round that sunny-faced boy as fast as it had ever clung to his father. The new Owen Sandbrook, with his innocent earnestness, and the spiritual light in his eyes, should fulfil all her dreams!

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Christmas had passed; Mr. Sandbrook had begun to write to his children about seeing them soon; Lucilla's slow hemming was stimulated by the hope of soon making her present; and Honora was marvelling at her own selfishness in dreading the moment when the little ones would be no longer hers; when a hurried note of preparation came from Captain Charteris. A slight imprudence had renewed all the mischief, and his patient was lying speechless under a violent attack of inflammation. Another letter, and all was over.

A shock indeed! but in Honora's eyes, Owen Sandbrook had become chiefly the children's father, and their future was what concerned her most. How should she bear to part with his darlings for ever, and to know them brought up in the way that was not good, and which their father dreaded, and when their orphanhood made her doubly tender over them?

To little Owen it was chiefly that papa was gone 'up there' whither all his hymns and allegories pointed, and at his age, all that he did not actually see was much on a par; the hope of meeting had been too distant for the extinction of it to affect him very nearly, and he only understood enough to prompt the prettiest and most touching sayings, wondering about the doings of papa, mamma, and little baby among the angels, with as much reality as he had formerly talked of papa among the French.

Lucilla heard with more comprehension, but her gay temper seemed to revolt against having sorrow forced on her. She would not listen and would not think; her spirits seemed higher than

ever, and Honora almost concluded that either she did not feel at all, or that the moment of separation had exhausted all. Her character made Honora especially regret her destiny; it was one only too congenial to the weeds that were more likely to be implanted, than plucked up, at Castle Blanch. Captain Charteris had written to say that he, and probably his brother, should come to Sandbeach to relieve Miss Charlecote from the care of the children, and she prized each day while she still had those dear little voices about the house.

'Sweet Honey,' said Lucilla, who had been standing by the window, apparently watching the rain, 'do Uncle Charteris and Uncle Kit want us to go away from you?'

'I am very much afraid they do, my dear.'

'Nurse said, if you would ask them, we might stay,' said Lucilla, tracing the course of a drop with her finger.

'If asking would do any good, my dear,' sighed Honor; 'but I don't think nurse knows. You see, you belong to your uncles now.'

'I won't belong to Uncle Charteris!' cried Lucilla, passionately. 'I won't go to Castle Blanch! They were all cross to me; Ratia teased me, and father said it was all their fault I was naughty, and he would never take me there again! Don't let Uncle Kit go and take me there!' and she clung to her friend, as if the recollection of Uncle Kit's victory by main force hung about her still.

'I won't, I won't, my child, if I can help it; but it will all be as your dear father may have fixed it, and whatever he wishes I know that his little girl will do.'

Many a dim hope did Honora revolve, and more than ever did she feel as if a piece of her heart would be taken away, for the orphans fastened themselves upon her, and little Owen stroked her face, and said naughty Uncle Kit should not take them away. She found from the children and nurse that about a year ago, just after the loss of the baby, there had been a most unsuccessful visit at Castle Blanch; father and little ones had been equally miserable there in the separation of the large establishment, and Lucilla had been domineeringly petted by her youngest cousin, Horatia, who chose to regard her as a baby, and coerced her by bodily force, such as was intolerable to so high-spirited a child, who was a little woman at home. She had resisted, and fallen into dire disgrace, and it was almost with horror that she regarded the place and the cousinhood. Nurse appeared to have some private disgust of her own, as well as to have much resented her children's being convicted of naughtiness, and she spoke strongly in confidence to Honora of the ungodly ways of the whole household, declaring that after the advantages she had enjoyed with her dear master, she could not bear to live there, though she might—yes, she *must* be with the dear children just at first, and she ventured to express strong wishes for their remaining in their present home, where they had been so much improved.

The captain came alone. He walked in from the inn just before luncheon, with a wearied, sad look about him, as if he had suffered a good deal; he spoke quietly and slowly, and when the children came in, he took them up in his arms and kissed them very tenderly. Lucilla submitted more placably than Honor expected, but the moment they were set down they sprang to their friend, and held by her dress. Then came the meal, which passed off with small efforts at making talk, but with nothing memorable except the captain's exclamation at the end—'Well, that's the first time I ever dined with you children without a fuss about the meat. Why, Cilly, I hardly know you.'

'I think the appetites are better for the sea air,' said Honor, not that she did not think it a great achievement.

'I'm afraid it has been a troublesome charge,' said the captain, laying his hand on his niece's shoulder, which she at once removed, as disavowing his right in her.

'Oh! it has made me so happy,' said Honor, hardly trusting her voice; 'I don't know how to yield it up.'

Those understanding eyes of Lucilla's were drinking in each word, but Uncle Kit ruthlessly said—'There, it's your walking time, children; you go out now.'

Honora followed up his words with her orders, and Lucille obeyed, only casting another wistful look, as if she knew her fate hung in the scales. It was showing tact such as could hardly have been expected from the little impetuous termagant, and was the best pleading for her cause, for her uncle's first observation was—'A wonder! Six months back, there would have been an explosion!'

'I am glad you think them improved.'

'Civilized beings, not plagues. You have been very good to them;' and as she intimated her own pleasure in them, he continued—'It will be better for them at Castle Blanch to have been a little broken in; the change from his indulgence would have been terrible.'

'If it were possible to leave them with me, I should be so happy,' at length gasped Honora, meeting an inquiring dart from the captain's eyes, as he only made an interrogative sound as though to give himself time to think, and she proceeded it broken sentences—'If their uncle and aunt did not so very much wish for them—perhaps—I could—'

'Well,' said Captain Charteris, apparently so little aided by his thoughts as to see no hope of

overcoming his perplexity without expressing it, 'the truth is that, though I had not meant to say anything of it, for I think relations should come first, I believe poor Sandbrook would have preferred it.' And while her colour deepened, and she locked her trembling fingers together to keep them still, he went on. 'Yes! you can't think how often I called myself a dozen fools for having parted him from his children! Never held up his head again! I could get him to take interest in nothing—every child he saw he was only comparing to one or other of them. After the year turned, and he talked of coming home, he was more cheerful; but strangely enough, for those last days at Hyères, though he seemed better, his spirits sank unaccountably, and he *would* talk more of the poor little thing that he lost than of these! Then he had a letter from you which set him sighing, and wishing they could always have such care! Altogether, I thought to divert him by taking him on that expedition, but— Well, I've been provoked with him many a time, but there was more of the *real thing* in him than in the rest of us, and I feel as if the best part of our family were gone.'

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'And this was all? He was too ill to say much afterwards?'

'Couldn't speak when he rang in the morning! Was gone by that time next day. Now,' added the captain, after a silence, 'I tell you candidly that my feeling is that the ordinary course is right. I think Charles ought to take the children, and the children ought to be with Charles.'

'If you think so,' began Honor, with failing hopes.

'At the same time,' continued he, 'I don't think they'll be so happy or so well cared for as by you, and knowing poor Owen's wishes, I should not feel justified in taking them away, since you are so good as to offer to keep them.'

Honor eagerly declared herself much obliged, then thought it sounded ironical.

'Unless,' he proceeded, 'Charles should strongly feel it his duty to take them home, in which case —'

'Oh, of course I could say nothing.'

'Very well, then we'll leave it to his decision.'

So it remained, and in trembling Honora awaited the answer.

It was in her favour that he was appointed to a ship, since he was thus excluded from exercising any supervision over them at Castle Blanch, and shortly after, letters arrived gratefully acceding to her request. Family arrangements and an intended journey made her proposal doubly welcome, for the present at least, and Mrs. Charteris was full of polite thanks.

Poor little waifs and strays! No one else wanted them, but with her at least they had a haven of refuge, and she loved them the more ardently for their forlorn condition. Her own as they had never before been! and if the tenure were uncertain, she prized it doubly, even though, by a strange fatality, she had never had so much trouble and vexation with them as arose at once on their being made over to her! When all was settled, doubt over, and the routine life begun, Lucilla evidently felt the blank of her vanished hopes, and became fretful and captious, weary of things in general, and without sufficient motive to control her natural taste for the variety of naughtiness! Honor had not undertaken the easiest of tasks, but she neither shrank from her enterprise nor ceased to love the fiery little flighty sprite, the pleasing torment of her life—she loved her only less than that model of childish sweetness, her little Owen.

* * * * *

'Lucy, dear child, don't take your brother there. Owen dear, come back, don't you see the mud? you'll sink in.'

'I'm only getting a dear little crab, Sweet Honey,' and the four little feet went deeper and deeper into the black mud.

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'I can't have it done! come back, children, I desire, directly.'

The boy would have turned, but his sister had hold of his hand. 'Owen, there he is! I'll have him,' and as the crab scuttled sidelong after the retreating tide, on plunged the children.

'Lucy, come here!' cried the unfortunate old hen, as her ducklings took to the black amphibious mass, but not a whit did Lucilla heed. In the ardour of the chase, on she went, unheeding, leaving her brother sticking half way, where having once stopped, he began to find it difficult to withdraw his feet, and fairly screamed to 'Sweet Honey' for help. His progress was not beyond what a few long vigorous steps of hers could come up with, but deeply and blackly did she sink, and when she had lifted her truant out of his two holes, the increased weight made her go ankle deep at the first tread, and just at the same moment a loud shriek proclaimed that Lucilla, in hey final assault on the crab, had fallen flat on a yielding surface, where each effort to rise sank her deeper, and Honora almost was expecting in her distress to see her disappear altogether, ere the treacherous mud would allow her to come to the rescue. But in that instant of utmost need, ere she could set down the little boy, a gentleman, with long-legged strides, had crossed the intervening space, and was bearing back the young lady from her mud bath. She raised her eyes to thank him. 'Humfrey!' she exclaimed.

'Honor! so it was you, was it? I'd no notion of it!' as he placed on her feet the little maiden,

encrusted with mud from head to foot, while the rest of the party were all apparently cased in dark buskins of the same.

'Come to see me and my children?' she said. 'I am ashamed you should find us under such circumstances! though I don't know what would have become of us otherwise. No, Lucy, you are too disobedient for any one to take notice of you yet—you must go straight home, and be cleaned, and not speak to Mr. Charlecote till you are quite good. Little Owen, here he is—he was quite led into it. But how good of you to come, Humfrey: where are you?'

'At the hotel—I had a mind to come and see how you were getting on, and I'd had rather more than usual to do of late, so I thought I would take a holiday.'

They walked on talking for some seconds, when presently as the squire's hand hung down, a little soft one stole into it, and made him exclaim with a start, 'I thought it was Ponto's nose!'

But though very fond of children, he took up his hand, and did not make the slightest response to the sly overture of the small coquette, the effect as Honor well knew of opposition quite as much as of her strong turn for gentlemen. She pouted a little, and then marched on with 'don't care' determination, while Humfrey and Honora began to talk over Hiltonbury affairs, but were soon interrupted by Owen, who, accustomed to all her attention, did not understand her being occupied by any one else. 'Honey, Honeypots,' and a pull at her hand when she did not immediately attend, 'why don't the little crabs get black legs like mine?'

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'Because they only go where they ought,' was the extremely moral reply of the squire. 'Little boys aren't meant to walk in black mud.'

'The shrimp boys do go in the mud,' shrewdly pleaded Owen, setting Honor off laughing at Humfrey's discomfited look of diversion.

'It won't do to generalize,' she said, merrily. 'Owen must be content to regard crabs and shrimp boys as privileged individuals.'

Owen demanded whether when he was big he might be a shrimp boy, and a good deal of fraternization had taken place between him and Mr. Charlecote before the cottage was reached.

It was a very happy day to Honora; there was a repose and trust to be felt in Humfrey's company, such as she had not experienced since she had lost her parents, and the home sense of kindred was very precious. Only women whose chief prop is gone, can tell the value of one who is still near enough to disapprove without ceremony.

The anxiety that Honor felt to prove to her cousin that it was not a bit of romantic folly to have assumed her present charge, was worth more than all the freedom of action in the world. How much she wanted the children to show off to advantage! how desirous she was that he should not think her injudicious! yes, and how eager to see him pleased with their pretty looks!

Lucilla came down cleaned, curled, and pardoned, and certainly a heart must have been much less tender than Humfrey Charlecote's not to be touched by the aspect of those two little fair waxen-looking beings in the deepest mourning of orphanhood. He was not slow in making advances towards them, but the maiden had been affronted, and chose to be slyly shy and retiring, retreating to the other side of Miss Wells, and there becoming intent upon her story-book, though many a gleam through her eyelashes betrayed furtive glances at the stranger whom Owen was monopolizing. And then she let herself be drawn out, with the drollest mixture of arch demureness and gracious caprice. Honora had never before seen her with a gentleman, and to be courted was evidently as congenial an element to her as to a reigning beauty. She was perfectly irresistible to manhood, and there was no doubt, ere the evening was over, that Humfrey thought her one of the prettiest little girls he had ever seen.

He remained a week at Sandbeach, lodging at the inn, but spending most of his time with Honor. He owned that he had been unwell, and there certainly was a degree of lassitude about him, though Honor suspected that his real motive in coming was brotherly kindness and desire to see whether she were suffering much from the death of Owen Sandbrook. Having come, he seemed not to know how to go away. He was too fond of children to become weary of their petty exactions, and they both had a sort of passion for him; he built castles for them on the beach, presided over their rides, took them out boating, and made them fabulously happy. Lucilla had not been so good for weeks, and the least symptom of an outbreak was at once put down by his good-natured 'No, no!' The evenings at the cottage with Honora and Miss Wells, music and bright talk, were evidently very refreshing to him, and he put off his departure from day to day, till an inexorable matter of county business forced him off.

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Not till the day was imminent, did the cousins quit the easy surface of holiday leisure talk. They had been together to the late evening service, and were walking home, when Honora began abruptly, 'Humfrey, I wish you would not object to the children giving me pet names.'

'I did not know that I had shown any objection.'

'As if you did not impressively say Miss Charlecote on every occasion when you mention me to them.'

'Well, and is not it more respectful?'

'That's not what I want. Where the natural tie is wanting, one should do everything to make up

for it.'

'And you hope to do so by letting yourself be called Honey-pots!'

'More likely than by sitting up distant and awful to be *Miss Charlecoted!*'

'Whatever you might be called must become an endearment,' said Humfrey, uttering unawares one of the highest compliments she had ever received, 'and I own I do not like to hear those little chits make so free with your name.'

'For my sake, or theirs?'

'For both. There is an old saying about familiarity, and I think you should recollect that, for the children's own good, it is quite as needful to strengthen respect as affection.'

'And you think I can do that by fortifying myself with Miss Charlecote? Perhaps I had better make it Mrs. Honora Charlecote at once, and get a high cap, a rod, and a pair of spectacles, eh? No! if they won't respect me out of a buckram suit, depend upon it they would find out it was a hollow one.'

Humfrey smiled. From her youth up, Honor could generally come off in apparent triumph from an argument with him, but the victory was not always where the triumph was.

'Well, Humfrey,' she said, after some pause, 'do you think I am fit to be trusted with my two poor children?'

There was a huskiness in his tone as he said, 'I am sincerely glad you have the pleasure and comfort of them.'

'I suspect there's a reservation there. But really, Humfrey, I don't think I went out searching for the responsibility in the way that makes it dangerous. One uncle did not want them, and the other could not have them, and it would have been mere barbarity in me not to offer. Besides, their father wished—' and her voice faltered with tears.

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'No, indeed,' said Humfrey, eagerly, 'I did not in the least mean that it is not the kindest, most generous requital,' and there he broke off, embarrassed by the sincere word that he had uttered, but before she had spoken an eager negative—to what she knew not—he went on. 'And of course I don't mean that you are not one to manage them very well, and all that—only I hope there may not be pain in store—I should not like those people to use you for their nursery governess, and then take the children away just as you had set your heart upon them. Don't do that, Honor,' he added, with an almost sad earnestness.

'Do what? Set my heart on them? Do you think I can help loving the creatures?' she said, with mournful playfulness, 'or that my uncertain tenure does not make them the greater darlings?'

'There are ways of loving without setting one's heart,' was the somewhat grave reply.

He seemed to be taking these words as equivalent to transgressing the command that requires all our heart, and she began quickly, 'Oh! but I didn't mean—' then a sudden thrill crossed her whether there might not be some truth in the accusation. Where had erst the image of Owen Sandbrook stood? First or second? Where was now the image of the boy? She turned her words into 'Do you think I am doing so—in a wrong way?'

'Honor dear, I could not think of wrong where you are concerned,' he said. 'I was only afraid of your kindness bringing you pain, if you rest your happiness very much upon those children.'

'I see,' said Honor, smiling, relieved. 'Thank you, Humfrey; but you see I can't weigh out my affection in that fashion. They will get it, the rogues!'

'I'm not afraid, as far as the girl is concerned,' said Humfrey. 'You are strict enough with her.'

'But how am I to be strict when poor little Owen never does anything wrong?'

'Yes, he is a particularly sweet child.'

'And not at all wanting in manliness,' cried Honor, eagerly. 'So full of spirit, and yet so gentle. Oh! he is a child whom it is a privilege to train, and I don't think I have spoilt him yet, do you?'

'No, I don't think you have. He is very obedient in general.'

'Oh! if he could be only brought up as I wish. And I do think his innocence is too perfect a thing not to be guarded. What a perfect clergyman he would make! Just fancy him devoting himself to some parish like poor dear old St. Wulstan's—carrying his bright sweetness into the midst of all that black Babel, and spreading light round him! he always says he will be a clergyman like his papa, and I am sure he must be marked out for it. He likes to look at the sheep on the moors, and talk about the shepherd leading them, and I am sure the meaning goes very deep with him.'

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She was not going quite the way to show Humfrey that her heart was not set on the boy, and she was checked by hearing him sigh. Perhaps it was for the disappointment he foresaw, so she said, 'Whether I bring him up or not, don't you believe there will be a special care over such a child?'

'There is a special care over every Christian child, I suppose,' he said; 'and I hope it may all turn out so as to make you happy. Here is your door; good night, and good-bye.'

'Why, are not you coming in?'

'I think not; I have my things to put up; I must go early to-morrow. Thank you for a very happy week. Good-bye, Honor.' There was a shade of disappointment about his tone that she could not quite account for. Dear old Humfrey! Could he be ageing? Could he be unwell? Did he feel himself lonely? Could she have mortified him, or displeased him? Honor was not a woman of personal vanity, or a solution would sooner have occurred to her. She knew, upon reflection, that it must have been for her sake that Humfrey had continued single, but it was so inconvenient to think of him in the light of an admirer, when she so much needed him as a brother, that it had hardly ever occurred to her to do so; but at last it did strike her whether, having patiently waited so long, this might not have been a visit of experiment, and whether he might not be disappointed to find her wrapped up in new interests—slightly jealous, in fact, of little Owen. How good he had been! Where was the heart that could fail of being touched by so long a course of forbearance and consideration? Besides Honor had been a solitary woman long enough to know what it was to stand alone. And then how well he would stand in a father's place towards the orphans. He would never decree her parting with them, and Captain Charteris himself must trust him. Yet what a shame it would be to give such a devoted heart nothing better than one worn out, with the power of love such as he deserved, exhausted for ever. And yet—and yet—something very odd bounded up within her, and told her between shame and exultation, that faithful old Humfrey would not be discontented even with what she had to give. Another time—a little, a very little encouragement, and the pine wood scene would come back again, and then—her heart fainted a little—there should be no concealment—but if she could only have been six months married all at once!

Time went on, and Honora more than once blushed at finding how strong a hold this possibility had taken of her heart, when once she had begun to think of resting upon one so kind, so good, so strong. Every perplexity, every care, every transaction that made her feel her position as a single woman, brought round the yearning to lay them all down upon him, who would only be grateful to her for them. Every time she wanted some one to consult, hope showed her his face beaming sweetly on her, and home seemed to be again opening to her, that home which might have been hers at any time these twelve years. She quite longed to see how glad the dear, kind fellow would be.

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Perhaps maidenly shame would have belied her feelings in his actual presence, perhaps she would not have shrunk from him, and been more cold than in her unconsciousness, but he came not; and his absence fanned the spark so tardily kindled. What if she had delayed till too late? He was a man whose duty it was to marry! he had waited till he was some years past forty—perhaps this had been his last attempt, and he was carrying his addresses elsewhere.

Well! Honora believed she had tried to act rightly, and that must be her comfort—and extremely ashamed of herself she was, to find herself applying such a word to her own sensations in such a case—and very much disliking the notion of any possible lady at Hiltonbury Holt.

CHAPTER III

There is a reaper, his name is Death,
And with his sickle keen,
He reaps the bearded grain at a breath,
And the flowers that grow between.—LONGFELLOW

A letter from Humfrey! how Honor's heart fluttered. Would it announce an engagement, or would it promise a visit on which her fate would turn, or would it be only a business letter on her money matters?

Angry at her own trepidation, she opened it. It was none of all these. It told her that Mr. Saville, his brother-in-law, was staying at the Holt with his second wife, and that he begged her to take advantage of this opportunity to come to visit the old place, adding, that he had not been well, and he wished much to see her, if she could spare a few days to him from her children.

Little doubt had she as to the acceptance. The mere words 'going to Hiltonbury,' had power by force of association to make her heart bound. She was a little disappointed that he had not included the children; she feared that it looked as if he were really ill; but it might be on account of the Savilles, or maybe he had that to say to her which—oh, nonsense! Were that the case, Humfrey would not reverse the order of things, and make her come to him. At any rate, the children should be her first condition. And then she concentrated her anxieties on his most unusual confession of having been unwell.

Humfrey's substantial person was ready to meet her at the station, and the first glance dispelled her nervous tremors, and calmed the tossings of her mind in the habitual sense of trust and reliance. He thanked her for coming, handed her into the carriage, looked after her goods, and seated himself beside her in so completely his ordinary fashion of taking care of her, that she forgot all her intentions of rendering their meeting momentous. Her first inquiry was for his health, but he put it aside with something about feeling very well now, and he looked so healthy, only perhaps a little more hearty and burly, that she did not think any more of the matter, and only talked in happy desultory scraps, now dwelling on her little Owen's charms, now joyfully recognizing familiar objects, or commenting upon the slight changes that had taken place. One thing, however, she observed; Humfrey did not stop the horse at the foot of the steep hill where

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walking had been a matter of course, when he had been a less solid weight than now. 'Yes, Honor,' he said, smiling, 'one grows less merciful as one grows old and short-breathed.'

'You growing old! you whom I've never left off thinking of as a promising lad, as poor old Mrs. Mervyn used to call you.'

He turned his face towards her as if about to say something very seriously, but apparently changing his intention, he said, 'Poor old Mrs. Mervyn, I wonder how she would like the changes at Beauchamp.'

'Are the Fulmorts doing a great deal?'

'They have quite modernized the house, and laid out the garden—what I should call very prettily, if it were not for my love of the old Dutch one. They see a great deal of company, and go on in grand style.'

'How do you get on with them?'

'Oh! very well; I have dined there two or three times. He is a good-natured fellow enough, and there are some nice children, whom I like to meet with their nurses in the woods. I stood proxy for the last one's sponsor; I could not undertake the office myself.'

'Good-natured!' exclaimed Nora. 'Why, you know how he behaved at St. Wulstan's. No more than £5 a year would he ever give to any charity, though he was making thousands by those gin-shops.'

'Probably he thought he was doing very liberally.'

'Ay, there is no hope for St. Wulstan's till people have left off thinking a guinea their duty, and five very handsome! and that Augusta Mervyn should have gone and married our *bête noire*—our lord of gin-palaces—I do think it must be on purpose for you to melt him. I shall set you at him, Humfrey, next time Mr. Askew writes to me in despair, that something won't go on for lack of means. Only I must be quite sure that you won't give the money yourself, to spare the trouble of dunning.'

'It is not fair to take other people's duties on oneself; besides, as you'll find, Honor, the Holt purse is not bottomless.'

As she would find! This was a very odd way of making sure of her beforehand, but she was not certain that she did not like it. It was comfortable, and would save much preliminary.

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The woods were bursting into spring: delicate, deeply creased leaves were joyously emerging to the light on the birches, not yet devoid of the silvery wool where they had been packed, the hazels were fluttering their goslings, the palms were honey sweet with yellow tufts, the primroses peeped out in the banks of moss.

'Oh! Humfrey, this is the great desire of my life fulfilled, to see the Holt in the flush of spring!'

'I have always said you cared for the place more than any one,' said Humfrey, evidently gratified, but with an expression which she did not understand.

'As if I did not! But how strangely differently from my vision my wish has been fulfilled.'

'How strangely!' he repeated, with even greater seriousness than had been in her voice.

The meadow was bright with spring grass, the cattle grazing serenely as in old times, the garden—ah! not quite so gay—either it was better in autumn than in spring, or it wanted poor Sarah's hand; the dogs, not the same individuals, but with much the same manners, dancing round their master—all like, all home. Nothing wanting, but, alas! the good-natured, narrow-minded old mistress of the house to fret her, and notable Sarah to make her comfortable, and wonder at her eccentric tastes. Ah! and how much more was wanting the gentle mother who did all the civility and listening, and the father, so happy to look at green woods, read poetry, and unbend his weary brow! How much more precious was the sight of the one living remnant of those days!

They had a cheerful evening. Mr. Saville had a great deal of old-fashioned Oxford agreeableness; he was very courtly, but a sensible man, with some native fun and many college stories. After many years of donship, his remote parish was somewhat of a solitude to him, and intercourse with a cultivated mind was as pleasant to him now as the sight of a lady had been in his college days. Honor liked conversation too; and Miss Wells, Lucilla, and Owen had been rather barren in that respect, so there was a great deal of liveliness, in which Humfrey took his full share; while good Mrs. Saville looked like what she was, her husband's admiring housekeeper.

'Do you take early walks still, Humfrey?' asked Honor, as she bade him good night. 'If you do, I shall be quite ready to confront the dew;' and therewith came a revulsion of the consciousness within. Was this courting him? and to her great provocation there arose an uncomfortable blush.

'Thank you,' he said, with something of a mournful tone, 'I'm afraid I'm past that, Honor. Tomorrow, after breakfast—good night.'

Honor was a little alarmed by all this, and designed a conference with the old housekeeper, Mrs. Stubbs, to inquire into her master's health, but this was not attainable that night, and she could only go to bed in the friendly old wainscoted room, whose white and gold carved monsters on the

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mantelpiece were well-nigh as familiar as the dove in Woolstone-lane; but, oh! how it made her long for the mother whom she used to kiss there.

Humfrey was brisk and cheerful as ever at breakfast, devising what his guests would like to do for the day, and talking of some friends whom he had asked to meet Mr. Saville, so that all the anxieties with which Honora had risen were dissipated, and she took her part gaily in the talk. There was something therefore freshly startling to her, when, on rising, Humfrey gravely said, 'Honor, will you come into my study for a little while?'

The study had always been more of a place for guns and fishing-tackle than for books. It was Humfrey's usual living room when alone, and was of course full besides of justice books, agricultural reports, acts of parliament, piles of papers, little bags of samples of wheat, all in the orderly disorder congenial to the male kind. All this was as usual, but the change that struck her was, that the large red leather lounging chair, hitherto a receptacle for the overflowings of the table, was now wheeled beside the fire, and near it stood a little table with a large print Bible on it, which she well remembered as his mother's. Humfrey set a chair for her by the fire, and seated himself in the easy one, leaning back a little. She had not spoken. Something in his grave preparation somewhat awed her, and she sat upright, watching him.

'It was very kind of you to come, Honor,' he began; 'more kind than you know.'

'I am sure it could be no other than a treat—'

He continued, before she could go farther, 'I wished particularly to speak to you. I thought it might perhaps spare you a shock.'

She looked at him with a terrified eye.

'Don't be frightened, my dear,' he said, leaning forward, 'there is no occasion. Such things must come sooner or later, and it is only that I wished to tell you that I have been having advice for a good many uncomfortable feelings that have troubled me lately.'

'Well?' she asked, breathlessly.

'And Dixon tells me that it is aneurism.'

Quick and fast came Honora's breath; her hands were clasped together; her eyes cast about with such a piteous, despairing expression, that he started to his feet in a moment, exclaiming—'Honor! Honor dear! don't! there's no need. I did not think you would feel it in this way!'

'Feel! what should I feel if not for you? Oh! Humfrey! don't say it! you are all that is left me—you cannot be spared!' and as he came towards her, she grasped his hand and clung to him, needing the support which he gave in fear of her fainting.

'Dear Honor, do not take it thus. I am very well now—I dare say I shall be so to the last, and there is nothing terrible to the imagination. I am very thankful for both the preparation and the absence of suffering. Will not you be the same?'

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'Yes, you,' said Honora, sitting up again, and looking up into his sincere, serene face; 'I cannot doubt that even this is well for you, but it is all selfishness—just as I was beginning to feel what you are to me.'

Humfrey's face lighted up suddenly. 'Then, Honor,' he said, evidently putting strong restraint upon his voice, 'you could have listened to me now!'

She bowed her head—the tears were dropping very fast.

'Thank God!' he said, as again he leant back in his chair; and when she raised her eyes again, he sat with his hands clasped, and a look of heavenly felicity on his face, raised upwards.

'Oh! Humfrey! how thoughtlessly I have trifled away all that might have been the happiness of your life!'

'You never trifled with me,' he said; 'you have always dealt honestly and straightforwardly, and it is best as it is. Had we been together all this time, the parting might have been much harder. I am glad there are so few near ties to break.'

'Don't say so! you, loved by every one, the tower of strength to all that is good!'

'Hush, hush! nonsense, Honor!' said he, kindly. 'I think I have tried,' he went on, gravely, 'not to fall behind the duties of my station; but that would be a bad dependence, were there not something else to look to. As to missing me, the world did very well without me before I was born; it will do as well when I am gone; and as to you, my poor Honor, we have been very little together of late.'

'I had you to lean on.'

'Lean on something stronger,' he said; and as she could not govern her bitter weeping, he went on—'Ah! I am the selfish one now, to be glad of what must make it the worse for you; but if one thing were wanting to make me happy, it was to know that at last you cared for me.'

'I should be a wretch not to do so. So many years of patience and forbearance!—Nobody could be like you.'

'I don't see that,' said Humfrey, simply. 'While you continued the same, I could not well turn my mind to any one else, and I always knew I was much too loutish for you.'

'Now, Humfrey!—'

'Yes, there is no use in dwelling on this,' he said, quietly. 'The reason I asked you to be kind enough to come here, is that I do not think it well to be far from home under the circumstances. There, don't look frightened—they say it may very possibly not come for several months or a year. I hope to have time to put things a little in order for you, and that is one reason I wished to see you; I thought I could make the beginning easier to you.'

But Honora was far too much shaken for such a turn to the conversation; she would not mortify him, but she could neither listen nor understand. He, who was so full of stalwart force, a doomed man, yet calm and happy under his sentence; he, only discovered to be so fondly loved in time to give poignancy to the parting, and yet rejoicing himself in the poor, tardy affection that had answered his manly constancy too late! His very calmness and stillness cut her to the heart, and after some ineffectual attempts to recover herself, she was forced to take refuge in her own room. Weeping, praying, walking restlessly about, she remained there till luncheon time, when Humfrey himself came up to knock at her door.

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'Honor dear!' he said, 'come down—try to throw it off—Saville does not wish his wife to be made aware of it while she is here, lest she should be nervous. You must not betray me—and indeed there is no reason for being overcome. Nothing vexes me but seeing you so. Let us enjoy your visit, pray.'

To be commanded to bear up by a strong, manly character so much loved and trusted was perhaps the chief support she could receive; she felt that she must act composure, and coming down in obedience to her cousin, she found the power of doing so. Nay, as she saw him so completely the bright, hospitable host, talking to Mrs. Saville about her poultry, and carrying on quiet jokes with Mr. Saville, she found herself drawn away from the morning's conversation, or remembering it like a dream that had passed away.

Then all went out together, and he was apparently as much interested in his young wheat as ever, and even more anxious to make her look at and appreciate crops and cattle, speaking about them in his hearty, simple way, as if his pleasure in them was not flagging, perhaps because it had never been excessive. He had always sat loose to them, and thus they could please and occupy him even when the touch of the iron hand had made itself felt.

And again she saw him engrossed in arranging some petty matter of business for one of the poor people; and when they had wandered down to the gate, pelting the turn-out of the boys' school with a pocket full of apples that he said he had taken up while in conference with the housekeeper, laughing and speaking merrily as the varlets touched their caps to him, and always turning to her for sympathy in his pleasures of success or of good nature, as though her visit were thorough enjoyment to him. And so it almost was to her. The influence of the dear old scenes was something, and his cheeriness was a great deal more; the peaceful present was not harassed or disturbed, and the foreboding, on which she might not dwell, made it the more precious. That slow wandering about the farm and village, and the desultory remarks, the old pleasant reminiscences, the inquiries and replies about the villagers and neighbours had a quiet charm about them, as free and happy as when, youth and child, they had frisked through the same paths; nay, the old scenes so brought back the old habits that she found herself discoursing to him in her former eager fashion upon the last historical character who had bitten her fancy.

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'My old way,' she said, catching herself up; 'dinning all this into your ears as usual, when you don't care.'

'Don't I?' said Humfrey, with his sincere face turned on her in all its sweetness. 'Perhaps I never showed you how much, Honor; and I beg your pardon, but I would not have been without it!'

The Savilles came up, while Honor's heart was brimful at this compliment, and then it was all commonplace again, except for that sunset light, that rich radiance of the declining day, that seemed unconsciously to pervade all Humfrey's cheerfulness, and to give his mirth and playfulness a solid happiness.

Some mutual friends of long standing came to dinner, and the evening was not unlike the last, quite as free from gloom, and Mr. Charlecote as bright as ever, evidently taking his full share in county business, and giving his mind to it. Only Honor noted that he quietly avoided an invitation to a very gay party which was proposed; and his great ally, Sir John Raymond, seemed rather vexed with him for not taking part in some new and expensive experiment in farming, and asked incredulously whether it were true that he wished to let a farm that he had kept for several years in his own hands. Humfrey agreed that it was so, and said something farther of wishing to come to terms quickly. She guessed that this was for her sake, when she thought all this over in her bedroom.

Such was the effect of his calmness that it had not been a day of agitation. There was more peace than tumult in her mind as she lay down to rest, sad, but not analyzing her sadness, and lulled by the present into putting aside the future. So she slept quietly, and awoke with a weight at her heart, but softened and sustained by reverent awe and obedience towards her cousin.

When they met, he scanned her looks with a bright, tender glance, and smiled commendation

when he detected no air of sleeplessness. He talked and moved as though his secret were one of untold bliss, and this was not far from the truth; for when, after breakfast, he asked her for another interview in the study, they were no sooner alone than he rubbed his hands together with satisfaction, saying—'So, Honor, you could have had me after all!' looking at her with a broad, undisguised, exulting smile.

'Oh! Humfrey!'

'Don't say it if you don't like it; but you can't guess the pleasure it gives me. I could hardly tell at first what was making me so happy when I awoke this morning.'

'I can't see how it should,' said Honor, her eyes swimming with tears, 'never to have met with any gratitude for—I have used you too ill—never valued, scarcely even believed in what you lavished on poor silly me—and now, when all is too late, you are glad—'

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'Glad! of course I am,' returned Humfrey; 'I never wished to obtrude my feelings on you after I knew how it stood with you. It would have been a shame. Your choice went far above me. For the rest, if to find you disposed towards me at the last makes me so happy,' and he looked at her again with beaming affection, 'how could I have borne to leave you if all had been as I wished? No, no, it is best as it is. You lose nothing in position, and you are free to begin the world again, not knocked down or crushed.'

'Don't talk so, Humfrey! It is breaking my heart to think that I might have been making you happy all this time.'

'Heaven did not will it so,' said Humfrey, reverently, 'and it might not have proved what we fancy. You might not have found such a clodhopper all you wanted, and my stupidity might have vexed you, though now you fancy otherwise. And I have had a very happy life—indeed I have, Honor; I never knew the time when I could not say with all my heart, "The lot is fallen unto me in a fair ground, yea, I have a goodly heritage." Everybody and everything, you and all the rest, have been very kind and friendly, and I have never wanted for happiness. It has been all right. You could fulfil your duty as a daughter undividedly, and now I trust those children will be your object and comfort—only, Honor, not your idols. Perhaps it was jealousy, but I have sometimes fancied that your tendency with their father—'

'Oh! how often I must have given you pain.'

'I did not mean *that*, but, as I say, perhaps I was no fair judge. One thing is well, the relations will be much less likely to take them from you when you are living here.'

She held up her hands in deprecation.

'Honor dear,' he said pleadingly, yet with authority, 'pray let me talk to you. There are things which I wish very much to say; indeed, without which I could hardly have asked for this indulgence. It is for your own sake, and that of the place and people.'

'Poor place, poor people.'

He sighed, but then turned his smiling countenance towards her again. 'No one else can care for it or them as you do, Honor. Our "goodly heritage"—it was so when I had it from my father, and I don't think it has got worse under my charge, and I want you to do your duty by it, Honor, and hand it on the same, whoever may come after.'

'For your sake, Humfrey—even if I did not love it. But—'

'Yes, it is a duty,' proceeded Humfrey, gravely. 'It may seem but a bit of earth after all, but the owner of a property has a duty to let it do its share in producing food, or maybe in not lessening the number of pleasant things here below. I mean it is as much my office to keep my trees and woods fair to look at, as it is not to let my land lie waste.'

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She had recovered a good deal while he was moralizing, and became interested. 'I did not suspect you of the poetical view, Humfrey,' she said.

'It is plain sense, I think,' he said, 'that to grub up a fine tree, or a pretty bit of copse without fair reason, only out of eagerness for gain, is a bit of selfishness. But mind, Honor, you must not go and be romantic. You *must* have the timber marked when the trees are injuring each other.'

'Ah! I've often done it with you.'

'I wish you would come out with me to-day. I'm going to the out-wood, I could show you.'

She agreed readily, almost forgetting the wherefore.

'And above all, Honor, you must not be romantic about wages! It is not right by other proprietors, nor by the people themselves. No one is ever the better for a fancy price for his labour.'

She could almost have smiled; he was at once so well pleased that she and his 'goodly heritage' should belong to each other, so confident in her love and good intentions towards it, and so doubtful of her discretion and management. She promised with all her heart to do her utmost to fulfil his wishes.

'After all,' he said, thoughtfully, 'the best thing for the place—ay, and for you and every one,

would be for you to marry; but there's little chance of that, I suppose, and it is of no use to distress you by mentioning it. I've been trying to put out of my hands things that I don't think you will be able to manage, but I should like you to keep up the home farm, and you may pretty well trust to Brooks. I dare say he will take his own way, but if you keep a reasonable check on him, he will do very well by you. He is as honest as the day, and very intelligent. I don't know that any one could do better for you.'

'Oh, yes; I will mind all he tells me.'

'Don't show that you mind him. That is the way to spoil him. Poor fellow, he has been a good servant to me, and so have they all. It is a thing to be very thankful for to have had such a set of good servants.'

Honora thought, but did not say, that they could not help being good with such a master.

He went on to tell her that he had made Mr. Saville his executor. Mr. Saville had been for many years before leaving Oxford bursar of his college, and was a thorough man of business whom Humfrey had fixed upon as the person best qualified to be an adviser and assistant to Honora, and he only wished to know whether she wished for any other selection, but this was nearly overpowering her again, for since her father's death she had leant on no one but Humfrey himself.

One thing more he had to say. 'You know, Honor, this place will be entirely your own. You and I seem to be the last of the Charlecotes, and even if we were not, there is no entail. You may found orphan asylums with it, or leave it to poor Sandbrook's children, just as you please.'

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'Oh, I could not do that,' cried Honor, with a sudden revulsion. Love them as she might, Owen Sandbrook's children must not step into Humfrey Charlecote's place. 'And, besides,' she added, 'I want my little Owen to be a clergyman; I think he can be what his father missed.'

'Well, you can do exactly as you think fit. Only what I wanted to tell you is, that there may be another branch, elder than our own. Not that this need make the least difference, for the Holt is legally ours. It seems that our great grandfather had an elder son—a wild sort of fellow—the old people used to tell stories of him. He went on, in short, till he was disinherited, and went off to America. What became of him afterwards I never could make out; but I have sometimes questioned how I should receive any of his heirs if they should turn up some day. Mind you, you need not have the slightest scruple in holding your own. It was made over to my grandfather by will, as I have made it sure for you; but I do think that when you come to think how to dispose of it, the possibility of the existence of these Charlecotes might be taken into consideration.'

'Yankee Charlecotes!' she said.

'Never mind; most likely nothing of the kind will ever come in your way, and they have not the slightest claim on you. I only threw it out, because I thought it right just to speak of it.'

After this commencement, Humfrey, on this and the ensuing days, made it his business to make his cousin acquainted with the details of the management of the estate. He took such pleasure in doing so, and was so anxious she should comprehend, that she was forced to give her whole attention; and, putting all else aside, was tranquilly happy in thus gratifying him. Those orderly ranges of conscientious accounts were no small testimony to the steady, earnest manner in which Humfrey had set himself to his duty from his early youth, and to a degree they were his honest pride too—he liked to show how good years had made up for bad years, and there was a tenderness in the way he patted their red leather backs to make them even on their shelves, as if they had been good friends to him. No, they must not run into confusion.

The farms and the cottages—the friendly terms of his intercourse, and his large-handed but well-judging almsgiving—all revealed to her more of his solid worth; and the simplicity that regarded all as the merest duty touched her more than all. Many a time did she think of the royal Norwegian brothers, one of whom went to tie a knot in the willows on the banks of the Jordan, while the other remained at home to be the blessing of his people, and from her broken idol wanderer she turned to worship her steadfast worker at home, as far as his humility and homeliness made it possible, and valued each hour with him as if each moment were of diamond price. And he was so calmly happy, that there was no grieving in his presence. It had been a serene life of simple fulfilment of duty, going ever higher, and branching wider, as a good man's standard gradually rises the longer he lives; the one great disappointment had been borne without sourness or repining, and the affections, deprived of the home channel, had spread in a beneficent flood, and blessed all around. So, though, like every sinful son of man, sensible of many an error, many an infirmity, still the open loving spirit was childlike enough for that blessed sense; for that feeling which St. John expresses as 'if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God;' confidence in the infinite Merits that atone for the errors of weakness, and occasional wanderings of will; confidence that made the hope a sure and steadfast one, and these sentenced weeks a land of Beulah, where Honora's tardy response to his constant love could be greeted and valued as the precious fulfilment of long-cherished wishes, not dashed aside as giving bitterness to his departure.

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The parting was broken by a promise that Honora should again meet the Savilles at the Holt in the autumn. She assured herself that there was no danger before that time, and Humfrey spoke cheerfully of looking forward to it, and seemed to have so much to do, and to be so well equal to doing it, that he would not let them be concerned at leaving him alone.

To worship Humfrey was an easier thing at a distance than when beside him. Honora came back to Sandbeach thoroughly restless and wretched, reproaching herself with having wasted such constant, priceless affection, haunted by the constant dread of each morning's post, and longing fervently to be on the spot. She had self-command enough not to visit her dejection on the children, but they missed both her spirits and her vigilance, and were more left to their nurse; and her chief solace was in long solitary walks, or in evening talks with Miss Wells. Kind Miss Wells perhaps guessed how matters stood between the two last Charlecotes, but she hinted not her suspicions, and was the unwearied recipient of all Honora's histories, of his symptoms, of his cheerfulness, and his solicitude for her. Those talks did her good, they set the real Humfrey before her, and braced her to strive against weakness and despondence.

And then the thought grew on her, why, since they were so thoroughly each other's, why should they not marry, and be together to the last? Why should he be left to his solitude for this final year? why should their meetings be so prudentially chaperoned? Suppose the disease should be lingering, how hard it was that she should be absent, and he left to servants! She could well imagine why he had not proposed it; he was too unselfish to think of exposing her to the shock, or making her a widow, but how came she never to have thought of it? She stood beyond all ordinary rules—she had nothing worldly to gain nor to lose by being his wife for these few remaining months—it surely was her part, after the way she had treated him, to meet him more than half way—she alone could make the proposal—she would—she must. And oh! if the doctors should be mistaken! So spoke the midnight dream—oh! how many times. But what said cool morning? Propriety had risen up, grave decorum objecting to what would shock Humfrey, ay, and was making Honor's cheeks tingle. Yes, and there came the question whether he would not be more distressed than gratified—he who wished to detach himself from all earthly ties—whether he might not be pained and displeased at her thus clinging to him—nay, were he even gratified, might not emotion and agitation be fatal?

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Many, many times was all this tossed over in Honor's mind. Often the desperate resolution was definitely taken, and she had seen herself quietly meeting him at dear old Hiltonbury Church, with his grave sweet eyes resting satisfied upon her as his darling. As often had the fear of offending him, and the instinct of woman's dignity turned her away when her heart was beating high. That autumn visit—then she would decide. One look as if he wished to retain her, the least air of feebleness or depression, and she would be determined, even if she had to waive all feminine reserves, and set the matter in hand herself. She thought Mr. Saville would highly approve and assist; and having settled into this period for her project, she set herself in some degree at rest, and moved and spoke with so much more of her natural ease, that Miss Wells was consoled about her, and knew not how entirely heart and soul were at Hiltonbury, with such devotion as had never even gone to the backwoods.

To meet the Savilles at Hiltonbury in the autumn! Yes—Honor met Mr. Saville, but not as she had intended. By that time the stroke had fallen, just as she had become habituated to the expectation, just as her promised visit had assumed a degree of proximity, and her heart was beating at the prospect of the results.

Humfrey had been scarcely ailing all the summer, he had gone about his occupations with his usual cheerfulness, and had taken part in all the village festivals as genially as ever. Only close observers could have noticed a slackness towards new undertakings, a gradual putting off of old ones, a training of those, dependent on his counsel, to go alone, a preference for being alone in the evening, a greater habit of stillness and contemplation.

September had come, and he had merrily sent off two happy boy-sportsmen with the keeper, seeing them over the first field himself, and leaning against the gate, as he sent them away in convulsions of laughing at his droll auguries. The second was a Sunday, a lovely day of clear deep blue sky, and rich sunshine laughing upon the full wealth of harvest fields—part fallen before the hand of the reaper, part waving in their ripe glowing beauty, to which he loved to liken Honora's hair—part in noble redundant shocks of corn in full season. Brooks used afterwards to tell how he overtook the squire slowly strolling to church on that beauteous autumnal morning, and how he paused to remark on the glory of the harvest, and to add, 'Keep the big barn clear, Brooks—let us have all the women and children in for the supper this time—and I say—send the spotted heifer down to-morrow to old Boycotts, instead of his cow that died. With such a crop as this, one can stand something. And,' said Brooks, 'Thank God for it! was as plain written on his face as ever I saw!'

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It was the first Sunday in the month, and there was full service. Hiltonbury Church had one of those old-fashioned altar-rails which form three sides of a square, and where it was the custom that at the words 'Draw near with faith,' the earliest communicants should advance to the rail and remain till their place was wanted by others, and that the last should not return to their seats till the service was concluded. Mr. Charlecote had for many years been always the first parishioner to walk slowly up the matted aisle, and kneel beside the wall, under the cumbrous old tables of Commandments. There, on this day, he knelt as usual, and harvest labours tending to thin the number of communicants, the same who came up first remained to the end, joined their voices in the Eucharistic Lord's Prayer and Angelic Hymn, and bowed their heads at the blessing of the peace that passeth all understanding.

It was not till the rest were moving away, that the vicar and his clerk remarked that the squire had not risen. Another look, and it was plain that he had sunk somewhat forward on his folded arms, and was only supported by the rail and the wall. The vicar hastily summoned the village

doctor, who had not yet left the church. They lifted him, and laid him along on the cushioned step where he had been kneeling, but motion and breath were gone, the strong arms were helpless, and the colour had left the open face. Taken at once from the heavenly Feast on earth to the glory above, could this be called sudden death?

There he lay on the altar step, with hands crossed on his breast, and perfectly blessed repose on his manly countenance, sweetened and ennobled in its stillness, and in every lineament bearing the impress of that Holy Spirit of love who had made it a meet temple.

What an unpremeditated lying in state was that! as by ones and twos, beneath the clergyman's eye, the villagers stole in with slowly, heavily falling tread to gaze in silent awe on their best friend, some sobbing and weeping beyond control, others with grave, almost stolid tranquillity, or the murmured 'He *was* a gentleman,' which, in a poor man's mouth, means 'he was a just man and patient, the friend of the weak and poor.' His farmers and his own labourers put their shoulders to bear him once more to his own house, through his half-gathered crops—

The hand of the reaper
Takes the ears that are hoary,
But the voice of the weeper
Wails manhood in glory.

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No, bewail him not. It was glory, indeed, but the glory of early autumn, the garnering of the shock of corn in full season. It was well done of the vicar that a few long, full-grained ears of wheat were all that was laid upon his breast in his coffin.

There Honora saw them. The vicar, Mr. Henderson, had written to her at once, as Humfrey had long ago charged him to do, enclosing a letter that he had left with him for the purpose, a tender, soothing farewell, and an avowal such as he could never have spoken of the blessing that his attachment to her had been, in drawing his mind from the narrowness to which he might have been liable, and in elevating the tone of his views and opinions.

She knew what he meant—it was what he had caught from her youthful enthusiasm, second-hand from Owen Sandbrook. Oh! what vivid, vigorous truth not to have been weakened in the transit through two such natures, but to have done its work in the strong, practical mind able and candid enough to adopt it even thus filtered!

There were a few words of affectionate commendation of his people and his land into her keeping, and a parting blessing, and, lastly, written as a postscript—with a blot as if it had been written with hesitation—'Little children, keep yourselves from idols!'

It was not bitter weeping. It was rather the sense of utter vacancy and hopelessness, with but one fixed purpose—that she would see his face again, and be the nearest to him when he was laid in the grave. She hastily wrote to the housekeeper and to the clergyman that she was coming, and Miss Wells's kind opposition only gave her just wilfulness and determination enough to keep her spirit from sinking.

So she travelled alone, and came to Hiltonbury in the sunset, as the 'last long wains' were slowly bearing their loads of wheat into the farmyard, the waggoners walking dejectedly beside them. Mr. Saville had come before her, and was at the door to receive her. She could not very well bear the presence of any one, nor the talk of cold-blooded arrangements. It seemed to keep away the dreamy living with Humfrey, and was far more dreary than the feeling of desolateness, and when they treated her as mistress of the house that was too intolerable. And yet it was worth something, too, to be the one to authorize that harvest supper in the big barn, in the confidence that it would be anything but revelry. Every one felt that the day was indeed a Harvest Home.

The funeral, according to his expressed wishes, was like those of the farmers of the parish; the coffin borne by his own labourers in their white round frocks; and the labourers were the expected guests for whom provision was made; but far and wide from all the country round, though harvest was at the height, came farmers and squires, poor men and rich, from the peer and county member down to the poor travelling hawker—all had met the sunny sympathy of that smile, all had been aided and befriended, all felt as if a prop, a castle of strength were gone.

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Charlecotes innumerable rested in the chancel, and the last heir of the line was laid beneath the same flag where he had been placed on that last Sunday, the spot where Honor might kneel for many more, meeting him in spirit at the feast, and looking to the time when the cry should be, 'Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is come.'

But ere she could look in thorough hope for that time, another page of Honor's life must be turned, and an alloy, as yet unknown to herself, must be purged from her heart. The last gleam of her youthful sunshine had faded with Humfrey; but youth is but a fraction of human existence, and there were further phases to be gone through and lessons to be learnt; although she was feeling as if all were over with her in this world, and neither hope, love, nor protection were left her, nor any interest save cherishing Humfrey Charlecote's memory, as she sat designing the brass tablet which was to record his name and age in old English illuminated letters, surrounded by a border of ears of corn and grapes.

CHAPTER IV

The glittering grass, with dewstars bright,
Is all astir with twinkling light;
What pity that such fair array
In one brief hour should melt away.—REV. T. WHYTEHEAD

'This is a stroke of good luck!' said Mr. Charteris. 'We must not, on any account, remove the Sandbrook children from Miss Charlecote; she has no relations, and will certainly make the boy her heir.'

'She will marry!' said his wife. 'Some fashionable preacher will swallow her red hair. She is just at the age for it!'

'Less likely when she has the children to occupy her.'

'Well, you'll have them thrown on your hands yet!'

'The chance is worth trying for, though! I would not interfere with her on any account.'

'Oh, no, nor I! but I pity the children.'

* * * * *

'There, Master Owen, be a good boy, and don't worry. Don't you see, I'm putting up your things to go home.'

'Home!' the light glittered in Lucilla's eyes. 'Is it Wrapworth, nurse?'

'Dear me, miss, not Wrapworth. That's given away, you know; but it's to Hiltonbury you are going—such a grand place, which if Master Owen is only a dear good boy, will all belong to him one of these days.'

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'Will there be a pony to ride on?' asked Owen.

'Oh, yes—if you'll only let those stockings alone—there'll be ponies, and carriages, and horses, and everything a gentleman can have, and all for my own dear little Master Owen!'

'I don't want to go to Hiltonbury,' said Lucilla; 'I want to go home to the river and the boat, and see Mr. Prendergast and the black cow.'

'I'll give you a black cow, Cilly,' said Owen, strutting about. 'Is Hiltonbury bigger than the castle?'

'Oh, ever so big, Master Owen; such acres of wood, Mr. Jones says, and all your dear cousin's, and sure to be your own in time. What a great gentleman you will be, to be sure, dining thirty gentlefolks twice a week, as they say poor Mr. Charlecote did, and driving four fine horses to your carriage like a gentleman. And then you won't forget poor old nursey-pursey.'

'Oh, no, nurse; I'll give you a ride in my carriage!'

Honora in her listless state had let Mr. Saville think for her, and passively obeyed him when he sent her back to Sandbeach to wind up her affairs there, while he finished off the valuations and other painful business at the Holt, in which she could be of little use, since all she desired was to keep everything as it was. She was anxious to return as soon as possible, so as to take up the reins before there had been time for the relaxation to be felt, the only chance she felt of her being able to fulfil his charge. The removal, the bustle, the talking things over with Miss Wells, and the sight of the children did much to restore her, and her old friend rejoiced to see that necessary occupation was tending to make her time pass more cheerfully than she perhaps knew.

As to the dear old City dwelling, it might have fetched an immense price, but only to become a warehouse, a measure that would have seemed to Honor little short of sacrilege. To let it, in such a locality, was impossible, so it must remain unavailable capital, and Honora decided on leaving her old housekeeper therein, with a respectable married niece, who would inhabit the lower regions, and keep the other rooms in order, for an occasional stay in London. She would have been sorry to cut herself off from a month of London in the spring, and the house might farther be useful to friends who did not object to the situation; or could be lent now and then to a curate; and she could well afford to keep it up, so she thought herself justified in following her inclination, and went up for three mournful days of settling matters there, and packing books and ornaments till the rooms looked so dismantled that she could not think how to face them again.

It was the beginning of October when she met Miss Wells, children, and luggage at the station, and fairly was on her way to her home. She tried to call it so, as a duty to Humfrey, but it gave her a pang every time, and in effect she felt far less at home than when he and Sarah had stood in the doorway to greet the arrivals. She had purposely fixed an hour when it would be dark, so that she might receive no painful welcome; she wished no one to greet her, she had rather they were mourning for their master. She had more than once shocked Miss Wells by declaring heiresses to be a mistake; and yet, as she always owned, she could not have borne for any one else to have had the Holt.

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Fortunately for her, the children were sleepy, and were rather in a mazy state when lifted out and set on their legs in the wainscoted hall, and she sent them at once with nurse to the cheerful room that Humfrey's little visitors had saved from becoming disused. Miss Wells's fond vigilance was a little oppressive, but she gently freed herself from it, and opened the study door. She had

begged that as little change as possible might be made; and there stood, as she had last seen them, the large leathern chair, the little table, the big Bible, and in it the little faded marker she had herself constructed for his twenty-first birthday, when her powers of making presents had not equalled her will. Yet what costly gift could have fulfilled its mission like that one? She opened the heavy book at the place. It was at the first lesson for the last day of his life, the end of the prophet Hosea, and the first words her eyes fell upon were the glorious prophecy—'I will redeem them from death, I will ransom them from the power of the grave.' Her heart beat high, and she stood half musing, half reading: 'They that dwell under His shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine.' How gentle and refreshing the cadence! A longing rose up in her to apply those latter words more closely, by placing them on his tablet; she did not think they would shock his humility, a consideration which had withheld her from choosing other passages of which she always thought in connection with him. Another verse, and she read: 'Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols?'

It brought back the postscript. Kind Humfrey must have seen strong cause before he gave any reproof, least of all to her, and she could take his word that the fault had been there. She felt certain of it when she thought of her early devotion to Owen Sandbrook, and the utter blank caused by his defection. Nay, she believed she had begun to idolize Humfrey himself, but now, at her age, chastened, desponding, with nothing before her save the lonely life of an heiress old maid, counting no tie of blood with any being, what had she to engross her affections from the true Object? Alas! Honora's heart was not feeling that Object sufficient! Conscientious, earnest, truly loving goodness, and all connected with it; striving as a faithful, dutiful woman to walk rightly, still the personal love and trust were not yet come. Spent as they had been upon props of earth, when these were taken away the tendrils hung down drearily, unemployed, not fastening on the true support.

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Not that she did not kneel beside that little table, as in a shrine, and entreat earnestly for strength and judgment to do her duty faithfully in her new station, so that Humfrey's charge might be fulfilled, and his people might not suffer; and this done, and her homage paid to his empty throne, she was better able to satisfy her motherly friend by her deportment for the remainder of the evening, and to reply to the welcome of the weeping Mrs. Stubbs. By one of Humfrey's wise acts of foresight, his faithful servant, Reeves, had been provided for as the master of the Union, whither it was certain he would carry the same milk of human kindness as had been so plentiful at Hiltonbury, and the Holt was thus left free for Honora's Mr. Jones, without fear of clashing, though he was divided between pride in his young lady's ownership of a 'landed estate,' and his own dislike to a country residence.

Honora did not sleep soundly. The place was too new, and yet too familiar, and the rattling of the windows, the roaring of the wind in the chimney, and the creaking of the vane, without absolutely wakening her, kept her hearing alive continually, weaving the noises into some harassing dream that Humfrey's voice was calling to her, and hindrances always keeping her from him; and then of Lucilla and Owen in some imminent peril, whence she shrieked to him to save them, and then remembered he would stretch out his hand no more.

Sounder sleep came at last, towards morning, and far later than her usual hour she was wakened by a drumming upon her door, and the boy and girl dashed in, radiant with excitement at the novelty of the place. 'Sweet Honey! Sweet Honey dear, do get up and see. There's a rocking-horse at the end of the passage.' 'And there's a real pony out in the field.' 'There are cows.' 'There's a goat and a little kid, and I want to play with it, and I may, for it is all mine and yours.'

'All yours! Owen, boy,' repeated Honora, sitting up in surprise.

'Nurse said it was all to be Owen's,' said Lucilla.

'And she said I should be as grand a gentleman as poor Mr. Charlecote or Uncle Charteris,' proceeded Owen, 'and that I should go out hunting in a red coat, on a beautiful horse; but I want to have the kid now, please, Sweet Honey.'

'Nurse does not know anything about it,' said Honora, much annoyed that such an idea should have been suggested in such a manner. 'I thought my little Owen wished for better things—I thought he was to be like his papa, and try to be a good shepherd, praising God and helping people to do right.'

'But can't I wear a red coat too?' said Owen, wistfully.

'No, my dear; clergymen don't go out hunting; or how could they teach the poor little children?'

'Then I won't be a clergyman.'

This was an inconvenient and most undesirable turn; but Honora's first object must be to put the right of heirship out of the little head, and she at once began—'Nurse must have made a mistake, my dear; this place is your home, and will be always so, I hope, while it is mine, but it must not be your own, and you must not think it will. My little boy must work for himself and other people, and that's better than having houses and lands given to him.'

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Those words touched the pride in Lucilla's composition, and she exclaimed—'I'll work too;' but the self-consequence of proprietorship had affected her brother more strongly, and he repeated, meditatively, 'Jones said, not mine while she was alive. Jones was cross.'

There might not be much in the words, child as he was, but there was something in his manner of

eyeing her which gave her acute unbearable pain—a look as if she stood in his way and crossed his importance. It was but a baby fit of temper, but she was in no frame to regard it calmly, and with an alteration of countenance that went to his heart, she exclaimed—‘Can that be my little Owen, talking as if he wanted his Cousin Honor dead and out of the way? We had better never have come here if you are to leave off loving me.’

Quick to be infected by emotion, the child’s arms were at once round her neck, and he was sobbing out that he loved his Sweet Honey better than anything; nurse was naughty; Jones was naughty; he wouldn’t hunt, he wouldn’t wear a red coat, he would teach little children just like lambs, he would be like dear papa; anything the poor little fellow could think of he poured out with kisses and entreaties to know if he were naughty still; while his sister, after her usual fashion on such occasions, began to race up and down the room with paroxysms, sometimes of stamping, sometimes of something like laughter.

Some minutes passed before Honora could compose herself, or soothe the boy, by her assurances that he was not to blame, only those who put things in his head that he could not understand; and it was not till after much tender fondling that she had calmed him enough for his morning devotions. No sooner were these over than he looked up and said, while the tears still glazed his cheeks, ‘Sweet Honey, I’ll tell nurse and Mr. Jones that I’m on pilgrimage to the Eastern land, and I’ll not turn into by-ways after red coats and little kids to vex you.’

Whether Owen quite separated fact from allegory might have been doubtful to a more prosaic mind than Honora’s, but he had brought this dreamy strain with him from his father, and she thought it one of his great charms. She had been obliged to leave him to himself much more than usual of late, and she fervently resolved to devote herself with double energy to watching over him, and eradicating any weeds that might have been sown during her temporary inattention. He clung so fast to her hand, and was so much delighted to have her with him again, so often repeating that she must not go away again, that the genuineness of his affection could not be doubted, and probably he would only retain an impression of having been led to say something very shocking, and the alarm to his sensitive conscience would hinder him from ever even trying to remember what it was.

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She spoke, however, to nurse, telling her that the subject must never be mentioned to the children, since it was by no means desirable for them, and besides, she had no intention of the kind. She wished it to be distinctly understood that Master Owen was not to be looked upon as her heir.

‘Very true, ma’am, it is too soon to be talking of such things yet, and I must say, I was as sorry as possible to find that the child had had it named to him. People will talk, you see, Miss Charlecote, though I am sure so young a lady as you are . . .’

‘That has nothing to do with it,’ said Honora; ‘I consider nothing so bad for a child as to be brought up to expectations to which he has no right, when he is sure to have to provide for himself. I beg that if you hear the subject entered on again, in the children’s presence, you will put a stop to it.’

‘Certainly, ma’am; their poor dear papa never would have wished them to be occupied with earthly things of that sort. As I often said, there never was such an unworldly gentleman; he never would have known if there were a sixpence in the house, nor a joint in the larder, if there had not been cook and me to care for him. I often said to cook—“Well for him that he has honest people about him.”’

Honora likewise spoke to Jones, her private retainer. He smiled scorn of the accusation, and answered her as the child he had known in frocks. ‘Yes, ma’am, I did tell the young gentleman to hold his tongue, for it never would be his in your lifetime, nor after, in my judgment.’

‘Why, certainly, it does seem early days to speak of such a matter,’ said Honora, sadly.

‘It is unaccountable what people will not put in children’s heads,’ said Jones, sagely; ‘not but what he is a nice quiet young gentleman, and gives very little trouble, but they might let *that* alone. Miss Honora, when will it be convenient to you to take my account of the plate?’

She felt pretty well convinced that Jones had only resented the whole on her account, and that it was not he who had put the notion into the boy’s head. As to nurse, she was far from equally clear. Doubts of nurse’s sincerity had long been growing upon her, and she was in the uncomfortable position of being able to bear neither to think of the children’s intercourse with any one tainted with falsehood, nor to dismiss a person implicitly trusted by their father. She could only decide that the first detected act of untruth should be the turning-point.

Meantime, painful as was many an association, Honor did not find her position so dreary or so oppressive as she had anticipated. She had a great deal to do, and the tracks had been duly made out for her by her cousin. Mr. Saville, or Humfrey’s old friend, Sir John Raymond, were always ready to help her in great matters, and Brooks was an excellent dictatorial deputy in small ones. Her real love for country life, for live animals, and, above all, the power of doing good, all found scope. Humfrey’s charge gave her a sense of a fulfilled duty; and mournful and broken-spirited as she believed herself, if Humfrey could have looked at her as she scrupulously made entries in his book, rode out with the children to try to look knowing at the crops, or sat by the fire in the evening with his dogs at her feet, telling stories to the children, he would not have feared too much for his Honor. Living or dead, the love of Humfrey could hardly help being a

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spring of peace and happiness; and the consciousness of it had been too brief, and the tie never close enough, to lead to a state of crushed spirits. The many little tender observances that she paid to him were a source of mournful sweetness rather than of heart-rending.

It was a quietly but fully occupied life, with a certain severity towards her own comforts, and liberality towards those of other people, which had always been a part of her character, ever since Owen Sandbrook had read sermons with her on self-denial. If Miss Wells had a fire in her bedroom forced upon her, Miss Charlecote had none, and hurried down in the bleak winter morning in shawl and gloves to Humfrey's great Bible, and then to his account books and her business letters. She was fresh with cold when she met the children for their early reading. And then—but it was not soon that she learnt to bear that, though she had gone through the like before, she had to read the household devotions, where every petition seemed to be lacking the manly tone to give it fulness and force.

Breakfast followed, the silver kettle making it home-like, the children chattering, Miss Wells smiling, letters coming in to perplex or to clear up perplexities, amuse or cheer. The children were then turned out for an hour's hoop-driving on the gravel drive, horse-chestnut picking, or whatever might not be mischief, while Honora was conferring with Jones or with Brooks, and receiving her orders for the day. Next followed letter-writing, then lessons in general, a real enjoyment, unless Lucilla happened to have picked up a fit of perverseness—some reading to them, or rationalizing of play—the early dinner—the subsequent expedition with them, either walking or riding—for Brooks had soon found ponies for them, and they were gallant little riders. Honor would not give up the old pony, long since trained for her by Humfrey, though, maybe, that was her most undutiful proceeding towards him, as he would certainly have told her that the creature was shaky on the legs. So at last it tumbled down with her, but without any damage, save a hole in her skirt, and a dreadful crying fit of little Owen, who was frightened out of his wits. She owned that it must be degraded to light cart work, and mounted an animal which Hiltonbury agreed to be more worthy of her. Coming in, the children played; she either did her business or found leisure for reading; then came tea-time, then the reading of a story book to the children, and when they were disposed of, of something mildly moral and instructive to suit Miss Wells's taste.

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The neighbourhood all mourned Mr. Charlecote as a personal loss, and could hardly help regarding any successor as their enemy. Miss Charlecote had been just enough known in her girlish days not to make her popular in a commonplace neighbourhood; the ladies had criticised her hair and her genius, and the gentlemen had been puzzled by her searching questions into their county antiquities, and obliged to own themselves unaware of a Roman milestone propping their bailiff's pigstye, or of the spur of a champion of one of the Roses being hung over their family pew. But when Mr. Henderson and the Raymonds reported pleasantly of her, and when once or twice she had been seen cantering down the lanes, or shopping in Elverslope, and had exchanged a bow with a familiar face, the gentlemen took to declaring that the heiress was an uncommonly fine woman after all, and the ladies became possessed with the perception that it was high time to call upon Miss Charlecote—what could she be doing with those two children?

So there were calls, which Honor duly returned, and then came invitations, but to Miss Wells's great annoyance, Honor decided against these. It was not self-denial, but she thought it suitable. She did not love the round of county gaieties, and in her position she did not think them a duty. Retirement seemed to befit the widowhood, which she felt so entirely that when Miss Wells once drove her into disclaiming all possibility of marrying, she called it 'marrying again.' When Miss Wells urged the inexpediency of absolute seclusion, she said she would continue to make morning calls, and she hoped in time to have friends of her own to stay with her; she might ask the Raymonds, or some of the quiet, clerical families (the real *élite*, be it observed) to spend a day or drink tea, but the dinner and ball life was too utterly incongruous for an elderly heiress. When it came to the elderly heiress poor Miss Wells was always shut up in utter despair—she who thought her bright-locked darling only grew handsomer each day of her pride of womanhood.

The brass which Honora had chosen for her cousin's memorial was slow in being executed, and summer days had come in before it was sent to Hiltonbury. She walked down, a good deal agitated, to ascertain whether it were being rightly managed, but, to her great annoyance, found that the church having been left open, so many idle people were standing about that she could not bear to mingle with them. Had it been only the Holt vassalage, either their feeling would have been one with her own, or they would have made way for her, but there were some pert nursery maids gaping about with the children from Beauchamp, whence the heads of the family had been absent all the winter and spring, leaving various nurses and governesses in charge. Honora could not encounter their eyes, and went to the vicarage to send Mr. Henderson, and finding him absent, walked over sundry fields in a vain search for Brooks. Rain came on so violently as to wet her considerably, and to her exceeding mortification, she was obliged to relinquish her superintendence, either in person or by deputy.

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However, when she awoke early and saw the sun laughing through the shining drops, she decided on going down ere the curious world was astir, to see what had been done. It was not far from six, when she let herself out at the porch, and very like a morning with Humfrey, with the tremulous glistening of every spray, and the steamy fragrance rising wherever the sun touched the grass, that seemed almost to grow visibly. The woods were ringing with the song of birds, circle beyond circle, and there was something in the exuberant merriment of those blackbirds and thrushes that would not let her be sad, though they had been Humfrey's special

glory. The thought of such pleasures did not seem out of keeping. The lane was overhung with bushes; the banks, a whole wealth of ferns, climbing plants, tall grasses, and nettles, had not yet felt the sun and were dank and dreary, so she hurried on, and arriving at the clerk's door, knocked and opened. He was gone to his work, and sounds above showed the wife to be engaged on the toilette of the younger branches. She called out that she had come for the keys of the church, and seeing them on the dresser, abstracted them, bidding the good woman give herself no trouble.

She paused under the porch, and ere fitting the heavy key to the lock, felt that strange pressure and emotion of the heart that even if it be sorrow is also an exquisite sensation. If it were mournful that the one last office she could render to Humfrey was over, it was precious to her to be the only one who had a right to pay it, the one whom he had loved best upon earth, round whom she liked to believe that he still might be often hovering—whom he might welcome by and by. Here was the place for communion with him, the spot which had, indeed, been to him none other than the gate of Heaven.

Yet, will it be believed? Not one look did Honora cast at Humfrey Charlecote's monument that morning.

With both hands she turned the reluctant bolts of the lock, and pushed open the nail-studded door. She slowly advanced along the uneven floor of the aisle, and had just reached the chancel arch, when something suddenly stirred, making her start violently. It was still, and after a pause she again advanced, but her heart gave a sudden throb, and a strange chill of awe rushed over her as she beheld a little white face over the altar rail, the chin resting on a pair of folded hands, the dark eyes fixed in a strange, dreamy, spiritual expression of awe.

The shock was but for a moment, the next the blood rallied to her heart, and she told herself that Humfrey would say, that either the state of her spirits had produced an illusion, or else that some child had been left here by accident. She advanced, but as she did so the two hands were stretched out and locked together as in an agony, and the childish, feeble voice cried out, 'Oh! if you're an angel, please don't frighten me; I'll be very good.'

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Honora was in a pale, soft, gray dress, that caught the light in a rosy glow from the east window, and her golden hair was hanging in radiant masses beneath her straw bonnet, but she could not appreciate the angelic impression she made on the child, who had been tried so long by such a captivity. 'My poor child,' she said, 'I am no angel; I am only Miss Charlecote. I'm afraid you have been shut up here;' and, coming nearer, she perceived that it was a boy of about seven years old, well dressed, though his garments were disordered. He stood up as she came near, but he was trembling all over, and as she drew him into her bosom, and put her arms round him, she found him quivering with icy cold.

'Poor little fellow,' she said, rocking him, as she sat on the step and folded her shawl round him, 'have you been here all night? How cold you are; I must take you home, my dear. What is your name?'

'I'm Robert Mervyn Fulmort,' said the little boy, clinging to her. 'We came in to see Mr. Charlecote's monument put up, and I suppose they forgot me. I waked up, and everybody was gone, and the door was locked. Oh! please,' he gasped, 'take me out. I don't want to cry.'

She thought it best to take him at once into the cheerful sunlight, but it did not yet yield the warmth that he needed; and all her soothing words could not check the nervous tremor, though he held her so tight that it seemed as if he would never let her go.

'You shall come home with me, my dear little boy; you shall have some breakfast, and then I will take you safe home to Beauchamp.'

'Oh, if you please!' said the boy, gratefully.

Exercise was thawing his numbed limbs, and his eyes brightened.

'Whom were you with?' she asked. 'Who could have forgotten you?'

'I came with Lieschen and nurse and the babies. The others went out with Mademoiselle.'

'And you went to sleep?'

'Yes; I liked to see the mason go chip, chip, and I wanted to see them fit the thing in. I got into that great pew, to see better; and I made myself a nest, but at last they were all gone.'

'And what did you do, then? Were you afraid?'

'I didn't know what to do. I ran all about to see if I could look out at a window, but I couldn't.'

'Did you try to call?'

'Wouldn't it have been naughty?' said the boy; and then with an impulse of honest truthfulness, 'I did try once; but do you know, there was another voice came back again, and I thought that *die Geister wachten sich auf*.'

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'The what?'

'*Die Geister das Lieschen sagt in die Gewolben wohnen*,' said little Robert, evidently quite

unconscious whether he spoke German or English.

'So you could not call for the echo. Well, did you not think of the bells?'

'Yes; but, oh! the door was shut; and then, I'll tell you—but don't tell Mervyn—I did cry.'

'Indeed, I don't wonder. It must have been very lonely.'

'I didn't like it,' said Robert, shivering; and getting to his German again, he described '*das Gewitter*' beating on the panes, with wind and whirling leaves, and the unearthly noises of the creaking vane. The terror of the lonely, supperless child was dreadful to think of; and she begged to know what he could have done as it grew dark.

'I got to Mr. Charlecote,' said Robert—an answer that thrilled her all over. 'I said I'd be always very good, if he would take care of me, and not let them frighten me. And so I did go to sleep.'

'I'm sure Mr. Charlecote would, my dear little man,' began Honora, then checked by remembering what he would have said. 'But didn't you think of One more sure to take care of you than Mr. Charlecote?'

'Lieschen talks of *der Lieber Gott*,' said the little boy. 'We said our prayers in the nursery, but Mervyn says only babies do.'

'Mervyn is terribly wrong, then,' said Honora, shuddering. 'Oh! Robert, Mr. Charlecote never got up nor went to bed without asking the good God to take care of him, and make him good.'

'Was that why he was so good?' asked Robert.

'Indeed it was,' said she, fervently; 'nobody can be good without it. I hope my little friend will never miss his prayers again, for they are the only way to be manly and afraid of nothing but doing wrong, as he was.'

'I won't miss them,' said Robert, eagerly; then, with a sudden, puzzled look—'Did he send you?'

'Who?'

'Mr. Charlecote.'

'Why—how should . . . ? What made you think so?'

'I—why, once in the night I woke up; and oh! it was so dark, and there were such noises, such rattlings and roarings; and then it came all white—white light—all the window-bars and all so plain upon the wall; and then came—bending, bending over—a great gray darkness—oh! so horrible!—and went away, and came back.'

'The shadow of the trees, swaying in the moonlight.'

'Was it? I thought it was the *Nebel Wittwen neckten mir*, and then the *Erlkonung-tochter*. *Wissen sie*—and oh! I did scream once; and then, somehow, it grew quietly darker; and I thought Mr. Charlecote had me folded up so warm on his horse's back, and that we rode ever so far; and they stretched out their long white arms, and could not get me; but somehow he set me down on a cold stone, and said, "Wait here, Robin, and I'll send her to lead you." And then came a creaking, and there were you.'

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'Well, little Robin, he did not quite send me; but it was to see his tablet that I came down this morning; so he brought me after all. He was my very dear Cousin Humfrey, and I like you for having been his little friend. Will you be mine, too, and let me help you, if I can? and if your papa and mamma give leave, come and see me, and play with the little girl and boy who live with me?'

'Oh, yes!' cried Robert; 'I like you.'

The alliance was sealed with a hearty kiss.

'But,' said Robert, 'you must ask Mademoiselle; papa and mamma are away!'

'And how was it no one ever missed you?'

Robert was far less surprised at this than she was; for, like all children, to be left behind appeared to him a contingency rather probable than otherwise.

He was a fine-looking boy, with dark gray, thoughtful eyes, and a pleasant countenance; but his nerves had been so much shaken that he started, and seemed ready to catch hold of her at every sound.

'What's that?' he cried, as a trampling came along the alley as they entered the garden.

'Only my two little cousins,' said Honora, smiling. 'I hope you will be good friends, though perhaps Owen is too young a playfellow. Here, Lucy, Owen—here is a little friend for you—Robert Fulmort.'

The children came eagerly up, and Lucilla, taking her hand, raised her face to kiss the stranger; but Robert did not approve of the proceeding, and held up his head. Lucilla rose on tiptoe; Robin did the same. As he had the advantage of a whole year's height, he fully succeeded in keeping out of her reach; and very comical was the effect. She gave it up at last, and contented herself with asking, 'And where do you come from?'

'Out of the church,' was Robin's reply.

'Then you are very good and holy, indeed,' said Owen, looking at him earnestly, with clasped hands.

'No!' said Robert, gruffly.

'Poor little man! he was left behind, and shut up in the church all night, without any supper,' said Honora.

'Shut up in the church like Goody Two-shoes!' cried Lucilla dancing about. 'Oh, what fun!'

'Did the angels come and sing to you?' asked Owen.

'Don't ask such stupid questions,' cried his sister. 'Oh, I know what I'd have done! Didn't you get up into the pulpit?'

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'No!'

'And I do so want to know if the lady and gentleman on the monument have their ruffs the same on the inside, towards the wall, as outside; and, oh! I do so want to get all the dust out of the folds of the lady's ruff: I wish they'd lock me into the church, and I'd soon get out when I was tired.'

Lucilla and Owen decidedly thought Robin had not profited by his opportunities, but he figured better in an examination on his brothers and sisters. There were seven, of whom he was the fourth—Augusta, Juliana, and Mervyn being his elders; Phœbe, Maria, and Bertha, his juniors. The three seniors were under the rule of Mademoiselle, the little ones under that of nurse and Lieschen, and Robert stood on neutral ground, doing lessons with Mademoiselle, whom, he said, in unpicked language which astounded little Owen, 'he morally hated,' and at the same time free of the nursery, where, it appeared, that 'Phœbe was the jolliest little fellow in the world,' and Lieschen was the only 'good-natured body going,' and knew no end of *Mährchen*. The boy spoke a very odd mixture of Lieschen's German and of English, pervaded by stable slang, and was altogether a curious study of the effects of absentee parents; nevertheless Honora and Lucilla both took a considerable fancy to him, the latter patronizing him to such a degree that she hardly allowed him to eat the much-needed breakfast, which recalled colour to his cheek and substance to his voice.

After much thought, Owen delivered himself of the sentiment that 'people's papas and mammas were very funny,' doubtless philosophizing on the inconsistency of the class in being, some so willing, some so reluctant, to leave their children behind them. Honor fully agreed with him, but did not think the discussion profitable for Robin, whom she now proposed to take home in the pony-carriage. Lucilla, always eager for novelty, and ardent for her new friendship, begged to accompany her. Owen was afraid of the strangers, and preferred Miss Wells.

Even as they set out, they found that Robert's disappearance had created some sensation, for the clerk's wife was hurrying up to ask if Miss Charlecote had the keys, that she might satisfy the man from Beauchamp that Master Fulmort was not in the church. At the lodge the woman threw up her hands with joy at the sight of the child; and some way off, on the sward, stood a bigger boy, who, with a loud hurrah, scoured away towards the house as the carriage appeared.

'That's Mervyn,' said Robert; 'he is gone to tell them.'

Beauchamp was many degrees grander since Honor had last visited it. The approach was entirely new. Two fresh wings had been added, and the front was all over scaffolds and cement, in all stages of colour, from rich brown to permanent white. Robert explained that nothing was so nice as to watch the workmen, and showed Lucilla a plasterer on the topmost stage of the scaffolding, who, he said, was the nicest man he knew, and could sing all manner of songs.

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Rather nervously Honora drove under the poles to the hall-door, where two girls were seen in the rear of a Frenchwoman; and Honor felt as if Robin might have grounds for his 'moral hatred' when her voluble transports of gratitude and affection broke forth, and the desolation in which the loss had left them was described. Robert edged back from her at once, and flew to another party at the bottom of the stairs—a very stout nurse and an uncapped, flaxen-haired mädchen, who clasped him in her arms, and cried, and sobbed over him. As soon as he could release himself, he caught hold of a fat little bundle, which had been coaxing one of his legs all through Lieschen's embrace, and dragging it forwards, cried, 'Here she is—here's Phœbe!' Phœbe, however, was shy, and cried and fought her way back to hide her face in Lieschen's apron; and meantime a very odd scene took place. School-room and nursery were evidently at most direful war. Each wanted to justify itself lest the lady should write to the parents; each tried to be too grand to seem to care, and threw all the blame on the other. On the whole, Honor gathered that Mademoiselle believed the boy *enfantin* enough to be in the nursery, the nurses that he was in the school-room, and he had not been really missed till bed-time, when each party recriminated instead of seeking him, and neither would allow itself to be responsible for him. Lieschen, who alone had her suspicions where he might be, abstained from naming them in sheer terror of *Kobolden*, *Geistern*, corpse-candles, and what not, and had lain conjuring up his miseries till morning. Honora did not much care how they settled it amongst them, but tried to make friends with the young people, who seemed to take their brother's restoration rather coolly, and to be chiefly occupied by staring at Lucilla. Augusta and Juliana were self-possessed, and rather

maniérées, acquitting themselves evidently to the satisfaction of the French governess, and Honor, perceiving her to be a necessary infliction, invited her and her pupils, especially Robin, to spend a day in the next week at the Holt.

The proposal was graciously accepted, and Lucilla spent the intervening time in a tumult of excitement.

Nor was the day entirely unsuccessful; Mademoiselle behaved herself with French tact, and Miss Wells took her off Honora's hands a good deal, leaving them free for the children. Lucilla, always aspiring, began a grand whispering friendship with the two girls, and set her little cap strongly at Mervyn, but that young gentleman was contemptuous and bored when he found no entertainment in Miss Charlecote's stud, and was only to be kept placable by the bagatelle-board and the strawberry-bed. Robert followed his lead more than was satisfactory, but with visible predilections for the Holt ladies, old and young. Honor talked to him about little Phœbe, and he lighted up and began to detail her accomplishments, and to be very communicative about his home vexations and pleasures, and finally, when the children were wishing good night, he bluntly said, 'It would be better fun to bring Lieschen and Phœbe.'

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Honor thought so too, and proposed giving the invitation.

'Don't,' said Robert, 'she'd be cross; I'll bring them.'

And so he did. Two days after, the broad German face and the flaxen head appeared, leading that fat ball, Phœbe, and Robin frisking in triumph beside her. Henceforth a great friendship arose between the children. Phœbe soon lost all dread of those who petted her, and favoured them with broad smiles and an incomprehensible patois. Owen made very much of her, and pursued and imitated Robert with the devotion of a small boy to a larger one. Lucilla devoted herself to him for want of better game, and moreover he plainly told her that she was the prettiest little girl he ever saw, and laid all manner of remarkable treasures at her feet. Miss Charlecote believed that he made some curious confidences to her, for once Owen said, 'I want to know why Robin hasn't a Sweet Honey to make him good?'

'Robin has a papa and mamma, and a governess.'

'Robin was telling Lucy he wanted some one to teach him to be good, and she said she would, but I think she is not old enough.'

'Any one who is good is teaching others, my Owen,' said Honor. 'We will ask in our prayers that poor little Robin may be helped.'

When Mr. and Mrs. Fulmort came home, there was an interchange of calls, many thanks for her kindness to the children, and sanction of future intercourse. Mr. Fulmort was a great distiller, who had married a county heiress, and endeavoured to take his place among the country squires, whom he far exceeded in display; and his wife, a meek, sickly person, lived a life of slavery to the supposed exigencies of fashion. She had always had, in her maiden days, a species of awe of the Charlecotes' London cousin, and was now disposed to be rather gratified by her notice of her children. Mervyn had been disposed of at a tutor's, and Robert was adrift for many hours of the day. As soon as he had discovered the possibility of getting to the Holt alone, he was frequently there, following Honora about in her gardening and farming, as much at home as the little Sandbrooks, sharing in their sports, and often listening to the little books that she read aloud to them. He was very far from being such an angelic little mortal as Owen, with whom indeed his sympathies were few. Once some words were caught from him by both children, which startled Honor exceedingly, and obliged her to tell him that if ever she found him to have repeated the like, she should forbid his coming near them. He looked excessively sullen, and did not come for a week, during which Lucilla was intolerably naughty, and was twice severely punished for using the identical expressions in defiance.

Then he came again, and behaved as if nothing had happened, but the offence never recurred. Some time after, when he boasted of having come away with a lesson unlearned, in flat disobedience to Mademoiselle, Honor sent him straight home, though Lucilla stamped and danced at her in a frenzy. Another time Owen rushed up to her in great agony at some torture that Robin was inflicting upon a live mouse. Upon this, Honor, full of the spirit of indignation, fairly struck the offender sharply on the fingers with her riding-whip. He scowled at her, but it was only for a moment. She held him tightly by the hand, while she sent the gardener to put his victim out of its misery, and then she talked to him, not sentimentally, her feelings were too strongly stirred, but with all her horror of cruelty. He muttered that Mervyn and the grooms always did it; but he did not hold out long—Lucilla was holding aloof, too much horrified to come near—and finally he burst into tears, and owned that he had never thought!

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Every now and then, such outbreaks made Honor wonder why she let him come, perhaps to tempt her children; but she remembered that he and Humfrey had been fond of one another, and she felt drawn towards him, though in all prudence she resolved to lessen the attractions of the Holt by being very strict with all, and rather ungracious to him. Yet, strange to say, the more regulations she made, and the more she flashed out at his faults, the more constant was her visitor, the Robin who seemed to thrive upon the veriest crumbs of good-nature.

Positively, Honora was sometimes amazed to find what a dragon she could be upon occasion. Since she had been brought into subordination at six or eight years old, she had never had occasion to find out that she had a spirit of her own, till she found herself astonishing Jones and

Brooks for taking the liberty of having a deadly feud; making Brooks understand that cows were not to be sold, nor promises made to tenants, without reference to her; or showing a determined marauder that Humfrey's wood was not to be preyed upon any more than in his own time. They were very feminine explosions to be sure, but they had their effect, and Miss Charlecote's was a real government.

The uproar with nurse came at last, through a chance discovery that she had taken Owen to a certain forbidden house of gossip, where he had been bribed to secrecy with bread and treacle.

Honora wrote to Mrs. Charteris for permission to dismiss the mischievous woman, and obtained full consent, and the most complete expression of confidence and gratitude. So there ensued a month, when every visit to the nursery seemed to be spent in tears. Nurse was really very fond of the children, and cried over them incessantly, only consoling herself by auguring a brilliant future for them, when Master Owen should reign over Hiltonbury, like the gentleman he was.

'But, nurse, Cousin Honor says I never shall—I'm to be a clergyman, like papa. She says . . . '

Nurse winked knowingly at the housemaid. 'Yes, yes, my darling, no one likes to hear who is to come after them. Don't you say nothing about it; ain't becoming; but, by and by, see if it don't come so, and if my boy ain't master here.'

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'I wish I was, and then nurse would never go.'

However, nurse did go, and after some tears Owen was consoled by promotion to the habits of an older boy.

Lucilla was very angry, and revenged herself by every variety of opposition in her power, all which were put down by the strong hand. It was a matter of necessity to keep a tight grasp on this little wilful sprite, the most fiery morsel of engaging caprice and naughtiness that a quiet spinster could well have lit upon. It really sometimes seemed to Honora as if there were scarcely a fault in the range of possibilities that she had not committed; and indeed a bit of good advice generally seemed to act by contraries, and served to suggest mischief. Softness and warmth of feeling seemed to have been lost with her father; she did not show any particular affection towards her brother or Honora. Perhaps she liked Miss Wells, but that might be only opposition; nay, Honor would have been almost thankful if she had melted at the departure of the undesirable nurse, but she appeared only hard and cross. If she liked any one it was Robert Fulmort, but that was too much in the way of flirtation.

Vanity was an extremely traceable spring of action. When nurse went, Miss Lucilla gave the household no peace, because no one could rightly curl the long flaxen tresses upon her shoulders, until the worry became so intolerable that Honora, partly as penance, partly because she thought the present mode neither conducive to tidiness nor comfort, took her scissors and trimmed all the ringlets behind, bowl-dish fashion, as her own carrots had figured all the days of her childhood.

Lucilla was held by Mrs. Stubbs during the operation. She did not cry or scream after she felt herself conquered by main strength, but her blue eyes gleamed with a strange, wild light; she would not speak to Miss Charlecote all the rest of the day, and Honora doubted whether she were ever forgiven.

Another offence was the cutting down her name into Lucy. Honor had avoided Cilly from the first; Silly Sandbrook would be too dreadful a sobriquet to be allowed to attach to any one, but Lucilla resented the change more deeply than she showed. Lucy was a housemaid's name, she said, and Honor reproved her for vanity, and called her so all the more. She did not love Miss Charlecote well enough to say that Cilly had been her father's name for her, and that he had loved to wind the flaxen curls round his fingers.

Every new study, every new injunction cost a warfare, disobedience, and passionate defiance and resistance on the one hand, and steady, good-tempered firmness on the other, gradually growing a little stern. The waves became weary of beating on the rock at last. The fiery child was growing into a girl, and the calm will had the mastery of her; she succumbed insensibly; and owing all her pleasures to Cousin Honor, she grew to depend upon her, and mind, manners, and opinions were taking their mould from her.

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CHAPTER V

Too soon the happy child
His nook of heavenward thought must change
For life's seducing wild.—*Christian Year*

The summer sun peeped through the Venetian blinds greenly shading the breakfast-table.

Only three sides were occupied. For more than two years past good Miss Wells had been lying under the shade of Hiltonbury Church, taking with her Honora Charlecote's last semblance of the dependence and deference of her young ladyhood. The kind governess had been fondly mourned, but she had not left her child to loneliness, for the brother and sister sat on either side, each with a particular pet—Lucilla's, a large pointer, who kept his nose on her knee; Owen's, a white fan-tailed pigeon, seldom long absent from his shoulder, where it sat quivering and bending backwards its graceful head.

Lucilla, now nearly fourteen, looked younger from the unusual smallness of her stature, and the exceeding delicacy of her features and complexion, and she would never have been imagined to be two years the senior of the handsome-faced, large-limbed young Saxon who had so far outstripped her in height; and yet there was something in those deep blue eyes, that on a second glance proclaimed a keen intelligence as much above her age as her appearance was below it.

'What's the matter?' said she, rather suddenly.

'Yes, sweetest Honey,' added the boy, 'you look bothered. Is that rascal not paying his rent?'

'No!' she said, 'it is a different matter entirely. What do you think of an invitation to Castle Blanch?'

'For us all?' asked Owen.

'Yes, all, to meet your Uncle Christopher, the last week in August.'

'Why can't he come here?' asked Lucilla.

'I believe we must go,' said Honora. 'You ought to know both your uncles, and they should be consulted before Owen goes to school.'

'I wonder if they will examine me,' said Owen. 'How they will stare to find Sweet Honey's teaching as good as all their preparatory schools.'

'Conceited boy.'

'I'm not conceited—only in my teacher. Mr. Henderson said I should take as good a place as Robert Fulmort did at Winchester, after four years in that humbugging place at Elverslope.'

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'We can't go!' cried Lucilla. 'It's the last week of Robin's holidays!'

'Well done, Lucy!' and both Honor and Owen laughed heartily.

'It is nothing to me,' said she, tossing her head, 'only I thought Cousin Honor thought it good for him.'

'You may stay at home to do him good,' laughed Owen; 'I'm sure I don't want him. You are very welcome, such a bore as he is.'

'Now, Owen.'

'Honey dear, I do take my solemn affidavit that I have tried my utmost to be friends with him,' said Owen; 'but he is such a fellow—never has the least notion beyond Winchester routine—Latin and Greek, cricket and football.'

'You'll soon be a schoolboy yourself,' said Lucilla.

'Then I shan't make such an ass of myself,' returned Owen.

'Robin is a very good boy, I believe,' said Honor.

'That's the worst of him!' cried Lucilla, running away and clapping the door after her as she went.

'Well, I don't know,' said Owen, very seriously, 'he says he does not care about the Saints' days because he has no one to get him leave out.'

'I remember,' said Honor, with a sweet smile of tender memory, 'when to me the merit of Saints' days was that they were your father's holidays.'

'Yes, you'll send me to Westminster, and be always coming to Woolstone-lane,' said Owen.

'Your uncles must decide,' she said, half mournfully, half proudly; 'you are getting to be a big boy—past me, Oney.'

It brought her a roughly playful caress, and he added, 'You've got the best right, I'm sure.'

'I had thought of Winchester,' she said. 'Robert would be a friend.'

Owen made a face, and caused her to laugh, while scandalizing her by humming, 'Not there, not there, my child.'

'Well, be it where it may, you had better look over your Virgil, while I go down to my practical Georgics with Brooks.'

Owen obeyed. He was like a spirited horse in a leash of silk. Strong, fearless, and manly, he was still perfectly amenable to her, and had never shown any impatience of her rule. She had taught him entirely herself, and both working together with a thorough good will, she had rendered him a better classical scholar, as all judges allowed, than most boys of the same age, and far superior to them in general cultivation; and she should be proud to convince Captain Charteris that she had not made him the mollicoddle that was obviously anticipated. The other relatives, who had seen the children in their yearly visits to London, had always expressed unqualified satisfaction, though not advancing much in the good graces of Lucy and Owen. But Honor thought the public school ought to be left to the selection of the two uncles, though she wished to be answerable for

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the expense, both there and at the university. The provision inherited by her charges was very slender, for, contrary to all expectation, old Mr. Sandbrook's property had descended in another quarter, and there was barely £5000 between the two.

To preserve this untouched by the expenses of education was Honora's object, and she hoped to be able to smooth their path in life by occasional assistance, but on principle she was determined to make them independent of her, and she had always made it known that she regarded it as her duty to Humfrey that her Hiltonbury property should be destined—if not to the apocryphal American Charlecote—to a relation of their mutual great-grandmother.

Cold invitations had been given and declined, but this one was evidently in earnest, and the consideration of the captain decided Honora on accepting it, but not without much murmuring from Lucilla. Caroline and Horatia were detestable grown-up young ladies, her aunt was horrid, Castle Blanch was the slowest place in the world; she should be shut up in some abominable school-room to do fancy-work, and never to get a bit of fun. Even the being reminded of Wrapworth and its associations only made her more cross. She was of a nature to fly from thought or feeling—she was keen to perceive, but hated reflection, and from the very violence of her feelings, she unconsciously abhorred any awakening of them, and steeled herself by levity.

Her distaste only gave way in Robert's presence, when she appeared highly gratified by the change, certain that Castle Blanch would be charming, and her cousin the Life-guardsmen especially so. The more disconsolate she saw Robert, the higher rose her spirits, and his arrival to see the party off sent her away in open triumph, glorifying her whole cousinhood without a civil word to him; but when seated in the carriage she launched at him a drawing, the favourite work of her leisure hours, broke into unrestrained giggling at his grateful surprise, and ere the wood was past, was almost strangled with sobs.

Castle Blanch was just beyond the suburbs of London, in complete country, but with an immense neighbourhood, and not half-an-hour by train from town. Honora drove all the way, to enjoy the lovely Thames scenery to the full. They passed through Wrapworth, and as they did so, Lucilla chattered to the utmost, while Honora stole her hand over Owen's and gently pressed it. He returned the squeeze with interest, and looked up in her face with a loving smile—mother and home were not wanting to him!

About two miles further on, and not in the same parish, began the Castle Blanch demesne. The park sloped down to the Thames, and was handsome, and quite full of timber, and the mansion, as the name imported, had been built in the height of pseudo-Gothic, with a formidable keep-looking tower at each corner, but the fortification below consisting of glass; the sham cloister, likewise glass windows, for drawing-room, music-room, and conservatory; and jutting out far in advance, a great embattled gateway, with a sham portcullis, and doors fit to defy an army.

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Three men-servants met the guests in the hall, and Mrs. Charteris received them in the drawing-room, with the woman-of-the-world tact that Honora particularly hated; there was always such deference to Miss Charlecote, and such an assumption of affection for the children, and gratitude for her care of them, and Miss Charlecote had not been an heiress early enough in life for such attentions to seem matters of course.

It was explained that there was no school-room at present, and as a girl of Lucilla's age, who was already a guest, joined the rest of the party at dinner, it was proposed that she and her brother should do the same, provided Miss Charlecote did not object. Honor was really glad of the gratification for Lucilla, and Mrs. Charteris agreed with her before she had time to express her opinion as to girls being kept back or brought forward.

Honor found herself lodged in great state, in a world of looking-glass that had perfectly scared her poor little Hiltonbury maiden, and with a large dressing-room, where she hoped to have seen a bed for Lucilla, but she found that the little girl was quartered in another story, near the cousins; and unwilling to imply distrust, and hating to incite obsequious compliance, she did not ask for any change, but only begged to see the room.

It was in a long passage whence doors opened every way, and one being left ajar, sounds of laughter and talking were heard in tones as if the young ladies were above good breeding in their private moments. Mrs. Charteris said something about her daughters' morning-room, and was leading the way thither, when an unguarded voice exclaimed—'Rouge dragon and all,' and a start and suppressed laughter at the entrance of the newcomers gave an air of having been caught.

Four young ladies, in *dégagé* attitudes, were lounging round their afternoon refection of tea. Two, Caroline and Horatia Charteris, shook hands with Miss Charlecote, and kissed Lucilla, who still looked at them ungraciously, followed Honora's example in refusing their offer of tea, and only waiting to learn her own habitation, came down to her room to be dressed for dinner, and to criticize cousins, aunt, house and all. The cousins were not striking—both were on a small scale, Caroline the best looking in features and complexion, but Horatia the most vivacious and demonstrative, and with an air of dash and fashion that was more effective than beauty. Lucilla, not sensible to these advantages, broadly declared both young ladies to be frights, and commented so freely on them to the willing ears of Owen, who likewise came in to go down under Sweet Honey's protection, as to call for a reproof from Honora, one of whose chief labours ever was to destroy the little lady's faith in beauty, and complacency in her own.

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The latter sensation was strong in Honor herself, as she walked into the room between her beautiful pair, and contrasted Lucilla with her contemporary, a formed and finished young lady,

all plaits, ribbons, and bracelets—not half so pleasing an object as the little maid in her white frock, blue sash, and short wavy hair, though maybe there was something quaint in such simplicity, to eyes trained by fashion instead of by good taste.

Here was Captain Charteris, just what he had been when he went away. How different from his stately, dull, wife-ridden elder brother. So brisk, and blunt, and eager, quite lifting his niece off her feet, and almost crushing her in his embrace, telling her she was still but a hop-o'-my-thumb, and shaking hands with his nephew with a look of scrutiny that brought the blood to the boy's cheek.

His eyes were never off the children while he was listening to Honora, and she perceived that what she said went for nothing; he would form his judgment solely by what he observed for himself.

At dinner, he was seated between Miss Charlecote and his niece, and Honora was pleased with him for his neglect of her and attention to his smaller neighbour, whose face soon sparkled with merriment, while his increasing animation proved that the saucy little woman was as usual enchanting him. Much that was very entertaining was passing about tiger-hunting, when at dessert, as he stretched out his arm to reach some water for her, she exclaimed, 'Why, Uncle Kit, you *have* brought away the marks! no use to deny it, the tigers did bite you.'

The palm of his hand certainly bore in purple, marks resembling those of a set of teeth; and he looked meaningly at Honora, as he quietly replied, 'Something rather like a tigress.'

'Then it was a bite, Uncle Kit?'

Yes,' in a put-an-end-to-it tone, which silenced Lucilla, her tact being much more ready when concerned with the nobler sex.

In the drawing-room, Mrs. Charteris's civilities kept Honora occupied, while she saw Owen bursting with some request, and when at length he succeeded in claiming her attention, it was to tell her of his cousin's offer to take him out shooting, and his elder uncle's proviso that it must be with her permission. He had gone out with the careful gamekeeper at Hiltonbury, but this was a different matter, more trying to the nerves of those who stayed at home. However, Honora suspected that the uncle's opinion of her competence to be trusted with Owen would be much diminished by any betrayal of womanly terrors, and she made her only conditions that he should mind Uncle Kit, and not go in front of the guns, otherwise he would never be taken out again, a menace which she judiciously thought more telling than that he would be shot.

By and by Mr. Charteris came to discuss subjects so interesting to her as a farmer, that it was past nine o'clock before she looked round for her children. Healthy as Lucilla was, her frame was so slight and unsubstantial, and her spirits so excitable, that over-fatigue or irregularity always told upon her strength and temper; for which reason Honor had issued a decree that she should go to bed at nine, and spend two hours of every morning in quiet employment, as a counterbalance to the excitement of the visit.

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Looking about to give the summons, Honor found that Owen had disappeared. Unnoticed, and wearied by the agricultural dialogue, he had hailed nine o'clock as the moment of release, and crept off with unobtrusive obedience, which Honor doubly prized when she beheld his sister full of eagerness, among cousins and gentlemen, at the racing game. Strongly impelled to end it at once, Honor waited, however, till the little white horseman had reached the goal, and just as challenges to a fresh race were beginning, she came forward with her needful summons.

'Oh, Miss Charlecote, how cruel!' was the universal cry.

'We can't spare all the life of our game!' said Charles Charteris.

'I solemnly declare we weren't betting,' cried Horatia. 'Come, the first evening—'

'No,' said Honor, smiling. 'I can't have her lying awake to be good for nothing to-morrow, as she will do if you entertain her too much.'

'Another night, then, you promise,' said Charles.

'I promise nothing but to do my best to keep her fit to enjoy herself. Come, Lucy.'

The habit of obedience was fixed, but not the habit of conquering annoyance, and Lucilla went off doggedly. Honora would have accompanied her to soothe away her troubles, but her cousin Ratia ran after her, and Captain Charteris stood in the way, disposed to talk. 'Discipline,' he said, approvingly.

'Harsh discipline, I fear, it seemed to her, poor child,' said Honor; 'but she is so excitable that I must try to keep her as quiet as possible.'

'Right,' said the captain; 'I like to see a child a child still. You must have had some tussles with that little spirit.'

'A few,' she said, smiling. 'She is a very good girl now, but it has been rather a contrast with her brother.'

'Ha!' quoth the captain; and mindful of the milk-sop charge, Honora eagerly continued, 'You will soon see what a spirit he has! He rides very well, and is quite fearless. I have always wished him

to be with other boys, and there are some very nice ones near us—they think him a capital cricketer, and you should see him run and vault.'

'He is an active-looking chap,' his uncle granted.

'Every one tells me he is quite able to make his way at school; I am only anxious to know which public school you and your brother would prefer.'

'How old is he?'

'Only twelve last month, though you would take him for fifteen.'

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'Twelve; then there would be just time to send him to Portsmouth, get him prepared for a naval cadetship, then, when I go out with Sir David Horfield, I could take him under my own eye, and make a man of him at once.'

'Oh! Captain Charteris,' cried Honora, aghast, 'his whole bent is towards his father's profession.'

The captain had very nearly whistled, unable to conceive any lad of spirit preferring study.

'Whatever Miss Charlecote's wishes may be, Kit,' interposed the diplomatic elder brother, 'we only desire to be guided by them.'

'Oh no, indeed,' cried Honor; 'I would not think of such a responsibility, it can belong only to his nearer connections;' then, feeling as if this were casting him off to be pressed by the sailor the next instant, she added, in haste—'Only I hoped it was understood—if you will let me—the expenses of his education need not be considered. And if he *might* be with me in the holidays,' she proceeded imploringly. 'When Captain Charteris has seen more of him, I am sure he will think it a pity that his talents . . .' and there she stopped, shocked at finding herself insulting the navy.

'If a boy have no turn that way, it cannot be forced on him,' said the captain, moodily.

Honora pitied his disappointment, wondering whether he ascribed it to her influence, and Mr. Charteris blandly expressed great obligation and more complete resignation of the boy than she desired; disclaimers ran into mere civilities, and she was thankful to the captain for saying, shortly, 'We'll leave it till we have seen more of the boy.'

Breakfast was very late at Castle Blanch; and Honora expected a tranquil hour in her dressing-room with her children, but Owen alone appeared, anxious for the shooting, but already wearying to be at home with his own pleasures, and indignant with everything, especially the absence of family prayers.

The breakfast was long and desultory, and in the midst Lucilla made her appearance with Horatia, who was laughing and saying, 'I found this child wandering about the park, and the little pussycat won't tell where she has been.'

'Poaching, of course,' responded Charles; 'it is what pussycats always do till they get shot by the keepers.'

Et cætera, et cætera, et cætera. Lucilla was among all the young people, in the full tide of fun, nonsense, banter, and repartee of a style new to her, but in which she was formed to excel, and there was such a black look when Honor summoned her after the meal, as impressed the awkwardness of enforcing authority among nearer relations; but it was in vain, she was carried off to the dressing-room, and reminded of the bargain for two hours' occupation. She murmured something about Owen going out as he liked.

'He came to me before breakfast; besides, he is a boy. What made you go out in that strange manner?'

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There was no answer, but Honor had learnt by experience that to insist was apt to end in obtaining nothing but a collision of wills, and she merely put out the Prayer Books for the morning's reading of the Psalms. By the time it was over, Lucilla's fit of temper had past, and she leant back in her chair. 'What are you listening to, Lucy?' said Honor, seeing her fixed eye.

'The river,' said Lucilla, pausing with a satisfied look to attend to the deep regular rush. 'I couldn't think before what it was that always seemed to be wanting, and now I know. It came to me when I went to bed; it was so nice!'

'The river voice! Yes; it must be one of your oldest friends,' said Honora, gratified at the softening. 'So that carried you out.'

'I couldn't help it! I went home,' said Lucilla.

'Home? To Wrapworth? All alone?' cried Honor, kindly, but aghast.

'I couldn't help it,' again said the girl. 'The river noise was so like everything—and I knew the way—and I felt as if I must go before any one was up.'

'So you really went. And what did you do?'

'I got over the palings our own old way, and there's my throne still in the back of the laurels, and I popped in on old Madge, and oh! she was so surprised! And then I came on Mr. Prendergast,

and he walked all the way back with me, till he saw Ratia coming, and then he would not go on any farther.'

'Well, my dear, I can't blame you this time. I am hoping myself to go to Wrapworth with you and Owen.'

'Ratia is going to take me out riding and in the boat,' said Lucy, without a direct answer.

'You like your cousins better than you expected?'

'Rashe is famous,' was the answer, 'and so is Uncle Kit.'

'My dear, you noticed the mark on his hand,' said Honora; 'you do not know the cause?'

'No! Was it a shark or a mad dog?' eagerly asked the child, slightly alarmed by her manner.

'Neither. But do not you remember his carrying you into Woolstone-lane? I always believed you did not know what your little teeth were doing.'

It was not received as Honora expected. Probably the scenes of the girl's infancy had brought back associations more strongly than she was prepared for—she turned white, gasped, and vindictively said, 'I'm glad of it.'

Honora, shocked, had not discovered a reply, when Lucilla, somewhat confused at the sound of her own words, said, 'I know—not quite that—he meant the best—but, Cousin Honor, it was cruel, it was wicked, to part my father and me! Father—oh, the river is going on still, but not my father!'

The excitable girl burst into a flood of passionate tears, as though the death of her father were more present to her than ever before; and she had never truly missed him till she was brought in contact with her old home. The fatigue and change, the talking evening and restless night, had produced their effect; her very thoughtlessness and ordinary *insouciance* rendered the rush more overwhelming when it did come, and the weeping was almost hysterical.

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It was not a propitious circumstance that Caroline knocked at the door with some message as to the afternoon's arrangements. Honor answered at haphazard, standing so as to intercept the view, but aware that the long-drawn sobs would be set down to the account of her own tyranny, and nevertheless resolving the more on enforcing the quiescence, the need of which was so evident; but the creature was volatile as well as sensitive, and by the time the door was shut, stood with heaving breast and undried tears, eagerly demanding whether her cousins wanted her.

'Not at all,' said Honora, somewhat annoyed at the sudden transition; 'it was only to ask if I would ride.'

'Charles was to bring the pony for me; I must go,' cried Lucy, with an eye like that of a greyhound in the leash.

'Not yet,' said Honor. 'My dear, you promised.'

'I'll never promise anything again,' was the pettish murmur.

Poor child, these two morning hours were to her a terrible penance, day after day. Practically, she might have found them heavy had they been left to her own disposal, but it was expecting overmuch from human nature to hope that she would believe so without experience, and her lessons were a daily irritation, an apparent act of tyranny, hardening her feelings against the exactor, at the same time that the influence of kindred blood drew her closer to her own family, with a revulsion the stronger from her own former exaggerated dislike.

The nursery at Castle Blanch, and the cousins who domineered over her as a plaything, had been intolerable to the little important companion of a grown man, but it was far otherwise to emerge from the calm seclusion and sober restraints of the Holt into the gaieties of a large party, to be promoted to young ladyhood, and treated on equal terms, save for extra petting and attention. Instead of Robert Fulmort alone, all the gentlemen in the house gave her flattering notice—eye, ear, and helping hand at her disposal, and blunt Uncle Kit himself was ten times more civil to her than to either of her cousins. What was the use of trying to disguise from her the witchery of her piquant prettiness?

Her cousin Horatia had always had a great passion for her as a beautiful little toy, and her affection, once so trying to its object, had taken the far more agreeable form of promoting her pleasures and sympathizing with her vexations. Patronage from two-and-twenty to fourteen, from a daughter of the house to a guest, was too natural to offend, and Lucilla requited it with vehement attachment, running after her at every moment, confiding all her grievances, and being made sensible of many more. Ratia, always devising delights for her, took her on the river, rode with her, set her dancing, opened the world to her, and enjoyed her pleasures, amused by her precocious vivacity, fostering her sauciness, extolling the wit of her audacious speeches, and extremely resenting all poor Honora's attempts to counteract this terrible spoiling, or to put a check upon undesirable diversions and absolute pertness. Every conscientious interference on her part was regarded as duenna-like harshness, and her restrictions as a grievous yoke, and Lucilla made no secret that it was so, treating her to almost unvaried ill-humour and murmurs.

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Little did Lucilla know, nor even Horatia, how much of the charms that produced so much effect

were due to these very restraints, nor how the droll sauciness and womanly airs were enhanced by the simplicity of appearance, which embellished her far more than the most fashionable air set off her companions. Once Lucilla had overheard her aunt thus excusing her short locks and simple dress—'It is Miss Charlecote's doing. Of course, when so much depends on her, we must give way. Excellent person, rather peculiar, but we are under great obligations to her. Very good property.'

No wonder that sojourn at Castle Blanch was one of the most irksome periods of Honora's life, disappointing, fretting, and tedious. There was a grievous dearth of books and of reasonable conversation, and both she and Owen were exceedingly at a loss for occupation, and used to sit in the boat on the river, and heartily wish themselves at home. He had no companion of his own age, and was just too young and too enterprising to be welcome to gentlemen bent more on amusing themselves than pleasing him. He was roughly admonished when he spoilt sport or ran into danger; his cousin Charles was fitfully good-natured, but generally showed that he was in the way; his uncle Kit was more brief and stern with him than 'Sweet Honey's' pupil could endure; and Honor was his only refuge. His dreariness was only complete when the sedulous civilities of his aunt carried her beyond his reach.

She could not attain a visit to Wrapworth till the Sunday. The carriage went in state to the parish church in the morning, and the music and preaching furnished subjects for *persiflage* at luncheon, to her great discomfort, and the horror of Owen; and she thought she might venture to Wrapworth in the afternoon. She had a longing for Owen's church, 'for auld lang syne'—no more. Even his bark church in the backwoods could not have rivalled Hiltonbury and the brass.

Owen, true to his allegiance, joined her in good time, but reported that his sister was gone on with Ratia. Whereas Ratia would probably otherwise not have gone to church at all, Honor was deprived of all satisfaction in her annoyance, and the compensation of a *tête-à-tête* with Owen over his father's memory was lost by the unwelcome addition of Captain Charteris. The loss signified the less as Owen's reminiscences were never allowed to languish for want of being dug up and revived, but she could not quite pardon the sailor for the commonplace air his presence cast over the walk.

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The days were gone by when Mr. Sandbrook's pulpit eloquence had rendered Wrapworth Church a Sunday show to Castle Blanch. His successor was a cathedral dignitary, so constantly absent that the former curate, who had been continued on at Wrapworth, was, in the eyes of every one, the veritable master. Poor Mr. Prendergast—whatever were his qualifications as a preacher—had always been regarded as a disappointment; people had felt themselves defrauded when the sermon fell to his share instead of that of Mr. Sandbrook, and odious comparison had so much established the opinion of his deficiencies, that Honora was not surprised to see a large-limbed and rather quaint-looking man appear in the desk, but the service was gone through with striking reverence, and the sermon was excellent, though homely and very plain-spoken. The church had been cruelly mauled by churchwardens of the last century, and a few Gothic decorations, intended for the beginning of restoration, only made it the more incongruous. The east window, of stained glass, of a quality left far behind by the advances of the last twenty years, bore an inscription showing that it was a memorial, and there was a really handsome font. Honor could trace the late rector's predilections in a manner that carried her back twenty years, and showed her, almost to her amusement, how her own notions and sympathies had been carried onwards with the current of the world around her.

On coming out, she found that there might have been more kindness in Captain Charteris than she had suspected, for he kept Horatia near him, and waited for the curate, so as to leave her at liberty and unobserved. Her first object was that Owen should see his mother's grave. It was beside the parsonage path, a flat stone, fenced by a low iron border, enclosing likewise a small flower-bed, weedy, ruinous, and forlorn. A floriated cross, filled up with green lichen, was engraven above the name.

Lucilla Horatia
beloved wife of the Reverend Owen Sandbrook
Rector of this parish
and only daughter
of Lieutenant-General Sir Christopher Charteris
She died November the 18th 1837
Aged 29 years.

Mary Caroline
her daughter
Born November 11th 1837
Died April 14th 1838

I shall go to them, but they shall not return to me.

How like it was to poor Owen! that necessity of expression, and the visible presage of weakening health so surely fulfilled! And his Lucilla! It was a melancholy work to have brought home a missionary, and secularized a parish priest! 'Not a generous reflection,' thought Honora, 'at a rival's grave,' and she turned to the boy, who had stooped to pull at some of the bits of groundsel.

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'Shall we come here in the early morning, and set it to rights?'

'I forgot it was Sunday,' said Owen, hastily throwing down the weed he had plucked up.

'You were doing no harm, my dear; but we will not leave it in this state. Will you come with us, Lucy?'

Lucilla had escaped, and was standing aloof at the end of the path, and when her brother went towards her, she turned away.

'Come, Lucy,' he entreated, 'come into the garden with us. We want you to tell us the old places.'

'I'm not coming,' was all her answer, and she ran back to the party who stood by the church door, and began to chatter to Mr. Prendergast, over whom she had domineered even before she could speak plain. A silent, shy man, wrapped up in his duties, he was mortally afraid of the Castle Blanch young ladies, and stood ill at ease, talked down by Miss Horatia Charteris, but his eye lighted into a smile as the fairy plaything of past years danced up to him, and began her merry chatter, asking after every one in the parish, and showing a perfect memory of names and faces such as amazed him, in a child so young as she had been at the time when she had left the parish. Honora and Owen meantime were retracing recollections in the rectory garden, eking out the boy's four years old memories with imaginations and moralizings, pondering over the border whence Owen declared he had gathered snowdrops for his mother's coffin; and the noble plane tree by the water-side, sacred to the memory of Bible stories told by his father in the summer evenings—

'That tree!' laughed Lucilla, when he told her that night as they walked up-stairs to bed. 'Nobody could sit there because of the mosquitoes. And I should like to see the snowdrops you found in November!'

'I know there were some white flowers. Were they lilies of the valley for little Mary?'

'It will do just as well,' said Lucilla. She knew that she could bring either scene before her mind with vivid distinctness, but shrinking from the pain almost with horror, she only said, 'It's a pity you aren't a Roman Catholic, Owen; you would soon find a hole in a rock, and say it was where a saint, with his head under his arm, had made a footmark.'

'You are very irreverent, Lucy, and very cross besides. If you would not come and tell us, what could we do?'

'Let it alone.'

'If you don't care for dear papa and mamma, I do,' said Owen, the tears coming into his eyes.

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'I'm not going to rake it up to please Honora,' returned his sister. 'If you like to go and poke with her over places where things never happened, you may, but she shan't meddle with my real things.'

'You are very unkind,' was the next accusation from Owen, much grieved and distressed, 'when she is so good and dear, and was so fond of our dear father.'

'I know,' said Lucilla, in a tone he did not understand; then, with an air of eldership, ill assorting with their respective sizes, 'You are a mere child. It is all very well for you, and you are very welcome to your Sweet Honey.'

Owen insisted on hearing her meaning, and on her refusal to explain, used his superior strength to put her to sufficient torture to elicit an answer. 'Don't, Owen! Let go! There, then! Why, she was in love with our father, and nearly died of it when he married; and Rashe says of course she bullies me for being like my mother.'

'She never bullies you,' cried Owen, indignantly; 'she's much kinder to you than you deserve, and I hate Ratia for putting it into your head, and teaching you such nasty man's words about my own Honor.'

'Ah! you'll never be a man while you are under her. She only wants to keep us a couple of babies for ever—sending us to bed, and making such a figure of me;' and Lucy relieved her feelings by five perpendicular leaps into the air, like an India-rubber ball, her hair flying out, and her eyes flashing.

Owen was not much astonished, for Lucy's furies often worked off in this fashion; but he was very angry on Honor's account, loving her thoroughly, and perceiving no offence in her affection for his father; and the conversation assumed a highly quarrelsome character. It was much to the credit of masculine discretion that he refrained from reporting it when he joined Honora in the morning's walk to Wrapworth churchyard. Behold! some one was beforehand with them—even Lucilla and the curate!

The wearisome visit was drawing to a close when Captain Charteris began—'Well, Miss Charlecote, have you thought over my proposal?'

'To take Owen to sea? Indeed, I hoped you were convinced that it would never answer.'

'So far from being so, that I see it is his best chance. He will do no good till the priggishness is knocked out of him.'

Honor would not trust herself to answer. Any accusation but this might have been borne.

'Well, well,' said the captain, in a tone still more provoking, it was so like hushing a petulant child, 'we know how kind you were, and that you meant everything good; but it is not in the nature of things that a lad alone with women should not be cock of the walk, and nothing cures that like a month on board.'

'He will go to school,' said Honor, convinced all this was prejudice.

'Ay, and come home in the holidays, lording it as if he were master and more, like the son and heir.'

'Indeed, Captain Charteris, you are quite mistaken; I have never allowed Owen to think himself in that position. He knows perfectly well that there are nearer claims upon me, and that Hiltonbury can never belong to him. I have always rejoiced that it should be so. I should not like to have the least suspicion that there could be self-interest in his affection for me in the time to come; and I think it presumptuous to interfere with the course of Providence in the matter of inheritances.'

'My good Miss Charlecote,' said the captain, who had looked at her with somewhat of a pitying smile, instead of attending to her last words, 'do you imagine that you know that boy?'

'I do not know who else should,' she answered, quivering between a disposition to tears at the harshness, and to laughter at the assumption of the stranger uncle to see farther than herself into her darling.

'Ha!' quoth the sailor, 'slippery—slippery fellows.'

'I do not understand you. You do not mean to imply that I have not his perfect confidence, or do you think I have managed him wrongly? If you do, pray tell me at once. I dare say I have.'

'I couldn't say so,' said Captain Charteris. 'You are an excellent good woman, Miss Charlecote, and the best friend the poor things have had in the world; and you have taught them more good than I could, I'm sure; but I never yet saw a woman who could be up to a boy, any more than she could sail a ship.'

'Very likely not,' said Honor, with a lame attempt at a good-humoured laugh; 'but I should be very glad to know whether you are speaking from general experience of woman and boy, or from individual observation of the case in point.'

The captain made a very odd, incomprehensible little bow; and after a moment's thought, said, 'Plainly speaking, then, I don't think you do get to the bottom of that lad; but there's no telling, and I never had any turn for those smooth chaps. If a fellow begins by being over-precise in what is of no consequence, ten to one but he ends by being reckless in all the rest.'

This last speech entirely reassured Honor, by proving to her that the captain was entirely actuated by prejudice against his nephew's gentle and courteous manners and her own religious views. He did not believe in the possibility of the success of such an education, and therefore was of course insensible to Owen's manifold excellences.

Thenceforth she indignantly avoided the subject, and made no attempt to discover whether the captain's eye, practised in midshipmen, had made any positive observations on which to found his dissatisfaction. Wounded by his want of gratitude, and still more hurt by his unkind judgment of her beloved pupil, she transferred her consultations to the more deferential uncle, who was entirely contented with his nephew, transported with admiration of her management, and ready to make her a present of him with all his heart. So readily did he accede to all that she said of schools, that the choice was virtually left to her. Eton was rejected as a fitter preparation for the squirearchy than the ministry; Winchester on account of the distaste between Owen and young Fulmort; and her decision was fixed in favour of Westminster, partly for his father's sake, partly on account of the proximity of St. Wulstan's—such an infinite advantage, as Mr. Charteris observed.

The sailor declared that he knew nothing of schools, and would take no part in the discussion. There had, in truth, been high words between the brothers, each accusing the other of going the way to ruin their nephew, ending by the captain's exclaiming, 'Well, I wash my hands of it! I can't flatter a foolish woman into spoiling poor Lucilla's son. If I am not to do what I think right by him, I shall get out of sight of it all.'

'His prospects, Kit; how often I have told you it is our duty to consider his prospects.'

'Hang his prospects! A handsome heiress under forty! How can you be such an ass, Charles? He ought to be able to make an independent fortune before he could stand in her shoes, if he were ever to do so, which she declares he never will. Yes, you may look knowing if you will, but she is no such fool in some things; and depend upon it she will make a principle of leaving her property in the right channel; and be that as it may, I warn you that you can't do this lad a worse mischief than by putting any such notion into his head, if it be not there already. There's not a more deplorable condition in the world than to be always dangling after an estate, never knowing if it is to be your own or not, and most likely to be disappointed at last; and, to do Miss Charlecote justice, she is perfectly aware of that; and it will not be her fault if he have any false expectations! So, if you feed him with them, it will all be your fault; and that's the last I mean to say about him.'

Captain Charteris was not aware of a colloquy in which Owen had a share.

'This lucky fellow,' said the young Life-guardsmen, 'he is as good as an eldest son—famous shooting county—capital, well-timbered estate.'

'No, Charles,' said Owen, 'my cousin Honor always says I am nothing like an eldest son, for there are nearer relations.'

'Oh ha!' said Charles, with a wink of superior wisdom, 'we understand that. She knows how to keep you on your good behaviour. Why, but for cutting you out, I would even make up to her myself—fine-looking, comely woman, and well-preserved—and only the women quarrel with that splendid hair. Never mind, my boy, I don't mean it. I wouldn't stand in your light.'

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'As if Honor would have *you!*' cried Owen, in fierce scorn. Charles Charteris and his companions, with loud laughter, insisted on the reasons.

'Because,' cried the boy, with flashing looks, 'she would not be ridiculous; and you are—' He paused, but they held him fast, and insisted on hearing what Charles was.

'Not a good Churchman,' he finally pronounced. 'Yes, you may laugh at me, but Honor shan't be laughed at.'

Possibly Owen's views at present were that 'not to be a good Churchman' was synonymous with all imaginable evil, and that he had put it in a delicate manner. Whether he heard the last of it for the rest of his visit may be imagined. And, poor boy, though he was strong and spirited enough with his own contemporaries, there was no dealing with the full-fledged soldier. Nor, when conversation turned to what 'we' did at Hiltonbury, was it possible always to disclaim standing in the same relation to the Holt as did Charles to Castle Blanch; nay, a certain importance seemed to attach to such an assumption of dignity, of which Owen was not loth to avail himself in his disregarded condition.

PART II

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CHAPTER I

We hold our greyhound in our hand,
Our falcon on our glove;
But where shall we find leash or band
For dame that loves to rove?—SCOTT

A June evening shed a slanting light over the greensward of Hiltonbury Holt, and made the western windows glisten like diamonds, as Honora Charlecote slowly walked homewards to her solitary evening meal, alone, except for the nearly blind old pointer who laid his grizzled muzzle upon her knees, gazing wistfully into her face, as seating herself upon the step of the sun-dial, she fondled his smooth, depressed black head.

'Poor Ponto!' she said, 'we are grown old together. Our young ones are all gone.'

Grown old? Less old in proportion than Ponto—still in full vigour of mind and body, but old in disenchantment, and not without the traces of her forty-seven years. The auburn hair was still in rich masses of curl; only on close inspection were silver threads to be detected; the cheek was paler, the brow worn, and the gravely handsome dress was chosen to suit the representative of the Charlecotes, not with regard to lingering youthfulness. The slow movement, subdued tone, and downcast eye, had an air of habitual dejection and patience, as though disappointment had gone deeper, or solitude were telling more on the spirits, than any past blow had done.

She saw the preparations for her tea going on within the window, but ere going indoors, she took out and re-read two letters.

The first was in the irregular decided characters affected by young ladies in the reaction from their grandmothers' pointed illegibilities, and bore a scroll at the top, with the word 'Cilly,' in old English letters of bright blue.

'Lowndes Square, June 14th.

'MY DEAR HONOR,—Many thanks for wishing for your will-o'-th'-wisp again, but it is going to dance off in another direction. Rashe and I are bound to the west of Ireland, as soon as Charles's inauguration is over at Castle Blanch; an odd jumble of festivities it is to be, but Lolly is just cockney enough to be determinedly rural, and there's sure to be some fun to be got out of it; besides, I am pacified by having my special darling, Edna Murrell, the lovely schoolmistress at Wrapworth, to sing to them. How Mr. Calthorp will admire her, as long as he thinks she is Italian! It will be hard if I can't get a rise out of some of them! This being the case, I have not a moment for coming home; but I send some contributions for the prize-giving, some stunning articles from the Lowther Arcade. The gutta-percha face is for Billy Harrison, *whether in disgrace or not*. He deserves compensation for his many weary hours of Sunday School, and it may suggest a new art for beguiling the time. *Mind* you tell him it is from me, with my love; and

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bestow the rest on all the chief reprobates. I wish I could see them; but you have no loss, you know how unedifying I am. Kiss Ponto for me, and ask Robin for his commands to Connaught. I know his sulkiness will transpire through Phœbe. Love to that dear little Cinderella, and tell her mamma and Juliana, that if she does not come out this winter, Mrs. Fulmort shall have no peace and Juliana no partners. Please to look in my room for my great nailed boots and hedging-gloves, also for the pig's wool in the left-hand drawer of the cabinet, and send them to me before the end of next week. Owen would give his ears to come with us, but gentlemen would only obstruct Irish chivalry; I am only afraid there is no hope of a faction fight. Mr. Saville called yesterday, so I made him dine here, and sung him into raptures. What a dear old Don he is!

'Your affectionate cousin, CILLY.'

The second letter stood thus:—

'Farrance's Hotel, June 14th.

'MY DEAR MISS CHARLECOTE,—I have seen Lawrence on your business, and he will prepare the leases for your signature. He suggests that it might be more satisfactory to wait, in case you should be coming to town, so that you might have a personal meeting with the parties; but this will be for you to determine. I came up from --- College on Wednesday, having much enjoyed my visit. Oxford is in many respects a changed place, but as long as our old Head remains to us, I am sure of a gratifying welcome, and I saw many old friends. I exchanged cards with Owen Sandbrook, but only saw him as we met in the street, and a very fine-looking youth he is, a perfect Hercules, and the champion of his college in all feats of strength; likely, too, to stand well in the class list. His costume was not what we should once have considered academical; but his is a daring set, intellectual as well as bodily, and the clever young men of the present day are not what they were in my time. It is gratifying to hear how warmly and affectionately he talks of you. I do not know how far you have undertaken the supplies, but I give you a hint that a warning on that subject might not be inappropriate, unless they have come into some great accession of fortune on their uncle's death. I ventured to call upon the young lady in Lowndes Square, and was most graciously received, and asked to dinner by the young Mrs. Charteris. It was a most *recherché* dinner in the new Italian fashion, which does not quite approve itself to me. "Regardless of expense," seems to be the family motto. Your pupil sings better than ever, and knew how to keep her hold of my heart, though I suspected her of patronizing the old parson to pique her more brilliant admirers, whom she possesses in plenty; and no wonder, for she is pretty enough to turn any man's head and shows to great advantage beside her cousin, Miss Charteris. I hope you will be able to prevent the cousins from really undertaking the wild plan of travelling alone in Ireland, for the sake, they say, of salmon-fishing. I should have thought them not in earnest, but girls are as much altered as boys from the days of my experience, and brothers, too; for Mr. Charteris seemed to view the scheme very coolly; but, as I told my friend Lucilla, I hope you will bring her to reason. I hope your hay-crop promises favourably.

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'Yours sincerely, W. SAVILLE.'

No wonder that these letters made loneliness more lonely!

'Oh, that Horatia!' exclaimed she, almost aloud. 'Oh, that Captain Charteris were available! No one else ever had any real power with Lucy! It was an unlucky day when he saw that colonial young lady, and settled down in Vancouver's Island! And yet how I used to wish him away, with the surly independence he was always infusing into Owen. Wanting to take him out there, indeed! And yet, and yet—I sometimes doubt whether I did right to set my personal influence over my dear affectionate boy so much in opposition to his uncle—Mr. Charteris was on my side, though! And I always took care to have it clearly understood that it was his education alone that I undertook. What can Mr. Saville mean?—The supplies? Owen knows what he has to trust to, but I can talk to him. A daring set!—Yes, everything appears daring to an old-world man like Mr. Saville. I am sure of my Owen; with our happy home Sundays. I know I am his Sweet Honey still. And yet'—then hastily turning from that dubious 'and yet'—'Owen is the only chance for his sister. She does care for him; and he will view this mad scheme in the right light. Shall I meet him at the beginning of the vacation, and see what he can do with Lucy? Mr. Saville thinks I ought to be in London, and I think I might be useful to the Parsons. I suppose I must; but it *is* a heart-ache to be at St. Wulstan's. One is used to it here; and there are the poor people, and the farm, and the garden—yes, and those dear nightingales—and you, poor Ponto! One is used to it here, but St. Wulstan's is a fresh pain, and so is coming back. But, if it be in the way of right, and to save poor Lucy, it must be, and it is what life is made of. It is a "following of the funeral" of the hopes that sprang up after my spring-time. Is it my chastisement, or is it my training? Alas! maybe I took those children more for *myself* than for duty's sake! May it all be for their true good in the end, whatever it may be with me. And now I *will* not dream. It is of no use save to unnerve me. Let me go to my book. It must be a story to-night. I cannot fix my attention yet.'

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As she rose, however, her face brightened at the sight of two advancing figures, and she went forward to meet them.

One was a long, loosely-limbed youth of two-and-twenty, with broad shoulders, a heavy overhanging brow, dark gray serious eyes, and a mouth scarcely curved, and so fast shut as to disclose hardly any lip. The hair was dark and lank; the air was of ungainly force, that had not yet found its purpose, and therefore was not at ease; and but for the educated cast of countenance he would have had a peasant look, in the brown, homely undress garb, which to most youths of his age would have been becoming.

With him was a girl, tall, slim, and lightly made, though of nicely rounded figure. In height she looked like seventeen, but her dress was more childish than usual at that age; and the contour of her smooth cheeks and short rounded chin, her long neck, her happy blue eyes, fully opened like those of a child, her fair rosy skin and fresh simple air, might almost have belonged to seven years old: and there was all the earnestness, innocence, and careless ease of childhood in her movements and gestures, as she sprang forward to meet Miss Charlecote, exclaiming, 'Robin said I might come.'

'And very right of him. You are both come to tea?' she added, in affirmative interrogation, as she shook hands with the young man.

'No, thank you,' he answered; 'at least I only brought Phœbe, having rescued her from Miss Fennimore's clutches. I must be at dinner. But I will come again for her.' And he yawned wearily.

'I will drive her back; you are tired.'

'No!' he said. 'At least the walk is one of the few tolerable things there is. I'll come as soon as I can escape, Phœbe. Past seven—I must go!'

'Can't you stay? I could find some food for you.'

'No, thank you,' he still said; 'I do not know whether Mervyn will come home, and there must not be too many empty chairs. Good-bye!' and he walked off with long strides, but with stooping shoulders, and an air of dejection almost amounting to discontent.

'Poor Robin!' said Honora, 'I wish he could have stayed.'

'He would have liked it very much,' said Phœbe, casting wistful glances toward him.

'What a pity he did not give notice of his intentions at home!'

'He never will. He particularly dislikes—'

'What?' as Phoebe paused and coloured.

'Saying anything to anybody,' she answered with a little smile. 'He cannot endure remarks.'

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'I am a very sober old body for a visit to me to be the occasion of remarks!' said Honor, laughing more merrily than perhaps Robert himself could have done; but Phœbe answered with grave, straightforward sincerity, 'Yes, but he did not know if Lucy might not be come home.'

Honora sighed, but playfully said, 'In which case he would have stayed?'

'No,' said the still grave girl, 'he would have been still less likely to do so.'

'Ah! the remarks would have been more pointed! But he has brought you at any rate, and that is something! How did he achieve it?'

'Miss Fennimore is really quite ready to be kind,' said Phœbe, earnestly, with an air of defence, 'whenever we have finished all that we have to do.'

'And when is that?' asked Honor, smiling.

'Now for once,' answered Phœbe, with a bright arch look. 'Yes, I sometimes can; and so does Bertha when she tries; and, indeed, Miss Charlecote, I do like Miss Fennimore; she never is hard upon poor Maria. No governess we ever had made her cry so seldom.'

Miss Charlecote only said it was a comfort. Within herself she hoped that, for Maria's peace and that of all concerned, her deficiency might become an acknowledged fact. She saw that the sparing Maria's tears was such a boon to Phœbe as to make her forgive all overtaking of herself.

'So you get on better,' she said.

'Much better than Robin chooses to believe we do,' said Phœbe, smiling; 'perhaps it seemed hard at first, but it is comfortable to be made to do everything thoroughly, and to be shown a better best than we had ever thought of. I think it ought to be a help in doing the duty of all one's life in a thorough way.'

'All that thou hast to do,' said Honor, smiling, 'the week-day side of the fourth commandment.'

'Yes, that is just the reason why I like it,' said Phœbe, with bright gladness in her countenance.

'But is that the motive Miss Fennimore puts before you?' said Honor, a little ironically.

'She does not say so,' answered Phœbe. 'She says that she never interferes with her pupils' religious tenets. But, indeed, I do not think she teaches us anything wrong, and there is always Robert to ask.'

This passed as the two ladies were entering the house and preparing for the evening meal. The table was placed in the bay of the open window, and looked very inviting, the little silver tea-pot steaming beside the two quaint china cups, the small crisp twists of bread, the butter cool in ice-plant leaves, and some fresh fruit blushing in a pretty basket. The Holt was a region of Paradise to Phœbe Fulmort; and glee shone upon her sweet face, though it was very quiet enjoyment, as the summer breeze played softly round her cheeks and danced with a merry little spiral that had detached itself from her glossy folds of light hair.

'How delicious!' she said. 'How sweet the honeysuckle is, dear old thing! You say you have known it all your life, and yet it is fresh as ever.'

'It is a little like you, Phœbe,' said Honor, smiling.

'What! because it is not exactly a pretty flower?'

'Partly; and I could tell you of a few other likenesses, such as your being Robert's woodbine, yet with a sort of clinging freedom. Yes, and for the qualities you share with the willow, ready to give thanks and live on the least that Heaven may give.'

'But I don't live on the least that Heaven may give,' said Phœbe, in such wonder that Honor smiled at the justice of her simile, without impressing it upon Phœbe, only asking—

'Is the French journey fixed upon, Phœbe?'

'Yes; they start this day fortnight.'

'They—not you?'

'No; there would be no room for me,' with a small sigh.

'How can that be? Who is going? Papa, mamma, two sisters!'

'Mervyn,' added Phœbe, 'the courier, and the two maids.'

'Two maids! Impossible!'

'It is always uncomfortable if mamma and my sisters have only one between them,' said Phœbe, in her tone of perfect acquiescence and conviction; and as her friend could not restrain a gesture of indignation, she added eagerly—'But, indeed, it is not only for that reason, but Miss Fennimore says I am not formed enough to profit by foreign travel.'

'She wants you to finish Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, eh?'

'It might be a pity to go away and lose so much of her teaching,' said Phœbe, with persevering contentment. 'I dare say they will go abroad again, and perhaps I shall never have so much time for learning. But, Miss Charlecote, is Lucilla coming home for the Horticultural Show?'

'I am afraid not, my dear. I think I shall go to London to see about her, among other things. The Charterises seem to have quite taken possession of her, ever since she went to be her cousin Caroline's bridesmaid, and I must try to put in my claim.'

'Ah! Robin so much wished to have seen her,' sighed Phœbe. 'He says he cannot settle to anything.'

'Without seeing her?' said Honor, amused, though not without pain.

'Yes,' said Phœbe; 'he has thought so much about Lucilla.'

'And he tells you?'

'Yes,' in a voice expressing of course; while the frank, clear eyes turned full on Miss Charlecote with such honest seriousness, that she thought Phœbe's charm as a confidante might be this absence of romantic consciousness; and she knew of old that when Robert wanted her opinion or counsel, he spared his own embarrassment by seeking it through his favourite sister. Miss Charlecote's influence had done as much for Robert as he had done for Phœbe, and Phœbe had become his medium of communication with her in all matters of near and delicate interest. She was not surprised when the maiden proceeded—'Papa wants Robin to attend to the office while he is away.'

'Indeed! Does Robin like it?'

'He would not mind it for a time; but papa wants him, besides, to take to the business in earnest. You know, my great-uncle, Robert Mervyn, left Robert all his fortune, quite in his own hands; and papa says that if he were to put that into the distillery it would do the business great good, and that Robert would be one of the richest men in England in ten years' time.'

'But that would be a complete change in his views,' exclaimed Honor, unable to conceal her disapproval and consternation.

'Just so,' answered Phœbe; 'and that is the reason why he wants to see Lucy. She always declared that she could not bear people in business, and we always thought of him as likely to be a clergyman; but, on the other hand, she has become used to London society, and it is only by his joining in the distillery that he could give her what she is accustomed to, and that is the reason

he is anxious to see her.'

'So Lucy is to decide his fate,' said Honora. 'I am almost sorry to hear it. Surely, he has never spoken to her.'

'He never does speak,' said Phœbe, with the calm gravity of simplicity which was like a halo of dignity. 'There is no need of speaking. Lucilla knows how he feels as well as she knows that she breathes the air.'

And regards it as little, perhaps, thought Honor, sadly. 'Poor Robin!' she said; 'I suppose he had better get his mind settled; but indeed it is a fearful responsibility for my poor foolish Lucy—' and but for the fear of grieving Phœbe, she would have added, that such a purpose as that of entering Holy Orders ought not to have been made dependent upon the fancy of a girl. Possibly her expression betrayed her sentiments, for Phœbe answered—'There can be no doubt that Lucy will set him at rest. I am certain that she would be shocked at the notion that her tastes were making him doubt whether to be a clergyman.'

'I hope so! I trust so!' said Honora, almost mournfully. 'It may be very good for her, as I believe it is for every woman of any soundness, to be taught that her follies tell upon man's greater aims and purposes. It may be wholesome for her and a check, but—'

Phœbe wondered that her friend paused and looked so sad.

'Oh! Phœbe,' said Honora, after a moment's silence, speaking fervently, 'if you can in any way do so, warn your brother against making an idol! Let nothing come between him and the direct devotion of will and affection to the Higher Service. If he decide on the one or the other, let it be from duty, not with respect to anything else. I do not suppose it is of any use to warn him,' she added, with the tears in her eyes. 'Every one sets the whole soul upon some one object, not the right, and then comes the shipwreck.'

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'Dear Robin!' said Phœbe. 'He is so good! I am sure he always thinks first of what is right. But I think I see what you mean. If he undertake the business, it should be as a matter of obedience to papa, not to keep Lucy in the great world. And, indeed, I do not think my father does care much, only he would like the additional capital; and Robert is so much more steady than Mervyn, that he would be more useful. Perhaps it would make him more important at home; no one there has any interest in common with him; and I think that moves him a little; but, after all, those do not seem reasons for not giving himself to God's service,' she finished, reverently and considerately.

'No, indeed!' cried Miss Charlecote.

'Then you think he ought not to change his mind?'

'You have thought so all along,' smiled Honor.

'I did not like it,' said Phœbe, 'but I did not know if I were right. I did tell him that I really believed Lucy would think the more highly of him if he settled for himself without reference to her.'

'You did! You were a capital little adviser, Phœbe! A woman worthy to be loved at all had always rather be set second instead of first:—'

"I could not love thee, dear, so much,
Loved I not honour more."

That is the true spirit, and I am glad you judged Lucy to be capable of it. Keep your brother up to that, and all may be well!

'I believe Robert knows it all the time,' said Phœbe. 'He always is right at the bottom; but his feelings get so much tried that he does not know how to bear it! I hope Lucy will be kind to him if they meet in London, for he has been so much harassed that he wants some comfort from her. If she would only be in earnest!'

'Does he go to London, at all events?'

'He has promised to attend to the office in Great Whittington-street for a month, by way of experiment.'

'I'll tell you what, Phœbe,' cried Honora, radiantly, 'you and I will go too! You shall come with me to Woolstone-lane, and Robin shall be with us every day; and we will try and make this silly Lucy into a rational being.'

'Oh! Miss Charlecote, thank you—thank you.' The quiet girl's face and neck were all one crimson glow of delight.

'If you can sleep in a little brown cupboard of a room in the very core of the City's heart.'

'Delightful! I have so wished to see that house. Owen has told me such things about it. Oh, thank you, Miss Charlecote!'

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'Have you ever seen anything in London?'

'Never. We hardly ever go with the rest; and if we do, we only walk in the square. What a holiday it will be!'

'We will see everything, and do it justice. I'll get an order for the print-room at the British Museum. I day say Robin never saw it either; and what a treat it will be to take you to the Egyptian Gallery!' cried Honora, excited into looking at the expedition in the light of a party of pleasure, as she saw happiness beaming in the young face opposite.

They built up their schemes in the open window, pausing to listen to the nightingales, who, having ceased for two hours, apparently for supper, were now in full song, echoing each other in all the woods of Hiltonbury, casting over it a network of sweet melody. Honora was inclined to regret leaving them in their glory; but Phœbe, with the world before her, was too honest to profess poetry which she did not feel. Nightingales were all very well in their place, but the first real sight of London was more.

The lamp came in, and Phœbe held out her hands for something to do, and was instantly provided with a child's frock, while Miss Charlecote read to her one of Fouqué's shorter tales by way of supplying the element of chivalrous imagination which was wanting in the Beauchamp system of education.

So warm was the evening, that the window remained open, until Ponto erected his crest as a footfall came steadily along, nearer and nearer. Uplifting one of his pendant lips, he gave a low growl through his blunted teeth, and listened again; but apparently satisfied that the step was familiar, he replaced his head on his crossed paws, and presently Robert Fulmort's head and the upper part of his person, in correct evening costume, were thrust in at the window, the moonlight making his face look very white, as he said, 'Come, Phœbe, make haste; it is very late.'

'Is it?' cried Phœbe, springing up; 'I thought I had only been here an hour.'

'Three, at least,' said Robert, yawning; 'six by my feelings. I could not get away, for Mr. Crabbe stayed to dinner; Mervyn absented himself, and my father went to sleep.'

'Robin, only think, Miss Charlecote is so kind as to say she will take me to London!'

'It is very kind,' said Robert, warmly, his weary face and voice suddenly relieved.

'I shall be delighted to have a companion,' said Honora; 'and I reckon upon you too, Robin, whenever you can spare time from your work. Come in, and let us talk it over.'

'Thank you, I can't. The dragon will fall on Phœbe if I keep her out too late. Be quick, Phœbe.'

While his sister went to fetch her hat, he put his elbows on the sill, and leaning into the room, said, 'Thank you again; it will be a wonderful treat to her, and she has never had one in her life!'

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'I was in hopes she would have gone to Germany.'

'It is perfectly abominable! It is all the others' doing! They know no one would look at them a second time if anything so much younger and pleasanter was by! They think her coming out would make them look older. I know it would make them look crosser.'

Laughing was the only way to treat this tirade, knowing, as Honor did, that there was but too much truth in it. She said, however, 'Yet one could hardly wish Phœbe other than she is. The rosebud keeps its charm longer in the shade.'

'I like justice,' quoth Robert.

'And,' she continued, 'I really think that she is much benefited by this formidable governess. Accuracy and solidity and clearness of head are worth cultivating.'

'Nasty latitudinarian piece of machinery,' said Robert, with his fingers over his mouth, like a sulky child.

'Maybe so; but you guard Phœbe, and she guards Bertha; and whatever your sense of injustice may be, this surely is a better school for her than gaities as yet.'

'It will be a more intolerable shame than ever if they will not let her go with you.'

'Too intolerable to be expected,' smiled Honora. 'I shall come and beg for her to-morrow, and I do not believe I shall be disappointed.'

She spoke with the security of one not in the habit of having her patronage obstructed by relations; and Phœbe coming down with renewed thanks, the brother and sister started on their way home in the moonlight—the one plodding on moodily, the other, unable to repress her glee, bounding on in a succession of little skips, and pirouetting round to clap her hands, and exclaim, 'Oh! Robin, is it not delightful?'

'If they will let you go,' said he, too desponding for hope.

'Do you think they will not?' said Phœbe, with slower and graver steps. 'Do you really think so? But no! It can't lead to coming out; and I know they like me to be happy when it interferes with nobody.'

'Great generosity,' said Robert, dryly.

'Oh, but, Robin, you know elder ones come first.'

'A truth we are not likely to forget,' said Robert. 'I wish my uncle had been sensible of it. That

legacy of his stands between Mervyn and me, and will never do me any good.'

'I don't understand,' said Phœbe; 'Mervyn has always been completely the eldest son.'

'Ay,' returned Robert, 'and with the tastes of an eldest son. His allowance does not suffice for them, and he does not like to see me independent. If my uncle had only been contented to let us share and share alike, then my father would have had no interest in drawing me into the precious gin and brandy manufacture.'

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'You did not think he meant to make it a matter of obedience,' said Phœbe.

'No; he could hardly do that after the way he has brought me up, and what we have been taught all our lives about liberty of the individual, absence of control, and the like jargon.'

'Then you are not obliged?'

He made no answer, and they walked on in silence across the silvery lawn, the maythorns shining out like flaked towers of snow in the moonlight, and casting abyss-like shadows, the sky of the most deep and intense blue, and the carols of the nightingales ringing around them. Robert paused when he had passed through the gate leading into the dark path down-hill through the wood, and setting his elbows on it, leant over it, and looked back at the still and beautiful scene, in all the white mystery of moonlight, enhanced by the white-blossomed trees and the soft outlines of slumbering sheep. One of the birds, in a bush close to them, began prolonging its drawn-in notes in a continuous prelude, then breaking forth into a varied complex warbling, so wondrous that there was no moving till the creature paused.

It seemed to have been a song of peace to Robert, for he gave a long but much softer sigh, and pushed back his hat, saying, 'All good things dwell on the Holt side of the boundary.'

'A sort of Sunday world,' said Phœbe.

'Yes; after this wood one is in another atmosphere.'

'Yet you have carried your cares there, poor Robin.'

'So one does into Sunday, but to get another light thrown on them. The Holt has been the blessing of my life—of both our lives, Phœbe.'

She responded with all her heart. 'Yes, it has made everything happier, at home and everywhere else. I never can think why Lucilla is not more fond of it.'

'You are mistaken,' exclaimed Robert; 'she loves no place so well; but you don't consider what claims her relations have upon her. That cousin Horatia, to whom she is so much attached, losing both her parents, how could she do otherwise than be with her?'

'Miss Charteris does not seem to be in great trouble now,' said Phœbe.

'You do not consider; you have never seen grief, and you do not know how much more a sympathizing friend is needed when the world supposes the sorrow to be over, and ordinary habits to be resumed.'

Phœbe was willing to believe him right, though considering that Horatia Charteris lived with her brother and his wife, she could hardly be as lonely as Miss Charlecote.

'We shall see Lucy in London,' she said.

Robert again sighed heavily. 'Then it will be over,' he said. 'Did you say anything there?' he pursued, as they plunged into the dark shadows of the woodland path, more congenial to the subject than the light.

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'Yes, I did,' said Phœbe.

'And she thought me a weak, unworthy wretch for ever dreaming of swerving from my original path.'

'No!' said Phœbe, 'not if it were your duty.'

'I tell you, Phœbe, it is as much my duty to consult Lucilla's happiness as if any words had passed between us. I have never pledged myself to take Orders. It has been only a wish, not a vocation; and if she have become averse to the prospect of a quiet country life, it would not be treating her fairly not to give her the choice of comparative wealth, though procured by means her family might despise.'

'Yes, I knew you would put right and duty first; and I suppose by doing so you make it certain to end rightly, one way or other.'

'A very few years, and I could realize as much as this Calthorp, the millionaire, whom they talk of as being so often at the Charterises.'

'It will not be so,' said Phœbe. 'I know what she will say;' and as Robert looked anxiously at her, she continued—

'She will say she never dreamt of your being turned from anything so great by any fancies she has seemed to have. She will say so more strongly, for you know her father was a clergyman, and

Miss Charlecote brought her up.'

Phœbe's certainty made Robert catch something of her hopes.

'In that case,' he said, 'matters might be soon settled. This fortune of mine would be no misfortune then; and probably, Phœbe, my sisters would have no objection to your being happy with us.'

'As soon as you could get a curacy! Oh, how delightful! and Maria and Bertha would come too.'

Robert held his peace, not certain whether Lucilla would consider Maria an embellishment to his ideal parsonage; but they talked on with cheerful schemes while descending through the wood, unlocking a gate that formed the boundary between the Holt and the Beauchamp properties, crossing a field or two, and then coming out into the park. Presently they were in sight of the house, rising darkly before them, with many lights shining in the windows behind the blinds.

'They are all gone up-stairs!' said Phœbe, dismayed. 'How late it must be!'

'There's a light in the smoking-room,' said Robert; 'we can get in that way.'

'No, no! Mervyn may have some one with him. Come in quietly by the servants' entrance.'

No danger that people would not be on foot there! As the brother and sister moved along the long stone passage, fringed with labelled bells, one open door showed two weary maidens still toiling over the plates of the late dinner; and another, standing ajar, revealed various men-servants regaling themselves; and words and tones caught Robert's ear making his brow lower with sudden pain.

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Phœbe was proceeding to mount the stone stairs, when a rustling and chattering, as of maids descending, caused her and her brother to stand aside to make way, and down came a pair of heads and candles together over a green bandbox, and then voices in vulgar tones half suppressed. 'I couldn't venture it, not with Miss Juliana—but Miss Fulmort—she never looks over her bills, nor knows what is in her drawers—I told her it was faded, when she had never worn it once!'

And tittering, they passed by the brother and sister, who were still unseen, but Robert heaved a sigh and murmured, 'Miserable work!' somewhat to his sister's surprise, for to her the great ill-regulated household was an unquestioned institution, and she did not expect him to bestow so much compassion on Augusta's discarded bonnet. At the top of the steps they opened a door, and entered a great wide hall. All was exceedingly still. A gas-light was burning over the fire-place, but the corners were in gloom, and the coats and cloaks looked like human figures in the distance. Phœbe waited while Robert lighted her candle for her. Albeit she was not nervous, she started when a door was sharply pushed open, and another figure appeared; but it was nothing worse than her brother Mervyn, in easy costume, and redolent of tobacco.

About three years older than Robert, he was more neatly though not so strongly made, shorter, and with more regular features, but much less countenance. If the younger brother had a worn and dejected aspect, the elder, except in moments of excitement, looked *bored*. It was as if Robert really had the advantage of him in knowing what to be out of spirits about.

'Oh! it's you, is it?' said he, coming forward, with a sauntering, scuffling movement in his slippers. 'You larking, Phœbe? What next?'

'I have been drinking tea with Miss Charlecote,' explained Phœbe.

Mervyn slightly shrugged his shoulders, murmuring something about 'Lively pastime.'

'I could not fetch her sooner,' said Robert, 'for my father went to sleep, and no one chose to be at the pains of entertaining Crabbe.'

'Ay—a prevision of his staying to dinner made me stay and dine with the --th mess. Very sagacious—eh, Phœbe?' said he, turning, as if he liked to look into her fresh face.

'Too sagacious,' said she, smiling; 'for you left him all to Robert.'

Manner and look expressed that this was a matter of no concern, and he said ungraciously: 'Nobody detained Robert, it was his own concern.'

'Respect to my father and his guests,' said Robert, with downright gravity that gave it the effect of a reproach.

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Mervyn only raised his shoulders up to his ears in contempt, took up his candle, and wished Phœbe good night.

Poor Mervyn Fulmort! Discontent had been his life-long comrade. He detested his father's occupation as galling to family pride, yet was greedy both of the profits and the management. He hated country business and country life, yet chafed at not having the control of his mother's estate, and grumbled at all his father's measures. 'What should an old distiller know of landed property?' In fact he saw the same difference between himself and his father as did the ungracious Plantagenet between the son of a Count and the son of a King: and for want of Provençal troubadours with whom to rebel, he supplied their place by the turf and the billiard-table. At present he was expiating some heavy debts by a forced residence with his parents, and

unwilling attention to the office, a most distasteful position, which he never attempted to improve, and which permitted him both the tedium of idleness and complaints against all the employment to which he was necessitated.

The ill-managed brothers were just nearly enough of an age for rivalry, and had never loved one another even as children. Robert's steadiness had been made a reproach to Mervyn, and his grave, rather surly character had never been conciliating. The independence left to the younger brother by their mother's relative was grudged by the elder as an injury to himself, and it was one of the misfortunes of Beauchamp that the two sons had never been upon happy terms together. Indeed, save that Robert's right principles and silent habits hindered him from readily giving or taking offence, there might have been positive outbreaks of a very unbrotherly nature.

CHAPTER II

Enough of science and of art,
Close up those barren leaves!
Come forth, and bring with you a heart
That watches and receives.—WORDSWORTH

'Half-past five, Miss Phœbe.'

'Thank you;' and before her eyes were open, Phœbe was on the floor.

Six was the regulation hour. Systematic education had discovered that half-an-hour was the maximum allowable for morning toilette, and at half-past six the young ladies must present themselves in the school-room.

The Bible, Prayer Book, and 'Daily Meditations' could have been seldom touched, had not Phœbe, ever since Robert had impressed on her the duty of such constant study, made an arrangement for gaining an extra half-hour. Cold mornings and youthful sleepiness had received a daily defeat: and, mayhap, it was such a course of victory that made her frank eyes so blithesome, and her step so free and light.

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That bright scheme, too, shone before her, as such a secret of glad hope, that, knowing how uncertain were her chances of pleasure, she prayed that she might not set her heart on it. It was no trifle to her, and her simple spirit ventured to lay her wishes before her loving Father in Heaven, and entreat that she might not be denied, if it were right for her and would be better for Robert; or, if not, that she might be good under the disappointment.

Her orisons sent her forth all brightness, with her small head raised like that of a young fawn, her fresh lips parted by an incipient smile of hope, and her cheeks in a rosy glow of health, a very Hebe, as Mr. Saville had once called her.

Such a morning face as hers was not always met by Miss Fennimore, who, herself able to exist on five hours' sleep, had no mercy on that of her pupils; and she rewarded Phœbe's smiling good-morrow with 'This is better than I expected, you returned home so late.'

'Robert could not come for me early,' said Phœbe.

'How did you spend the evening?'

'Miss Charlecote read aloud to me. It was a delightful German story.'

'Miss Charlecote is a very well-informed person, and I am glad the time was not absolutely lost. I hope you observed the condensation of the vapours on your way home.'

'Robert was talking to me, and the nightingales were singing.'

'It is a pity,' said Miss Fennimore, not unkindly, 'that you should not cultivate the habit of observation. Women can seldom theorize, but they should always observe facts, as these are the very groundwork of discovery, and such a rare opportunity as a walk at night should not be neglected.'

It was no use to plead that this was all very well when there was no brother Robert with his destiny in the scales, so Phœbe made a meek assent, and moved to the piano, suppressing a sigh as Miss Fennimore set off on a domiciliary visit to the other sisters.

Mr. Fulmort liked his establishment to prove his consequence, and to the old family mansion of the Mervyns he had added a whole wing for the educational department. Above, there was a passage, with pretty little bed-rooms opening from it; below there were two good-sized rooms, with their own door opening into the garden. The elder ones had long ago deserted it, and so completely shut off was it from the rest of the house, that the governess and her pupils were as secluded as though in a separate dwelling. The schoolroom was no repulsive-looking abode; it was furnished almost well enough for a drawing-room; and only the easels, globes, and desks, the crayon studies on the walls, and a formidable time-table showed its real destination.

The window looked out into a square parterre, shut in with tall laurel hedges, and filled with the gayest and sweetest blossoms. It was Mrs. Fulmort's garden for cut flowers; supplying the bouquets that decked her tables, or were carried to wither at balls; and there were three long, narrow beds, that Phœbe and her younger sisters still called theirs, and loved with the pride of

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property; but, indeed, the bright carpeting of the whole garden was something especially their own, rejoicing their eyes, and unvalued by the rest of the house. On the like liberal scale were the salaries of the educators. Governesses were judged according to their demands; and the highest bidder was supposed to understand her own claims best. Miss Fennimore was a finishing governess of the highest order, thinking it an insult to be offered a pupil below her teens, or to lose one till nearly beyond them; nor was she far from being the treasure that Mrs. Fulmort pronounced her, in gratitude for the absence of all the explosions produced by the various imperfections of her predecessors.

A highly able woman, and perfectly sincere, she possessed the qualities of a ruler, and had long experience in the art. Her discipline was perfect in machinery, and her instructions admirably complete. No one could look at her keen, sensible, self-possessed countenance, her decided mouth, ever busy hands, and unpretending but well-chosen style of dress, without seeing that her energy and intelligence were of a high order; and there was principle likewise, though no one ever quite penetrated to the foundation of it. Certainly she was not an irreligious person; she conformed, as she said, to the habits of each family she lived with, and she highly estimated moral perfections. Now and then a degree of scorn, for the narrowness of dogma, would appear in reading history, but in general she was understood to have opinions which she did not obtrude.

As a teacher she was excellent; but her own strong conformation prevented her from understanding that young girls were incapable of such tension of intellect as an enthusiastic scholar of forty-two, and that what was sport to her was toil to a mind unaccustomed to constant attention. Change of labour is not rest, unless it be through gratification of the will. Her very best pupil she had killed. Finding a very sharp sword, in a very frail scabbard, she had whetted the one and worn down the other, by every stimulus in her power, till a jury of physicians might have found her guilty of manslaughter; but perfectly unconscious of her own agency in causing the atrophy, her dear Anna Webster lived foremost in her affections, the model for every subsequent pupil. She seldom remained more than two years in a family. Sometimes the young brains were over-excited; more often they fell into a dreary state of drilled diligence; but she was too much absorbed in the studies to look close into the human beings, and marvelled when the fathers and mothers were blind enough to part with her on the plea of health and need of change.

On the whole she had never liked any of her charges since the renowned Anna Webster so well as Phœbe Fulmort; although her abilities did not rise above the 'very fair,' and she was apt to be bewildered in metaphysics and political economy; but then she had none of the eccentricities of will and temper of Miss Fennimore's clever girls, nor was she like most good-humoured ones, recklessly *insouciant*. Her only drawback, in the governess's eyes, was that she never seemed desirous of going beyond what was daily required of her—each study was a duty, and not a subject of zeal. p. 108

Presently Miss Fennimore came back, followed by the two sisters, neither of them in the best of tempers. Maria, a stout, clumsily-made girl of fifteen, had the same complexion and open eyes as Phœbe, but her colouring was muddled, the gaze full-orbed and vacant, and the lips, always pouting, were just now swelled with the vexation that filled her prominent eyelids with tears. Bertha, two years younger, looked as if nature had designed her for a boy, and the change into a girl was not yet decided. She, too, was very like Maria; but Maria's open nostrils were in her a droll *retroussé*, puggish little nose; her chin had a boyish squareness and decision, her round cheeks had two comical dimples, her eyes were either stretched in defiance or narrowed up with fun, and a slight cast in one gave a peculiar archness and character to her face; her skin, face, hands, and all, were uniformly pinky; her hair in such obstinate yellow curls, that it was to be hoped, for her sake, that the fashion of being *crépé* might continue. The brow lowered in petulance; and as she kissed Phœbe, she muttered in her ear a vituperation of the governess in schoolroom *patois*; then began tossing the lesson-books in the air and catching them again, as a preliminary to finding the places, thus drawing on herself a reproof in German. French and German were alternately spoken in lesson hours by Phœbe and Bertha, who had lived with foreign servants from infancy; but poor Maria had not the faculty of keeping the tongues distinct, and corrections only terrified her into confusion worse confounded, until Miss Fennimore had in despair decided that English was the best alternative.

Phœbe practised vigorously. Aware that nothing pleasant was passing, and that, be it what it might, she could do no good, she was glad to stop her ears with her music, until eight o'clock brought a pause in the shape of breakfast. Formerly the schoolroom party had joined the family meal, but since the two elder girls had been out, and Mervyn's friends had been often in the house, it had been decided that the home circle was too numerous; and what had once been the play-room was allotted to be the eating-room of the younger ones, without passing the red door, on the other side of which lay the world.

Breakfast was announced by the schoolroom maid, and Miss Fennimore rose. No sooner was her back turned, than Bertha indulged in a tremendous writhing yawn, wriggling in her chair, and clenching both fat fists, as she threatened with each, at her governess's retreating figure, so ludicrously, that Phœbe smiled while she shook her head, and an explosive giggle came from Maria, causing the lady to turn and behold Miss Bertha demure as ever, and a look of disconsolate weariness fast settling down on each of the two young faces. The unbroken routine pressed heavily at those fit moments for family greetings and for relaxation, and even Phœbe would gladly have been spared the German account of the Holt and of Miss Charlecote's book, for which she was called upon. Bertha meanwhile, to whom waggishness was existence, was carrying on a silent drama on her plate, her roll being a quarry, and her knife the workmen p. 109

attacking it. Now she undermined, now acted an explosion, with uplifted eyebrows and an indicated 'puff!' with her lips, with constant dumb-show directed to Maria, who, without half understanding, was in a constant suppressed titter, sometimes concealed by her pocket-handkerchief.

Quick as Miss Fennimore was, and often as she frowned on Maria's outbreaks, she never could detect their provocative. Over-restraint and want of sympathy were direct instruction in unscrupulous slyness of amusement. A sentence of displeasure on Maria's ill-mannered folly was in the act of again filling her eyes with tears, when there was a knock at the door, and all the faces beamed with glad expectation.

It was Robert. This was the time of day when he knew Miss Fennimore could best tolerate him, and he seldom failed to make his appearance on his way down-stairs, the only one of the privileged race who was a wonted object on this side the baize door. Phœbe thought he looked more cheerful, and indeed gravity could hardly have withstood Bertha's face, as she gave a mischievous tweak to his hair behind, under colour of putting her arm round his neck.

'Well, Curlylocks, how much mischief did you do yesterday?'

'I'd no spirits for mischief,' she answered, with mock pitifulness, twinkling up her eyes, and rubbing them with her knuckles as if she were crying. 'You barbarous wretch, taking Phœbe to feast on strawberries and cream with Miss Charlecote, and leaving poor me to poke in that stupid drawing-room, with nothing to do but to count the scollops of mamma's flounce!'

'It is your turn. Will Miss Fennimore kindly let you have a walk with me this evening?'

'And me,' said Maria.

'You, of course. May I come for them at five o'clock?'

'I can hardly tell what to say about Maria. I do not like to disappoint her, but she knows that nothing displeases me so much as that ill-mannered habit of giggling,' said Miss Fennimore, not without concern. Merciful as to Maria's attainments, she was strict as to her manners, and was striving to teach her self-restraint enough to be unobtrusive.

Poor Maria's eyes were glassy with tears, her chest heaved with sobs, and she broke out, 'O pray, Miss Fennimore, O pray!' while all the others interceded for her; and Bertha, well knowing that it was all her fault, avoided the humiliation of a confession, by the apparent generosity of exclaiming, 'Take us both to-morrow instead, Robin.'

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Robert's journey was, however, fixed for that day, and on this plea, licence was given for the walk. Phœbe smiled congratulation, but Maria was slow in cheering up; and when, on returning to the schoolroom, the three sisters were left alone together for a few moments, she pressed up to Phœbe's side, and said, 'Phœbe, I've not said my prayers. Do you think anything will happen to me?'

Her awfully mysterious tone set Bertha laughing. 'Yes, Maria, all the cows in the park will run at you,' she was beginning, when the grave rebuke of Phœbe's eyes cut her short.

'How was it, my dear?' asked Phœbe, tenderly fondling her sister.

'I was so sleepy, and Bertha would blow soap-bubbles in her hands while we were washing, and then Miss Fennimore came, and I've been naughty now, and I know I shall go on, and then Robin won't take me.'

'I will ask Miss Fennimore to let you go to your room, dearest,' said Phœbe. 'You must not play again in dressing time, for there's nothing so sad as to miss our prayers. You are a good girl to care so much. Had you time for yours, Bertha?'

'Oh, plenty!' with a toss of her curly head. 'I don't take ages about things, like Maria.'

'Prayers cannot be hurried,' said Phœbe, looking distressed, and she was about to remind Bertha to whom she spoke in prayer, when the child cut her short by the exclamation, 'Nonsense, Maria, about being naughty. You know I always make you laugh when I please, and that has more to do with it than saying your prayers, I fancy.'

'Perhaps,' said Phœbe, very sadly, 'if you had said yours more in earnest, my poor Bertha, you would either not have made Maria laugh, or would not have left her to bear all the blame.'

'Why do you call me poor?' exclaimed Bertha, with a half-offended, half-diverted look.

'Because I wish so much that you knew better, or that I could help you better,' said Phœbe, gently.

There Miss Fennimore entered, displeased at the English sounds, and at finding them all, as she thought, loitering. Phœbe explained Maria's omission, and Miss Fennimore allowed her five minutes in her own room, saying that this must not become a precedent, though she did not wish to oppress her conscience.

Bertha's eyes glittered with a certain triumph, as she saw that Miss Fennimore was of her mind, and anticipated no consequences from the neglect, but only made the concession as to a superstition. Without disbelief, the child trained only to reason, and quick to detect fallacy, was

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blind to all that was not material. And how was the spiritual to be brought before her?

Phœbe might well sigh as she sat down to her abstract of Schlegel's Lectures. 'If any one would but teach them,' she thought; 'but there is no time at all, and I myself do not know half so much of those things as one of Miss Charlecote's lowest classes.'

Phœbe was a little mistaken. An earnest mind taught how to learn, with access to the Bible and Prayer Book, could gain more from these fountain-heads than any external teaching could impart; and she could carry her difficulties to Robert. Still it was out of her power to assist her sisters. Surveillance and driving absolutely left no space free from Miss Fennimore's requirements; and all that there was to train those young ones in faith, was the manner in which it *lived* and worked in her. Nor of this effect could she be conscious.

As to dreams or repinings, or even listening to her hopes and fears for her project of pleasure, they were excluded by the concentrated attention that Miss Fennimore's system enforced. Time and capacity were so much on the stretch, that the habit of doing *what* she was doing, and nothing else, had become second nature to the docile and duteous girl; and she had become little sensible to interruptions; so she went on with her German, her Greek, and her algebra, scarcely hearing the repetitions of the lessons, or the counting as Miss Fennimore presided over Maria's practice, a bit of drudgery detested by the governess, but necessarily persevered in, for Maria loved music, and had just voice and ear sufficient to render this single accomplishment not hopeless, but a certain want of power of sustained effort made her always break down at the moment she seemed to be doing best. Former governesses had lost patience, but Miss Fennimore had early given up the case, and never scolded her for her failures; she made her attempt less, and she was improving more, and shedding fewer tears than under any former dynasty. Even a stern dominion is better for the subjects than an uncertain and weak one; regularity gives a sense of reliance; and constant occupation leaves so little time for being naughty, that Bertha herself was getting into training, and on the present day her lessons were exemplary, always with a view to the promised walk with her brother, one of the greatest pleasures ever enjoyed by the denizens of the west wing.

Phœbe's pleasure was less certain, and less dependent on her merits, yet it invigorated her efforts to do all she had to do with all her might, even into the statement of the pros and cons of customs and free-trade, which she was required to produce as her morning's exercise. In the midst, her ear detected the sound of wheels, and her heart throbbed in the conviction that it was Miss Charlecote's pony carriage; nay, she found her pen had indited 'Robin would be so glad,' instead of 'revenue to the government,' and while scratching the words out beyond all legibility, she blamed herself for betraying such want of self-command.

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No summons came, no tidings, the wheels went away; her heart sank, and her spirit revolted against an unfeeling, unutterably wearisome captivity; but it was only a moment's fluttering against the bars, the tears were driven back with the thought, 'After all, the decision is guided from Above. If I stay at home, it *must* be best for me. Let me try to be good!' and she forced her mind back to her exports and her customs. It was such discipline as few girls could have exercised, but the conscientious effort was no small assistance in being resigned; and in the precious minutes granted in which to prepare herself for dinner, she found it the less hard task to part with her anticipations of delight and brace herself to quiet, contented duty.

The meal was beginning when, with a very wide expansion of the door, appeared a short, consequential-looking personage, of such plump, rounded proportions, that she seemed ready to burst out of her riding-habit, and of a broad, complacent visage, somewhat overblossoming. It was Miss Fulmort, the eldest of the family, a young lady just past thirty, a very awful distance from the schoolroom party, to whom she nodded with good-natured condescension, saying: 'Ah! I thought I should find you at dinner; I'm come for something to sustain nature. The riding party are determined to have me with them, and they won't wait for luncheon. Thank you, yes, a piece of mutton, if there were any under side. How it reminds me of old times. I used so to look forward to never seeing a loin of mutton again.'

'As your chief ambition?' said Miss Fennimore, who, governess as she was, could not help being a little satirical, especially when Bertha's eyes twinkled responsively.

'One does get so tired of mutton and rice-pudding,' answered the less observant Miss Fulmort, who was but dimly conscious of any one's existence save her own, and could not have credited a governess laughing at her; 'but really this is not so bad, after all, for a change; and some pale ale. You don't mean that you exist without pale ale?'

'We all drink water by preference,' said Miss Fennimore.

'Indeed! Miss Watson, our finishing governess, never drank anything but claret, and she always had little *pâtés*, or fish, or something, because she said her appetite was to be consulted, she was so delicate. She was very thin, I know; and what a figure you have, Phœbe! I suppose that is water drinking. Bridger did say it would reduce me to leave off pale ale, but I can't get on without it, I get so horridly low. Don't you think that's a sign, Miss Fennimore?'

'I beg your pardon, a sign of what?'

'That one can't go on without it. Miss Charlecote said she thought it was all constitution whether one is stout or not, and that nothing made much difference, when I asked her about German wines.'

'Yes; she came at twelve o'clock, and there was I actually pinned down to entertain her, for mamma was not come down. So I asked her about those light foreign wines, and whether they do really make one thinner; you know one always has them at her house.'

'Did mamma see her?' asked poor Phœbe, anxiously.

'Oh yes, she was bent upon it. It was something about you. Oh! she wants to take you to stay with her in that horrible hole of hers in the City—very odd of her. What do you advise me to do, Miss Fennimore? Do you think those foreign wines would bring me down a little, or that they would make me low and sinking?'

'Really, I have no experience on the subject!' said Miss Fennimore, loftily.

'What did mamma say?' was poor Phœbe's almost breathless question.

'Oh! it makes no difference to mamma' (Phœbe's heart bounded); but Augusta went on: 'she always has her soda-water, you know; but of course I should take a hamper from Bass. I hate being unprovided.'

'But about my going to London?' humbly murmured Phœbe.

'What *did* she say?' considered the elder sister, aloud. 'I don't know, I'm sure. I was not attending—the heat does make one so sleepy—but I know we all wondered she should want you at your age. You know some people take a spoonful of vinegar to fine themselves down, and some of those wines *are* very acid,' she continued, pressing on with her great subject of consultation.

'If it be an object with you, Miss Fulmort, I should recommend the vinegar,' said Miss Fennimore. 'There is nothing like doing a thing outright!'

'And, oh! how glorious it would be to see her taking it!' whispered Bertha into Phœbe's ear, unheard by Augusta, who, in her satisfied stolidity, was declaring, 'No, I could not undertake that. I am the worst person in the world for taking anything disagreeable.'

And having completed her meal, which she had contrived to make out of the heart of the joint, leaving the others little but fat, she walked off to her ride, believing that she had done a gracious and condescending action in making conversation with her inferiors of the west wing.

Yet Augusta Fulmort might have been good for something, if her mind and her affections had not lain fallow ever since she escaped from a series of governesses who taught her self-indulgence by example.

'I wonder what mamma said!' exclaimed Phœbe, in her strong craving for sympathy in her suspense.

'I am sorry the subject has been brought forward, if it is to unsettle you, Phœbe,' said Miss Fennimore, not unkindly; 'I regret your being twice disappointed; but, if your mother should refer it to me, as I make no doubt she will, I should say that it would be a great pity to break up our course of studies.'

'It would only be for a little while,' sighed Phœbe; 'and Miss Charlecote is to show me all the museums. I should see more with her than ever I shall when I am come out; and I should be with Robert.'

'I intended asking permission to take you through a systematic course of lectures and specimens when the family are next in town,' said Miss Fennimore. 'Ordinary, desultory sight-seeing leaves few impressions; and though Miss Charlecote is a superior person, her mind is not of a sufficiently scientific turn to make her fully able to direct you. I shall trust to your good sense, Phœbe, for again submitting to defer the pleasure till it can be enhanced.'

Good sense had a task imposed on it for which it was quite inadequate; but there was something else in Phœbe which could do the work better than her unconvinced reason. Even had she been sure of the expediency of being condemned to the schoolroom, no good sense would have brought that resolute smile, or driven back the dew in her eyes, or enabled her voice to say, with such sweet meekness, 'Very well, Miss Fennimore; I dare say it may be right.'

Miss Fennimore was far more concerned than if the submission had been grudging. She debated with herself whether she should consider her resolution irrevocable.

Ten minutes were allowed after dinner in the parterre, and these could only be spent under the laurel hedge; the sun was far too hot everywhere else. Phœbe had here no lack of sympathy, but had to restrain Bertha, who, with angry gestures, was pronouncing the governess a horrid cross-patch, and declaring that no girls ever were used as they were; while Maria observed, that if Phœbe went to London, she must go too.

'We shall all go some day,' said Phœbe, cheerfully, 'and we shall enjoy it all the more if we are good now. Never mind, Bertha, we shall have some nice walks.'

'Yes, all bothered with botany,' muttered Bertha.

'I thought, at least, you would be glad of me,' said Phœbe, smiling; 'you who stay at home.'

'To be sure, I am,' said Bertha; 'but it is such a shame! I shall tell Robin, and he'll say so too. I shall tell him you nearly cried!'

'Don't vex Robin,' said Phœbe. 'When you go out, you should set yourself to tell him pleasant things.'

'So I'm to tell him you wouldn't go on any account. You like your political economy much too well!'

'Suppose you say nothing about it,' said Phœbe. 'Make yourself merry with him. That's what you've got to do. He takes you out to entertain you, not to worry about grievances.'

'Do you never talk about grievances?' asked Bertha, twinkling up her eyes.

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Phœbe hesitated. 'Not my own,' she said, 'because I have not got any.'

'Has Robert, then?' asked Bertha.

'Nobody has grievances who is out of the schoolroom,' opined Maria; and as she uttered this profound sentiment, the tinkle of Miss Fennimore's little bell warned the sisters to return to the studies, which in the heat of summer were pursued in the afternoon, that the walk might be taken in the cool of the evening. Reading aloud, drawing, and sensible plain needlework were the avocations till it was time to learn the morrow's lessons. Phœbe being beyond this latter work, drew on, and in the intervals of helping Maria with her geography, had time to prepare such a bright face as might make Robert think lightly of her disappointment, and not reckon it as another act of tyranny.

When he opened the door, however, there was that in his looks which made her spirits leap up like an elastic spring; and his 'Well, Phœbe!' was almost triumphant.

'Is it—am I—' was all she could say.

'Has no one thought it worth while to tell you?'

'Don't you know,' interposed Bertha, 'you on the other side the red baize door might be all married, or dead and buried, for aught we should hear. But is Phœbe to go?'

'I believe so.'

'Are you sure?' asked Phœbe, afraid yet to hope.

'Yes. My father heard the invitation, and said that you were a good girl, and deserved a holiday.'

Commendation from that quarter was so rare, that excess of gladness made Phœbe cast down her eyes and colour intensely, a little oppressed by the victory over her governess. But Miss Fennimore spoke warmly. 'He cannot think her more deserving than I do. I am rejoiced not to have been consulted, for I could hardly have borne to inflict such a mortification on her, though these interruptions are contrary to my views. As it is, Phœbe, my dear, I wish you joy.'

'Thank you,' Phœbe managed to say, while the happy tears fairly started. In that chilly land, the least approach to tenderness was like the gleam in which the hardy woodbine leaflets unfold to sun themselves.

Thankful for small mercies, thought Robert, looking at her with fond pity; but at least the dear child will have one fortnight of a more genial atmosphere, and soon, maybe, I shall transplant her to be Lucilla's darling as well as mine, free from task-work, and doing the labours of love for which she is made!

He was quite in spirits, and able to reply in kind to the freaks and jokes of his little sister, as she started, spinning round him like a humming-top, and singing—

Will you go to the wood, Robin a Bobbin?

giving safe vent to an ebullition of spirits that must last her a good while, poor little maiden!

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Phœbe took a sober walk with Miss Fennimore, receiving advice on methodically journalizing what she might see, and on the scheme of employments which might prevent her visit from being waste of time. The others would have resented the interference with the holiday; but Phœbe, though a little sorry to find that tasks were not to be off her mind, was too grateful for Miss Fennimore's cordial consent to entertain any thought except of obedience to the best of her power.

Miss Fennimore was politely summoned to Mrs. Fulmort's dressing-room for the official communication; but this day was no exception to the general custom, that the red baize door was not passed by the young ladies until their evening appearance in the drawing-room. Then the trio descended, all alike in white muslin, made high, and green sashes—a dress carefully distinguishing Phœbe as not introduced, but very becoming to her, with the simple folds and the little net ruche, suiting admirably the tall, rounded slenderness of her shape, her long neck, and short, childish contour of face, where there smiled a joy of anticipation almost inappreciable to those who know not what it is to spend day after day with nothing particular to look forward to.

Very grand was the drawing-room, all amber-coloured with satin-wood, satin and gold, and with everything useless and costly encumbering tables that looked as if nothing could ever be done

upon them. Such a room inspired a sense of being in company, and it was no wonder that Mrs. Fulmort and her two elder daughters swept in in as decidedly procession style as if they had formed part of a train of twenty.

The star that bestowed three female sovereigns to Europe seemed to have had the like influence on Hiltonbury parish, since both its squires were heiresses. Miss Mervyn would have been a happier woman had she married a plain country gentleman, like those of her own stock, instead of giving a county position to a man of lower origin and enormous monied wealth. To live up to the claims of that wealth had been her business ever since, and health and enjoyment had been so completely sacrificed to it, that for many years past the greater part of her time had been spent in resting and making herself up for her appearance in the evening, when she conducted her elder daughters to their gaieties. Faded and tallowy in complexion, so as to be almost ghastly in her blue brocade and heavy gold ornaments, she reclined languidly on a large easy-chair, saying with half-closed eyes—

‘Well, Phœbe, Miss Fennimore has told you of Miss Charlecote’s invitation.’

‘Yes, mamma. I am very, *very* much obliged!’

‘You know you are not to fancy yourself come out,’ said Juliana, the second sister, who had a good tall figure, and features and complexion not far from beauty, but marred by a certain shrewish tone and air.

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‘Oh, no,’ answered Phœbe; ‘but with Miss Charlecote that will make no difference.’

‘Probably not,’ said Juliana; ‘for of course you will see nobody but a set of old maids and clergymen and their wives.’

‘She need not go far for old maids,’ whispered Bertha to Maria.

‘Pray, in which class do you reckon the Sandbrooks?’ said Phœbe, smiling; ‘for she chiefly goes to meet them.’

‘She may go!’ said Juliana, scornfully; ‘but Lucilla Sandbrook is far past attending to her!’

‘I wonder whether the Charterises will take any notice of Phœbe?’ exclaimed Augusta.

‘My dear,’ said Mrs. Fulmort, waking slowly to another idea, ‘I will tell Boodle to talk to—what’s your maid’s name?—about your dresses.’

‘Oh, mamma,’ interposed Juliana, ‘it will be only poking about the exhibitions with Miss Charlecote. You may have that plaid silk of mine that I was going to have worn out abroad, half-price for her.’

Bertha fairly made a little stamp at Juliana, and clenched her fist.

If Phœbe dreaded anything in the way of dress, it was Juliana’s half-price.

‘My dear, your papa would not like her not to be well fitted out,’ said her mother; ‘and Honora Charlecote always has such handsome things. I wish Boodle could put mine on like hers.’

‘Oh, very well!’ said Juliana, rather offended; ‘only it should be understood what is to be done if the Charterises ask her to any of their parties. There will be such mistakes and confusion if she meets any one we know; and you particularly objected to having her brought forward.’

Phœbe’s eye was a little startled, and Bertha set her front teeth together on edge, and looked viciously at Juliana.

‘My dear, Honora Charlecote never goes out,’ said Mrs. Fulmort.

‘If she should, you understand, Phœbe,’ said Juliana.

Coffee came in at the moment, and Augusta criticized the strength of it, which made a diversion, during which Bertha slipped out of the room, with a face replete with mischievous exultation.

‘Are not you going to play to-night, my dears?’ asked Mrs. Fulmort. ‘What was that duet I heard you practising?’

‘Come, Juliana,’ said the elder sister, ‘I meant to go over it again; I am not satisfied with my part.’

‘I have to write a note,’ said Juliana, moving off to another table; whereupon Phœbe ventured to propose herself as a substitute, and was accepted.

Maria sat entranced, with her mouth open; and presently Mrs. Fulmort looked up from a kind of doze to ask who was playing. For some moments she had no answer. Maria was too much awed for speech in the drawing-room; and though Bertha had come back, she had her back to her mother, and did not hear. Mrs. Fulmort exerted herself to sit up and turn her head.

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‘Was that Phœbe?’ she said. ‘You have a clear, good touch, my dear, as they used to say I had when I was at school at Bath. Play another of your pieces, my dear.’

‘I am ready now, Augusta,’ said Juliana, advancing.

Little girls were not allowed at the piano when officers might be coming in from the dining-room, so Maria’s face became vacant again, for Juliana’s music awoke no echoes within her.

Phœbe beckoned her to a remote ottoman, a receptacle for the newspapers of the week, and kept her turning over the *Illustrated News*, an unfailing resource with her, but powerless to occupy Bertha after the first Saturday; and Bertha, turning a deaf ear to the assurance that there was something very entertaining about a tiger-hunt, stood, solely occupied by eyeing Juliana.

Was she studying 'come-out' life as she watched her sisters surrounded by the gentlemen who presently herded round the piano?

It was nearly the moment when the young ones were bound to withdraw, when Mervyn, coming hastily up to their ottoman, had almost stumbled over Maria's foot.

'Beg pardon. Oh, it was only you! What a cow it is!' said he, tossing over the papers.

'What are you looking for, Mervyn?' asked Phœbe.

'An advertisement—*Bell's Life* for the 3rd. That rascal, Mears, must have taken it.'

She found it for him, and likewise the advertisement, which he, missing once, was giving up in despair.

'I say,' he observed, while she was searching, 'so you are to chip the shell.'

'I'm only going to London—I'm not coming out.'

'Gammon!' he said, with an odd wink. 'You need never go in again, like the what's-his-name in the fairy tale, or you are a sillier child than I take you for. They'—nodding at the piano—'are getting a terrible pair of old cats, and we want something young and pretty about.'

With this unusual compliment, Phœbe, seeing the way clear to the door, rose to depart, most reluctantly followed by Bertha, and more willingly by Maria, who began, the moment they were in the hall—

'Phœbe, why do they get a couple of terrible old cats? I don't like them. I shall be afraid.'

'Mervyn didn't mean—' began perplexed Phœbe, cut short by Bertha's boisterous laughter. 'Oh, Maria, what a goose you are! You'll be the death of me some day! Why, Juliana and Augusta are the cats themselves. Oh, dear! I wanted to kiss Mervyn for saying so. Oh, wasn't it fun! And now, Maria,—oh! if I could have stayed a moment longer!'

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'Bertha, Bertha, not such a noise in the hall. Come, Maria; mind, you must not tell anybody. Bertha, come,' expostulated Phœbe, trying to drag her sister to the red baize door; but Bertha stood, bending nearly double, exaggerating the helplessness of her paroxysms of laughter.

'Well, at least the cat will have something to scratch her,' she gasped out. 'Oh, I did so want to stay and see!'

'Have you been playing any tricks?' exclaimed Phœbe, with consternation, as Bertha's deportment recurred to her.

'Tricks?—I couldn't help it. Oh, listen, Phœbe!' cried Bertha, with her wicked look of triumph. 'I brought home such a lovely sting-nettle for Miss Fennimore's peacock caterpillar; and when I heard how kind dear Juliana was to you about your visit to London, I thought she really must have it for a reward; so I ran away, and slyly tucked it into her bouquet; and I did so hope she would take it up to fiddle with when the gentlemen talk to her,' said the elf, with an irresistibly comic imitation of Juliana's manner towards gentlemen.

'Bertha, this is beyond—' began Phœbe.

'Didn't you sting your fingers?' asked Maria.

Bertha stuck out her fat pink paws, embellished with sundry white lumps. 'All pleasure,' said she, 'thinking of the jump Juliana will give, and how nicely it serves her.'

Phœbe was already on her way back to the drawing-rooms; Bertha sprang after, but in vain. Never would she have risked the success of her trick, could she have guessed that Phœbe would have the temerity to return to the company!

Phœbe glided in without waiting for the sense of awkwardness, though she knew she should have to cross the whole room, and she durst not ask any one to bring the dangerous bouquet to her—not even Robert—he must not be stung in her service.

She met her mother's astonished eye as she threaded her way; she wound round a group of gentlemen, and spied the article of which she was in quest, where Juliana had laid it down with her gloves on going to the piano. Actually she had it! She had seized it unperceived! Good little thief; it was a most innocent robbery. She crept away with a sense of guilt and desire to elude observation, positively starting when she encountered her father's portly figure in the ante-room. He stopped her with 'Going to bed, eh? So Miss Charlecote has taken a fancy to you, has she? It does you credit. What shall you want for the journey?'

'Boodle is going to see,' began Phœbe, but he interrupted.

'Will fifty do? I will have my daughters well turned out. All to be spent upon yourself, mind. Why, you've not a bit of jewellery on! Have you a watch?'

'No, papa.'

'Robert shall choose one for you, then. Come to my room any time for the cash; and if Miss Charlecote takes you anywhere among her set—good connections she has—and you want to be rigged out extra, send me in the bill—anything rather than be shabby.'

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'Thank you, papa! Then, if I am asked out anywhere, may I go?'

'Why, what does the child mean? Anywhere that Miss Charlecote likes to take you of course.'

'Only because I am not come out.'

'Stuff about coming out! I don't like my girls to be shy and backward. They've a right to show themselves anywhere; and you should be going out with us now, but somehow your poor mother doesn't like the trouble of such a lot of girls. So don't be shy, but make the most of yourself, for you won't meet many better endowed, nor more highly accomplished. Good night, and enjoy yourself.'

Palpitating with wonder and pleasure, Phœbe escaped. Such permission, over-riding all Juliana's injunctions, was worth a few nettle stings and a great fright; for Phœbe was not philosopher enough, in spite of Miss Fennimore—ay, and of Robert—not to have a keen desire to see a great party.

Her delay had so much convinced the sisters that her expedition had had some fearful consequences, that Maria was already crying lest dear Phœbe should be in disgrace; and Bertha had seated herself on the balusters, debating with herself whether, if Phœbe were suspected of the trick (a likely story) and condemned to lose her visit to London, she would confess herself the guilty person.

And when Phœbe came back, too much overcome with delight to do anything but communicate papa's goodness, and rejoice in the unlimited power of making presents, Bertha triumphantly insisted on her confessing that it had been a capital thing that the nettles were in Juliana's nosegay!

Phœbe shook her head; too happy to scold, too humble to draw the moral that the surest way to gratification is to remove the thorns from the path of others.

CHAPTER III

She gives thee a garland woven fair,
Take care!
It is a fool's-cap for thee to wear,
Beware! Beware!
Trust her not,
She is fooling thee!—LONGFELLOW, from MÜLLER

Behold Phœbe Fulmort seated in a train on the way to London. She was a very pleasant spectacle to Miss Charlecote opposite to her, so peacefully joyous was her face, as she sat with the wind breathing in on her, in the calm luxury of contemplating the landscape gliding past the windows in all its summer charms, and the repose of having no one to hunt her into unvaried rationality.

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Her eye was the first to detect Robert in waiting at the terminus, but he looked more depressed than ever, and scarcely smiled as he handed them to the carriage.

'Get in, Robert, you are coming home with us,' said Honor.

'You have so much to take, I should encumber you.'

'No, the sundries go in cabs, with the maids. Jump in.'

'Do your friends arrive to-night?'

'Yes; but that is no reason you should look so rueful! Make the most of Phœbe beforehand. Besides, Mr. Parsons is a Wykehamist.'

Robert took his place on the back seat, but still as if he would have preferred walking home. Neither his sister nor his friend dared to ask whether he had seen Lucilla. Could she have refused him? or was her frivolity preying on his spirits?

Phœbe tried to interest him by the account of the family migration, and of Miss Fennimore's promise that Maria and Bertha should have two half-hours of real play in the garden on each day when the lessons had been properly done; and how she had been so kind as to let Maria leave off trying to read a French book that had proved too hard for her, not perceiving why this instance of good-nature was not cheering to her brother.

Miss Charlecote's house was a delightful marvel to Phœbe from the moment when she rattled into the paved court, entered upon the fragrant odour of the cedar hall, and saw the Queen of Sheba's golden locks beaming with the evening light. She entered the drawing-room, pleasant-looking already, under the judicious arrangement of the housekeeper, who had set out the Holt flowers and arranged the books, so that it seemed full of welcome.

Phœbe ran from window to mantelpiece, enchanted with the quaint mixture of old and new, admiring carving and stained glass, and declaring that Owen had not prepared her for anything equal to this, until Miss Charlecote, going to arrange matters with her housekeeper, left the brother and sister together.

'Well, Robin!' said Phœbe, coming up to him anxiously.

He only crossed his arms on the mantelpiece, rested his head on them, and sighed.

'Have you seen her?'

'Not to speak to her.'

'Have you called?'

'No.'

'Then where did you see her?'

'She was riding in the Park. I was on foot.'

'She could not have seen you!' exclaimed Phœbe.

'She did,' replied Robert; 'I was going to tell you. She gave me one of her sweetest, brightest smiles, such as only she can give. You know them, Phœbe. No assumed welcome, but a sudden flash and sparkle of real gladness.'

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'But why—what do you mean?' asked Phœbe; 'why have you not been to her? I thought from your manner that she had been neglecting you, but it seems to me all the other way.'

'I cannot, Phœbe; I cannot put my poor pretensions forward in the set she is with. I know they would influence her, and that her decision would not be calm and mature.'

'Her decision of what you are to be?'

'That is fixed,' said Robert, sighing.

'Indeed! With papa.'

'No, in my own mind. I have seen enough of the business to find that I could in ten years quadruple my capital, and in the meantime maintain her in the manner she prefers.'

'You are quite sure she prefers it?'

'She has done so ever since she could exercise a choice. I should feel myself doing her an injustice if I were to take advantage of any preference she may entertain for me to condemn her to what would be to her a dreary banishment.'

'Not with you,' cried Phœbe.

'You know nothing about it, Phœbe. You have never led such a life, and you it would not hurt— attract, I mean; but lovely, fascinating, formed for admiration, and craving for excitement as she is, she is a being that can only exist in society. She would be miserable in homely retirement—I mean she would prey on herself. I could not ask it of her. If she consented, it would be without knowing her own tastes. No; all that remains is to find out whether she can submit to owe her wealth to our business.'

'And shall you?'

'I could not but defer it till I should meet her here,' said Robert. 'I shrink from seeing her with those cousins, or hearing her name with theirs. Phœbe, imagine my feelings when, going into Mervyn's club with him, I heard "Rashe Charteris and Cilly Sandbrook" contemptuously discussed by those very names, and jests passing on their independent ways. I know how it is. Those people work on her spirit of enterprise, and she—too guileless and innocent to heed appearances. Phœbe, you do not wonder that I am nearly mad!'

'Poor Robin!' said Phœbe affectionately. 'But, indeed, I am sure, if Lucy once had a hint—no, one could not tell her, it would shock her too much; but if she had the least idea that people could be so impertinent,' and Phœbe's cheeks glowed with shame and indignation, 'she would only wish to go away as far as she could for fear of seeing any of them again. I am sure they were not gentlemen, Robin.'

'A man must be supereminently a gentleman to respect a woman who does not *make* him do so,' said Robert mournfully. 'That Miss Charteris! Oh! that she were banished to Siberia!'

Phœbe meditated a few moments; then looking up, said, 'I beg your pardon, Robin, but it does strike me that, if you think that this kind of life is not good for Lucilla, it cannot be right to sacrifice your own higher prospects to enable her to continue it.'

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'I tell you, Phœbe,' said he, with some impatience, 'I never was pledged. I may be of much more use and influence, and able to effect more extended good as a partner in a concern like this than as an obscure clergyman. Don't you see?'

Phœbe had only time to utter a somewhat melancholy 'Very likely,' before Miss Charlecote returned to take her to her room, the promised brown cupboard, all wainscoted with delicious

cedar, so deeply and uniformly panelled, that when shut, the door was not obvious; and it was like being in a box, for there were no wardrobes, only shelves shut by doors into the wall, which the old usage of the household tradition called *armories* (*armoires*). The furniture was reasonably modern, but not obtrusively so. There was a delicious recess in the deep window, with a seat and a table in it, and a box of mignonette along the sill. It looked out into the little high-walled entrance court, and beyond to the wall of the warehouse opposite; and the roar of the great city thoroughfare came like the distant surging of the ocean. Seldom had young maiden's bower given more satisfaction. Phœbe looked about her as if she hardly knew how to believe in anything so unlike her ordinary life, and she thanked her friend again and again with such enthusiasm, that Miss Charlecote laughed as she told her she liked the old house to be appreciated, since it had, like Pompeii, been potted for posterity.

'And thank you, my dear,' she added with a sigh, 'for making my coming home so pleasant. May you never know how I dreaded the finding it full of emptiness.'

'Dear Miss Charlecote!' cried Phœbe, venturing upon a warm kiss, and thrilled with sad pleasure as she was pressed in a warm, clinging embrace, and felt tears on her cheek. 'You have been so happy here!'

'It is not the past, my dear,' said Honora; 'I could live peacefully on the thought of that. The shadows that people this house are very gentle ones. It is the present!'

She broke off, for the gates of the court were opening to admit a detachment of cabs, containing the persons and properties of the new incumbent and his wife. He had been a curate of Mr. Charlecote, since whose death he had led a very hard-working life in various towns; and on his recent presentation to the living of St. Wulstan's, Honora had begged him and his wife to make her house their home while determining on the repairs of the parsonage. She ran down to meet them with gladsome steps. She had never entirely dropped her intercourse with Mr. Parsons, though seldom meeting; and he was a relic of the past, one of the very few who still called her by her Christian name, and regarded her more as the clergyman's daughter of St. Wulstan's than as lady of the Holt. Mrs. Parsons was a thorough clergyman's wife, as active as himself, and much loved and esteemed by Honora, with whom, in their few meetings, she had 'got on' to admiration.

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There they were, looking after luggage, and paying cabs so heedfully as not to remark their hostess standing on the stairs; and she had time to survey them with the affectionate curiosity of meeting after long absence, and with pleasure in remarking that there was little change. Perhaps they were rather more gray, and had grown more alike by force of living and thinking together; but they both looked equally alert and cheerful, and as if fifty and fifty-five were the very prime of years for substantial work.

Their first glances at her were full of the same anxiety for her health and strength, as they heartily shook hands, and accompanied her into the drawing-room, she explaining that Mr. Parsons was to have the study all to himself, and never be disturbed there; then inquiring after the three children, two daughters, who were married, and a son lately ordained.

'I thought you would have brought William to see about the curacy,' she said.

'He is not strong enough,' said his mother. 'He wished it, but he is better where he is; he could not bear the work here.'

'No; I told him the utmost I should allow would be an exchange now and then when my curates were overdone,' said Mr. Parsons.

'And so you are quite deserted,' said Honor, feeling the more drawn towards her friends.

'Starting afresh, with a sort of honeymoon, as I tell Anne,' replied Mr. Parsons; and such a bright look passed between them, as though they were quite sufficient for each other, that Honor felt there was no parallel between their case and her own.

'Ah! you have not lost your children yet,' said Mrs. Parsons.

'They are not with me,' said Honor, quickly. 'Lucy is with her cousins, and Owen—I don't exactly know how he means to dispose of himself this vacation; but we were all to meet here.' Guessing, perhaps, that Mr. Parsons saw into her dissatisfaction, she then assumed their defence. 'There is to be a grand affair at Castle Blanch, a celebration of young Charles Charteris's marriage, and Owen and Lucy will be wanted for it.'

'Whom has he married?'

'A Miss Mendoza, an immense fortune—something in the stockbroker line. He had spent a good deal, and wanted to repair it; but they tell me she is a very handsome person, very ladylike and agreeable; and Lucy likes her greatly. I am to go to luncheon at their house to-morrow, so I shall treat you as if you were at home.'

'I should hope so,' quoth Mr. Parsons.

'Yes, or I know you would not stay here properly. I'm not alone, either. Why, where's the boy gone? I thought he was here. I have two young Fulmorts, one staying here, the other looking in from the office.'

'Fulmort!' exclaimed Mr. Parsons, with three notes of admiration at least in his voice. 'What! the

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distiller?’

‘The enemy himself, the identical lord of gin-shops—at least his children. Did you not know that he married my next neighbour, Augusta Mervyn, and that our properties touch? He is not so bad by way of squire as he is here; and I have known his wife all my life, so we keep up all habits of good neighbourhood; and though they have brought up the elder ones very ill, they have not succeeded in spoiling this son and daughter. She is one of the very nicest girls I ever knew, and he, poor fellow, has a great deal of good in him.’

‘I think I have heard William speak of a Fulmort,’ said Mrs. Parsons. ‘Was he at Winchester?’

‘Yes; and an infinite help the influence there has been to him. I never saw any one more anxious to do right, often under great disadvantages. I shall be very glad for him to be with you. He was always intended for a clergyman, but now I am afraid there is a notion of putting him into the business; and he is here attending to it for the present, while his father and brother are abroad. I am sorry he is gone. I suppose he was seized with a fit of shyness.’

However, when all the party had been to their rooms and prepared for dinner, Robert reappeared, and was asked where he had been.

‘I went to dress,’ he answered.

‘Ah! where do you lodge? I asked Phœbe, but she said your letters went to Whittington-street.’

‘There are two very good rooms at the office which my father sometimes uses.’

Phœbe and Miss Charlecote glanced at each other, aware that Mervyn would never have condescended to sleep in Great Whittington-street. Mr. Parsons likewise perceived a straightforwardness in the manner, which made him ready to acknowledge his fellow-Wykehamist and his son’s acquaintance; and they quickly became good friends over recollections of Oxford and Winchester, tolerably strong in Mr. Parsons himself, and all the fresher on ‘William’s’ account. Phœbe, whose experience of social intercourse was confined to the stately evening hour in the drawing-room, had never listened to anything approaching to this style of conversation, nor seen her brother to so much advantage in society. Hitherto she had only beheld him neglected in his uncongenial home circle, contemning and contemned, or else subjected to the fretting torment of Lucilla’s caprice. She had never known what he could be, at his ease, among persons of the same way of thinking. Speaking scarcely ever herself, and her fingers busy with her needle, she was receiving a better lesson than Miss Fennimore had ever yet been able to give. The acquiring of knowledge is one thing, the putting it out to profit another.

Gradually, from general topics, the conversation contracted to the parish and its affairs, known intimately to Mr. Parsons a quarter of a century ago, but in which Honora was now the best informed; while Robert listened as one who felt as if he might have a considerable stake therein, and indeed looked upon usefulness there as compensation for the schemes he was resigning.

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The changes since Mr. Parsons’s time had not been cheering. The late incumbent had been a man whose trust lay chiefly in preaching, and who, as his health failed, and he became more unable to cope with the crying evils around, had grown despairing, and given way to a sort of dismal, callous indifference; not doing a little, because he could not do much, and quashing the plans of others with a nervous dread of innovation. The class of superior persons in trade, and families of professional men, who in Mr. Charlecote’s time had filled many a massively-built pew, had migrated to the suburbs, and preserved only an office or shop in the parish, an empty pew in the church, where the congregation was to be counted by tens instead of hundreds. Not that the population had fallen off. Certain streets which had been a grief and pain to Mr. Charlecote, but over which he had never entirely lost his hold, had become intolerably worse. Improvements in other parts of London, dislodging the inhabitants, had heaped them in festering masses of corruption in these untouched byways and lanes, places where honest men dared not penetrate without a policeman; and report spoke of rooms shared by six families at once.

Mr. Parsons had not taken the cue unknowing of what he should find in it; he said nothing, and looked as simple and cheerful as if his life were not to be a daily course of heroism. His wife gave one long, stifled sigh, and looked furtively upon him with her loving eyes, in something of anxious fear, but with far more of exultation.

Yet it was in no dispirited tone that she asked after the respectable poor—there surely must be some employed in small trades, or about the warehouses. She was answered that these were not many in proportion, and that not only had pew-rents kept them out of church, but that they had little disposition to go there. They did send their children to the old endowed charity schools, but as these children grew up, wave after wave lapsed into a smooth, respectable heathen life of Sunday pleasuring. The more religious became dissenters, because the earnest inner life did not approve itself to them in Church teaching as presented to them; the worse sort, by far the most numerous, fell lower and lower, and hovered scarcely above the depths of sin and misery. Drinking was the universal vice, and dragged many a seemingly steady character into every stage of degradation. Men and women alike fell under the temptation, and soon hastened down the descent of corruption and crime.

‘Ah!’ said Mrs. Parsons, ‘I observed gin palaces at the corner of every street.’

There was a pause. Neither her husband nor Honora made any reply. If they had done so, neither of the young Fulmorts would have perceived any connection between the gin palaces and their

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father's profession; but the silence caused both to raise their eyes. Phœbe, judging by her sisters' code of the becoming, fancied that their friends supposed their feelings might be hurt by alluding to the distillery, as a trade, and cast about for some cheerful observations, which she could not find.

Robert had received a new idea, one that must be put aside till he had time to look at it.

There was a ring at the door. Honor's face lighted up at the tread on the marble pavement of the hall, and without other announcement, a young man entered the room, and as she sprang up to meet him, bent down his lofty head, and kissed her with half-filial, half-coaxing tenderness.

'Yes, here I am. They told me I should find you here. Ah! Phœbe, I'm glad to see you. Fulmort, how are you?' and a well-bred shake of the hand to Mr. and Mrs. Parsons, with the ease and air of the young master, returning to his mother's house.

'When did you come?'

'Only to-day. I got away sooner than I expected. I went to Lowndes Square, and they told me I should find you here, so I came away as soon as dinner was over. They were dressing for some grand affair, and wanted me to come with them, but of course I must come to see if you had really achieved bringing bright Phœbe from her orbit.'

His simile conveyed the astronomical compliment at once to Honora and Phœbe, who were content to share it. Honora was in a condition of subdued excitement and anxiety, compared to which all other sensations were tame, chequered as was her felicity, a state well known to mothers and sisters. Intensely gratified at her darling's arrival, gladdened by his presence, rejoicing in his endowments, she yet dreaded every phrase lest some dim misgiving should be deepened, and watched for the impression he made on her friends, as though her own depended upon it.

Admiration could not but come foremost. It was pleasant to look upon such a fine specimen of manly beauty and vigour. Of unusual height, his form was so well moulded, that his superior stature was only perceived by comparison with others, and the proportions were those of great strength. The small, well-set head, proudly carried, the short, straight features, and the form of the free massive curls, might have been a model for the bust of a Greek athlete; the colouring was the fresh, healthy bronzed ruddiness of English youth, and the expression had a certain boldness of good-humoured freedom, agreeing with the quiet power of the whole figure. Those bright gray eyes could never have been daunted, those curling, merry lips never at a loss, that smooth brow never been unwelcome, those easy movements never cramped, nor the manners restrained by bashfulness.

The contrast was not favourable to Robert. The fair proportions of the one brought out the irregular build of the other; the classical face made the plain one more homely, the erect bearing made the eye turn to the slouching carriage, and the readiness of address provoked comparison with the awkward diffidence of one disregarded at home. Bashfulness and depression had regained their hold of the elder lad almost as the younger one entered, and in the changes of position consequent upon the new arrival, he fell into the background, and stood leaning, caryatid fashion, against the mantelshelf, without uttering a word, while Owen, in a half-recumbent position on an ottoman, a little in the rear of Miss Charlecote and her tea equipage, and close to Phœbe, indulged in the blithe loquacity of a return home, in a tone of caressing banter towards the first lady, of something between good-nature and attention to the latter, yet without any such exclusiveness as would have been disregard to the other guests.

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'Ponto well! Poor old Pon! how does he get on? Was it a very affecting parting, Phœbe?'

'I didn't see. I met Miss Charlecote at the station.'

'Not even your eyes might intrude on the sacredness of grief! Well, at least you dried them? But who dried Ponto's?' solemnly turning on Honora.

'Jones, I hope,' said she, smiling.

'I knew it! Says I to myself, when Henry opened the door, Jones remains at home for the consolation of Ponto.'

'Not entirely—' began Honora, laughing; but the boy shook his head, cutting her short with a playful frown.

'Cousin Honor, it grieves me to see a woman of your age and responsibility making false excuses. Mr. Parsons, I appeal to you, as a clergyman of the Church of England, is it not painful to hear her putting forward Jones's asthma, when we all know the true fact is that Ponto's tastes are so aristocratic that he can't take exercise with an under servant, and the housekeeper is too fat to waddle. By the bye, how is the old thing?'

'Much more effective than might be supposed by your account, sir, and probably wishing to know whether to get your room ready.'

'My room. Thank you; no, not to-night. I've got nothing with me. What are you going to do to-morrow? I know you are to be at Charteris's to luncheon; his Jewess told me so.'

'For shame, Owen.'

'I don't see any shame, if Charles doesn't,' said Owen; 'only if you don't think yourselves at a stall of cheap jewellery at a fair—that's all! Phœbe, take care. You're a learned young lady.'

'No; I'm very backward.'

'Ah! it's the fashion to deny it, but mind you don't mention Shakespeare.'

'Why not?'

'Did you never hear of the *Merchant of Venice*?'

Phœbe, a little startled, wanted to hear whether Mrs. Charteris were really Jewish, and after a little more in this style, which Honor reasonably feared the Parsons might not consider in good taste, it was explained that her riches were Jewish, though her grandfather had been nothing, and his family Christian. Owen adding, that but for her origin, she would be very good-looking; not that he cared for that style, and his manner indicated that such rosy, childish charms as were before him had his preference. But though this was evident enough to all the rest of the world, Phœbe did not appear to have the least perception of his personal meaning, and freely, simply answered, that she admired dark-eyed people, and should be glad to see Mrs. Charteris.

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'You will see her in her glory,' said Owen; 'Tuesday week, the great concern is to come off, at Castle Blanch, and a rare sight she'll be! Cilly tells me she is rehearsing her dresses with different sets of jewels all the morning, and for ever coming in to consult her and Rashe!'

'That must be rather tiresome,' said Honor; 'she cannot be much of a companion.'

'I don't fancy she gets much satisfaction,' said Owen, laughing; 'Rashe never uses much "soft sawder." It's an easy-going place, where you may do just as you choose, and the young ladies appreciate liberty. By the bye, what do you think of this Irish scheme?'

Honora was so much ashamed of it, that she had never mentioned it even to Phœbe, and she was the more sorry that it had been thus adverted to, as she saw Robert intent on what Owen let fall. She answered shortly, that she could not suppose it serious.

'Serious as a churchyard,' was Owen's answer. 'I dare say they will ask Phœbe to join the party. For my own part, I never believed in it till I came up to-day, and found the place full of salmon-flies, and the start fixed for Wednesday the 24th.'

'Who?' came a voice from the dark mantelshelf.

'Who? Why, that's the best of it. Who but my wise sister and Rashe? Not a soul besides,' cried Owen, giving way to laughter, which no one was disposed to echo. 'They vow that they will fish all the best streams, and do more than any crack fisherman going, and they would like to see who will venture to warn them off. They've tried that already. Last summer what did Lucy do, but go and fish Sir Harry Buller's water. You know he's a very tiger about preserving. Well, she fished coolly on in the face of all his keepers; they stood aghast, didn't know what manner of Nixie it was, I suppose; and when Sir Harry came down, foaming at the mouth, she just shook her curls, and made him wade in up to his knees to get her fly out of a bramble!'

'That must be exaggerated,' said Robert.

'Exaggerated! Not a word! It's not possible to exaggerate Cilly's coolness. I did say something about going with them.'

'You must, if they go at all!' exclaimed Honora.

'Out of the question, Sweet Honey. They reject me with disdain, declare that I should only render them commonplace, and that "rich and rare were the gems she wore" would never have got across Ireland safe if she had a great strapping brother to hamper her. And really, as Charles says, I don't suppose any damage can well happen to them.'

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Honora would not talk of it, and turned the conversation to what was to be done on the following day. Owen eagerly proffered himself as escort, and suggested all manner of plans, evidently assuming the entire direction and protection of the two ladies, who were to meet him at luncheon in Lowndes Square, and go with him to the Royal Academy, which, as he and Honora agreed, must necessarily be the earliest object for the sake of providing innocent conversation.

As soon as the clock struck ten, Robert took leave, and Owen rose, but instead of going, lingered, talking Oxford with Mr. Parsons, and telling good stories, much to the ladies' amusement, though increasing Honora's trepidation by the fear that something in his tone about the authorities, or the slang of his manner, might not give her friends a very good idea of his set. The constant fear of what might come next, absolutely made her impatient for his departure, and at last she drove him away, by begging to know how he was going all that distance, and offering to send Henry to call a cab, a thing he was too good-natured to permit. He bade good night and departed, while Mr. Parsons, in answer to her eager eyes, gratified her by pronouncing him a very fine young man.

'He is very full of spirit,' she said. 'You must let me tell you a story of him. They have a young new schoolmistress at Wrapworth, his father's former living, you know, close to Castle Blanch. This poor thing was obliged to punish a school-child, the daughter of one of the bargemen on the Thames, a huge ruffianly man. Well, a day or two after, Owen came upon him in a narrow lane, bullying the poor girl almost out of her life, threatening her, and daring her to lay a finger on his

children. What do you think Owen did?’

‘Fought him, I suppose,’ said Mr. Parsons, judging by the peculiar delight ladies take in such exploits. ‘Besides, he has sufficiently the air of a hero to make it incumbent on him to “kill some giant.”’

‘We may be content with something short of his killing the giant,’ said Honor, ‘but he really did gain the victory. That lad, under nineteen, positively beat this great monster of a man, and made him ask the girl’s pardon, knocked him down, and thoroughly mastered him! I should have known nothing of it, though, if Owen had not got a black eye, which made him unrepresentable for the Castle Blanch gaieties, so he came down to the Holt to me, knowing I should not mind wounds gained in a good cause.’

They wished her good night in her triumph.

The receipt of a letter was rare and supreme felicity to Maria; therefore to indite one was Phœbe’s first task on the morrow; after which she took up her book, and was deeply engaged, when the door flew back, and the voice of Owen Sandbrook exclaimed, ‘Goddess of the silver bow! what, alone?’

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‘Miss Charlecote is with her lawyer, and Robert at the office.’

‘The parson and parsoness parsonically gone to study parsonages, schools, and dilapidations, I suppose. What a bore it is having them here; I’d have taken up my quarters here, otherwise, but I can’t stand parish politics.’

‘I like them very much,’ said Phœbe, ‘and Miss Charlecote seems to be happy with them.’

‘Just her cut, dear old thing; the same honest, illogical, practical sincerity,’ said Owen, in a tone of somewhat superior melancholy; but seeing Phœbe about to resent his words as a disrespectful imputation on their friend, he turned the subject, addressing Phœbe in the manner between teasing and flattering, habitual to a big schoolboy towards a younger child, phases of existence which each had not so long outgrown as to have left off the mutual habits thereto belonging. ‘And what is bright Cynthia doing? Writing verses, I declare!—worthy sister of Phoebus Apollo.’

‘Only notes,’ said Phœbe, relinquishing her paper, in testimony.

‘When found make a note of—Summoned by writ—temp. Ed. III.—burgesses—knights of shire. It reads like an act of parliament. Hallam’s English Constitution. My eyes! By way of lighter study. It is quite appalling. Pray what may be the occupation of your more serious moments?’

‘You see the worst I have with me.’

‘Holiday recreation, to which you can just condescend. I say, Phœbe, I have a great curiosity to understand the Zend. I wish you would explain it to me.’

‘If I ever read it,’ began Phœbe, laughing.

‘What, you pretend to deny? You won’t put me off that way. A lady who can only unbend so far as to the English Constitution by way of recreation, must—’

‘But it is not by way of recreation.’

‘Come, I know my respected cousin too well to imagine she would have imposed such a task. That won’t do, Phœbe.’

‘I never said she had, but Miss Fennimore desired me.’

‘I shall appeal. There’s no act of tyranny a woman in authority will not commit. But this is a free country, Phœbe, as maybe you have gathered from your author, and unless her trammels have reached to your soul—’ and he laid his hand on the book to take it away.

‘Perhaps they have,’ said Phœbe, smiling, but holding it fast, ‘for I shall be much more comfortable in doing as I was told.’

‘Indeed!’ said Owen, pretending to scrutinize her as if she were something extraordinary (really as an excuse for a good gaze upon her pure complexion and limpid eyes, so steady, childlike, and unabashed, free from all such consciousness as would make them shrink from the playful look). ‘Indeed! Now, in my experience the comfort would be in the *not* doing as you were told.’

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‘Ah! but you know I have no spirit.’

‘I wish to heaven other people had none!’ cried Owen, suddenly changing his tone, and sitting down opposite to Phœbe, his elbow on the table, and speaking earnestly. ‘I would give the world that my sister were like you. Did you ever hear of anything so preposterous as this Irish business?’

‘She cannot think of it, when Miss Charlecote has told her of all the objections,’ said Phœbe.

‘She will go the more,’ returned Owen. ‘I say to you, Phœbe, what I would say to no one else. Lucilla’s treatment of Honora Charlecote is abominable—vexes me more than I can say. They say some nations have no words for gratitude. One would think she had come of them.’

Phœbe looked much shocked, but said, ‘Perhaps Miss Charlecote’s kindness has seemed to her

like a matter of course, not as it does to us, who have no claim at all.'

'We had no claim,' said Owen; 'the connection is nothing, absolutely nothing. I believe, poor dear, the attraction was that she had once been attached to my father, and he was too popular a preacher to *keep* well as a lover. Well, there were we, a couple of orphans, a nuisance to all our kith and kin—nobody with a bit of mercy for us but that queer old coon, Kit Charteris, when she takes us home, treats us like her own children, feels for us as much as the best mother living could; undertakes to provide for us. Now, I put it to you, Phœbe, has she any right to be cast off in this fashion?'

'I don't know in what fashion you mean.'

'Don't you. Haven't you seen how Cilly has run restive from babyhood? A pretty termagant she was, as even I can remember. And how my poor father spoilt her! Any one but Honor would have given her up, rather than have gone through what she did, so firmly and patiently, till she had broken her in fairly well. But then come in these Charterises, and Cilly runs frantic after them, her own *dear* relations. Much they had cared for us when we were troublesome little pests. But it's all the force of blood. Stuff! The whole truth is that they are gay, and Honora quiet; they encourage her to run riot. Honora keeps her in order.'

'Have you spoken to her?'

'As well speak to the wind. She thinks it a great favour to run down to Hiltonbury for the Horticultural Show, turn everything topsy-turvy, keep poor dear Sweet Honey in a perpetual ferment, then come away to Castle Blanch, as if she were rid of a troublesome duty.'

'I thought Miss Charlecote sent Lucy to enjoy herself! We always said how kind and self-denying she was.'

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'Denied, rather,' said Owen; 'only that's her way of carrying it off. A month or two in the season might be very well; see the world, and get the tone of it; but to racket about with Ratia, and leave Honor alone for months together, is too strong for me.'

Honora came in, delighted at her boy's visit, and well pleased at the manner in which he was engrossed. Two such children needed no chaperon, and if that sweet crescent moon were to be his guiding light, so much the better.

'Capital girl, that,' he said, as she left the room. 'This is a noble achievement of yours.'

'In getting my youngest princess out of the castle. Ay! I do feel in a beneficent enchanter's position.'

'She has grown up much prettier than she promised to be.'

'And far too good for a Fulmort. But that is Robert's doing.'

'Poor Robert! how he shows the old distiller in grain. So he is taking to the old shop?—best thing for him.'

'Only by way of experiment.'

'Pleasant experiment to make as much as old Fulmort! I wish he'd take me into partnership.'

'You, Owen?'

'I am not proud. These aren't the days when it matters how a man gets his tin, so he knows what to do with it. Ay! the world gets beyond the dear old Hiltonbury views, after all, Sweet Honey, and you see what City atmosphere does to me.'

'You know I never wished to press any choice on you,' she faltered.

'What!' with a good-humoured air of affront, 'you thought me serious? Don't you know I'm the ninth, instead of the nineteenth-century man, under your wing? I'd promise you to be a bishop, only, you see, I'm afraid I couldn't be mediocre enough.'

'For shame, Owen!' and yet she smiled. That boy's presence and caressing sweetness towards herself were the greatest bliss to her, almost beyond that of a mother with a son, because more uncertain, less her right by nature.

Phœbe came down as the carriage was at the door, and they called in Whittington Street for her brother, but he only came out to say he was very busy, and would not intrude on Mrs. Charteris—bashfulness for which he was well abused on the way to Lowndes Square.

Owen, with his air of being at home, put aside the servants as they entered the magnificent house, replete with a display of state and luxury analogous to that of Beauchamp, but with better taste and greater ease. The Fulmorts were in bondage to ostentation; the Charterises were lavish for their own enjoyment, and heedless alike of cost and of appearance.

The great drawing-room was crowded with furniture, and the splendid marqueterie tables and crimson ottomans were piled with a wild confusion of books, prints, periodicals, papers, and caricatures, heaped over ornaments and bijouterie, and beyond, at the doorway of a second room, even more miscellaneously filled, a small creature sprang to meet them, kissing Honora, and exclaiming, 'Here you are! Have you brought the pig's wool? Ah! but you've brought something

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else! No—what's become of that Redbreast!' as she embraced Phœbe.

'He was so busy that he could not come.'

'Ill-behaved bird; a whole month without coming near me.'

'Only a week,' said Phœbe, speaking less freely, as she perceived two strangers in the room, a gentleman in moustaches, who shook hands with Owen, and a lady, whom from her greeting to Miss Charlecote (for introductions were not the way of the house) she concluded to be the formidable Rashe, and therefore regarded with some curiosity.

Phœbe had expected her to be a large masculine woman, and was surprised at her dapper proportions and not ungraceful manner. Her face, neither handsome nor the reverse, was one that neither in features nor complexion revealed her age, and her voice was pitched to the tones of good society, so that but for a certain 'don't care' sound in her words, and a defiant freedom of address, Phœbe would have set down all she had heard as a mistake, in spite of the table covered with the brilliant appliances of fly-making, over which both she and Lucilla were engaged. It was at the period when ladies affected coats and waistcoats, and both cousins followed the fashion to the utmost; wearing tightly-fitting black coats, plain linen collars, and shirt-like under-sleeves, with black ties round the neck. Horatia was still in mourning for her mother, and wore a black skirt, but Lucilla's was of rich deep gentianella-coloured silk, and the buttons of her white vest were of beautiful coral. The want of drapery gave a harshness to Miss Charteris's appearance, but the little masculine affectations only rendered Lucy's miniature style of feminine beauty still more piquant. Less tall than many girls of fourteen, she was exquisitely formed; the close-fitting dress became her taper waist, the ivory fairness of the throat and hands shone out in their boyish setting, and the soft delicacy of feature and complexion were enhanced by the vivid sparkling of those porcelain blue eyes, under the long lashes, still so fair and glossy as to glisten in the light, like her profuse flaxen tresses, arranged in a cunning wilderness of plaits and natural ringlets. The great charm was the minuteness and refinement of the mould containing the energetic spirit that glanced in her eyes, quivered on her lips, and pervaded every movement of the elastic feet and hands, childlike in size, statue-like in symmetry, elfin in quickness and dexterity. 'Lucile la Fée,' she might well have been called, as she sat manipulating the gorgeous silk and feathers with an essential strength and firmness of hands such as could hardly have been expected from such small members, and producing such lovely specimens that nothing seemed wanting but a touch of her wand to endow them with life. It was fit fairy work, and be it farther known, that few women are capable of it; they seldom have sufficient accuracy of sustained attention and firmness of finger combined, to produce anything artistic or durable, and the accomplishment was therefore Lucilla's pride. Her cousin could prepare materials, but could not finish. 'Have you brought the pig's wool?' repeated Lucy, as they sat down. 'No? That *is* a cruel way of testifying. I can't find a scrap of that shade, though I've nearly broke my heart in the tackle shops. Here's my last fragment, and this butcher will be a wreck for want of it.'

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'Let me see,' quoth the gentleman, bending over with an air of intimacy.

'You may see,' returned Lucilla, 'but that will do no good. Owen got this at a little shop at Elverslope, and we can only conclude that the father of orange pigs is dead, for we've tried every maker, and can't hit off the tint.'

'I've seen it in a shop in the Strand,' he said, with an air of depreciation, such as set both ladies off with an ardour inexplicable to mere spectators, both vehemently defending the peculiarity of their favourite hue, and little personalities passing, exceedingly diverting apparently to both parties, but which vexed Honora and dismayed Phœbe by the coolness of the gentleman, and the ease with which he was treated by the ladies.

Luncheon was announced in the midst, and in the dining-room they found Miss Charteris, a dark, aquiline beauty, of highly-coloured complexion, such as permitted the glowing hues of dress and ornament in which she delighted, and large languid dark eyes of Oriental appearance.

In the scarlet and gold net confining her sable locks, her ponderous earrings, her massive chains and bracelets, and gorgeous silk, she was a splendid ornament at the head of the table; but she looked sleepily out from under her black-fringed eyelids, turned over the carving as a matter of course to Owen, and evidently regarded the two young ladies as bound to take all trouble off her hands in talking, arranging, or settling what she should do with herself or her carriage.

'Lolly shall take you there,' or 'Lolly shall call for that,' passed between the cousins without the smallest reference to Lolly herself (otherwise Eloïsa), who looked serenely indifferent through all the plans proposed for her, only once exerting her will sufficiently to say, 'Very well, Rashe, dear, you'll tell the coachman—only don't forget that I must go to Storr and Mortimer's.'

Honora expressed a hope that Lucilla would come with her party to the Exhibition, and was not pleased that Mr. Calthorp exclaimed that there was another plan.

'No, no, Mr. Calthorp, I never said any such thing!'

'Miss Charteris, is not that a little too strong?'

'You told me of the Dorking,' cried Lucilla, 'and you said you would not miss the sight for anything; but I never said you should have it.'

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Rashe meanwhile clapped her hands with exultation, and there was a regular chatter of eager

voices—'I should like to know how you would get the hackles out of a suburban poultry fancier.'

'Out of him?—no, out of his best Dorking. Priced at £120 last exhibition—two years old—wouldn't take £200 for him now.'

'You don't mean that you've seen him?'

'Hurrah!' Lucilla opened a paper, and waved triumphantly five of the long tippet-plumes of chanticleer.

'You don't mean—'

'Mean! I more than mean! Didn't you tell us that you had been to see the old party on business, and had spied the hackles walking about in his yard?'

'And I had hoped to introduce you.'

'As if we needed that! No, no. Rashe, and I started off at six o'clock this morning, to shake off the remains of the ball, rode down to Brompton, and did our work. No, it was not like the macaw business, I declare. The old gentleman held the bird for us himself, and I promised him a dried salmon.'

'Well, I had flattered myself—it was an unfair advantage, Miss Sandbrook.'

'Not in the least. Had you gone, it would have cast a general clumsiness over the whole transaction, and not left the worthy old owner half so well satisfied. I believe you had so little originality as to expect to engage him in conversation while I captured the bird; but once was enough of that.'

Phœbe could not help asking what was meant; and it was explained that, while a call was being made on a certain old lady with a blue and yellow macaw, Lucilla had contrived to abstract the prime glory of the creature's tail—a blue feather lined with yellow—an irresistible charm to a fisherwoman. But here even the tranquil Eloïsa murmured that Cilly must never do so again when she went out with HER.

'No, Lolly, indeed I won't. I prefer honesty, I assure you, except when it is too commonplace. I'll meddle with nothing at Madame Sonnini's this afternoon.'

'Then you cannot come with us?'

'Why, you see, Honor, here have Rashe and I been appointed band-masters, Lord Chamberlains, masters of the ceremonies, major-domos, and I don't know what, to all the Castle Blanch concern; and as Rashe neither knows nor cares about music, I've got all that on my hands; and I must take Lolly to look on while I manage the programme.'

'Are you too busy to find a day to spend with us at St. Wulstan's?'

A discussion of engagements took place, apparently at the rate of five per day; but Mrs. Charteris interposed an invitation to dinner for the next evening, including Robert; and farther it appeared that all the three were expected to take part in the Castle Blanch festivities. Lolly had evidently been told of them as settled certainties among the guests, and Lucilla, Owen, and Rashe vied with each other in declaring that they had imagined Honor to have brought Phœbe to London with no other intent, and that all was fixed for the ladies to sleep at Castle Blanch the night before, and Robert Fulmort to come down in the morning by train.

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Nothing could have been farther from Honora's predilections than such gaieties, but Phœbe's eyes were growing round with eagerness, and there would be unkindness in denying her the pleasure, as well as churlishness in disappointing Lucy and Owen, who had reckoned on her in so gratifying a manner. Without decidedly accepting or refusing, she let the talk go on.

'Miss Fulmort,' said Ratia, 'I hope you are not too religious to dance.'

Much surprised, Phœbe made some reply in the negative.

'Oh, I forgot, that's not your sisters' line; but I thought . . . ' and she gave an expressive glance to indicate Miss Charlecote.

'Oh, no,' again said Phœbe, decidedly.

'Yes, I understand. Never mind, I ought to have remembered; but when people are *gone in*, one is apt to forget whether they think "promiscuous dancing" immoral or praiseworthy. Well, you must know some of my brother's constituents are alarmingly excellent—fat, suburban, and retired; and we have hatched a juvenile hay-making, where they may eat and flirt without detriment to decided piety; and when they go off, we dress for a second instalment for an evening party.'

To Phœbe it sounded like opening Paradise, and she listened anxiously for the decision; but nothing appeared certain except the morrow's dinner, and that Lucilla was to come to spend the Sunday at Miss Charlecote's; and this being fixed, the luncheon party broke up, with such pretty bright affection on Lucilla's part, such merry coaxing of Honor, and such orders to Phœbe to 'catch that Robin to-morrow,' that there was no room left for the sense of disappointment that no rational word had passed.

'Where?' asked Owen, getting into the carriage.

'Henry knows—the Royal Academy.'

'Ha! no alteration in consequence of the invitation? no finery required? you must not carry Hiltonbury philosophy *too* far.'

'I have not accepted it.'

'That is not required; it is your fate, Phœbe; why don't you speak, or are you under an embargo from any of the wicked enchanters? Even if so, you might be got off among the pious juveniles.'

'Papa was so kind as to say I might go wherever Miss Charlecote liked,' said Phœbe; 'but, indeed, I had rather do exactly what suits her; I dare say the morning party will suit her best—'

'The oily popular preachers!'

'Thank you, Owen,' laughed Honor.

'No, now you must accept the whole. There's room to give the preachers a wide berth, even should they insist on "concluding with prayer," and it will be a pretty sight. They have the Guards' band coming.'

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'I never heard a military band,' ejaculated Phœbe.

'And there are to be sports for the village children, I believe,' added Owen; 'besides, you will like to meet some of the lions—the Archdeacon and his wife will be there.'

'But how can I think of filling up Mrs. Charteris's house, without the least acquaintance?'

'Honey-sweet philosopher, Eloïsa heeds as little how her house is filled, so it *be* filled, as Jessica did her father's ring. Five dresses a day, with accoutrements to match, and for the rest she is sublimely indifferent. Fortune played her a cruel trick in preventing her from being born a fair sultana.'

'Not to be a Mahometan?' said Phœbe.

'I don't imagine she is far removed from one;' then, as Phœbe's horror made her look like Maria, he added—'don't mean that she was not bred a Christian, but the Oriental mind never distinctly embraces tenets contrary to its constitution.'

'Miss Charlecote, is he talking in earnest?'

'I hope not,' Honora said, a little severely, 'for he would be giving a grievous account of the poor lady's faith—'

'Faith! no, my dear, she has not reflection enough for faith. All that enters into the Eastern female mind is a little observance.'

'And you are not going to lead Phœbe to believe that you think it indifferent whether those observances be Christian or Pagan?' said Honora, earnestly.

There was a little pause, and then Owen rather hesitatingly said—'It is a hard thing to pronounce that three-fifths of one's fellow-creatures are on the high road to Erebus, especially when ethnologically we find that certain aspects of doctrine never have approved themselves to certain races, and that climate is stronger than creed. Am I not talking Fennimorically, Phœbe?'

'Much more Fennimorically than I wish her to hear, or you to speak,' said Honora; 'you talk as if there were no such thing as truth.'

'Ah! now comes the question of subjective and objective, and I was as innocent as possible of any intention of plunging into such a sea, or bringing those furrows into your forehead, dear Honor! See what it is to talk to you and Miss Fennimore's pupil. All things, human and divine, have arisen out of my simple endeavour to show you that you must come to Castle Blanch, the planners of the feast having so ordained, and it being good for all parties, due from the fairy godmother to the third princess, and seriously giving Cilly another chance of returning within the bounds of discretion.'

Honora thought as much. She hoped that Robert would by that time have assumed his right to plead with Lucilla, and that in such a case she should be a welcome refuge, and Phœbe still more indispensable; so her lips opened in a yielding smile, and Phœbe thanked her rapturously, vague hopes of Robert's bliss adding zest to the anticipation of the lifting of the curtain which hid the world of brightness.

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'There's still time,' said Owen, with his hand on the check-string; 'which do you patronize? Redmayne or—'

'Nonsense,' smiled Honor, 'we can't waste our escort upon women's work.'

'Ladies never want a gentleman more than when their taste is to be directed.'

'He is afraid to trust us, Phœbe.'

'Conscience has spoken,' said Owen; 'she knows how she would go and disguise herself in an old dowager's gown to try to look like sixty!'

'As for silk gowns—'

'I positively forbid it,' he cried, cutting her short; 'it is five years old!'

'A reason why I should not have another too grand to wear out.'

'And you never ought to have had it. Phœbe, it was bought when Lucy was seventeen, on purpose to look as if she was of a fit age for a wall-flower, and so well has the poor thing done its duty, that Lucy hears herself designated as the pretty girl who belongs to the violet and white! If she had known *that* was coming after her, I won't answer for the consequence.'

'If it *does* annoy Lucy—we do not so often go out together—don't, Owen, I never said it was to be now, I am bent on Landseer.'

'But I said so,' returned Owen, 'for Miss Charlecote regards the distressed dressmakers—four dresses—think of the fingers that must ache over them.'

'Well, he does what he pleases,' sighed Honor; 'there's no help for it, you see, Phœbe. Shall you dislike looking on?' For she doubted whether Phœbe had been provided with means for her equipment, and might not require delay and correspondence but the frank answer was, 'Thank you, I shall be glad of the opportunity. Papa told me I might fit myself out in case of need.'

'And suppose we are too late for the Exhibition.'

'I never bought a dress before,' quoth Phœbe.

Owen laughed. 'That's right, Phœbe! Be strong-minded and original enough to own that some decorations surpass "Raffaelles, Correggios, and stuff"—'

'No,' said Phœbe, simply, and with no affectation of scorn, 'they only interest me more at this moment.'

Honor smiled to Owen her love for the honesty that never spoke for effect, nor took what it believed it ought to feel, for what it really felt. Withal, Owen gained his purpose, and conducted the two ladies into one of the great shops of ladies apparel.

Phœbe followed Miss Charlecote with eyes of lively anticipation. Miss Fennimore had taught her to be *real* when she could not be philosophical, and scruples as to the 'vain pomp and glory of the world' had not presented themselves; she only found herself admitted to privileges hitherto so jealously withheld as to endow them with a factitious value, and in a scene of real beauty. The textures, patterns, and tints were, as Owen observed, such as approved themselves to the æsthetic sense, the miniature embroidery of the brocades was absolute art, and no contemptible taste was displayed in the apparently fortuitous yet really elaborate groupings of rich and delicate hues, fine folds, or ponderous draperies.

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'Far from it,' said Honor; 'the only doubt is whether such be a worthy application of æsthetics. Were they not given us for better uses?'

'To diffuse the widest amount of happiness?'

'That is one purpose.'

'And a fair woman well dressed is the sight most delightful to the greatest number of beholders.'

Honor made a playful face of utter repudiation of the maxim, but meeting him on his own ground emphasized 'FAIR and WELL dressed—that is, appropriately.'

'That is what brings me here, said Owen, turning round, as the changeful silks, already asked for, were laid on the counter before them.

It was an amusing shopping. The gentleman's object was to direct the taste of both ladies, but his success was not the same. Honora's first affections fell upon a handsome black, enlivened by beautiful blue flowers in the flounces; but her tyrant scouted it as a 'dingy dowager,' and overruled her into choosing a delicate lavender, insisting that if it were less durable, so much the better for her friends, and domineering over the black lace accompaniments with a solemn tenderness that made her warn him in a whisper that people were taking her for his ancient bride, thus making him some degrees more drolly attentive; settling her head-gear with the lady of the shop, without reference to her. After all, it was very charming to be so affectionately made a fool of, and it was better for her children as well as due to the house of Charlecote that she should not be a dowdy country cousin.

Meantime, Phœbe stood by amused, admiring, assisting, but not at all bewildered. Miss Fennimore had impressed the maxim; 'Always know what you mean to do, and do it.' She had never chosen a dress before, but that did not hinder her from having a mind and knowing it; she had a reply for each silk that Owen suggested, and the moment her turn came, she desired to see a green glacé. In vain he exclaimed, and drew his favourites in front of her, in vain appealed to Miss Charlecote and the shopman; she laughed him off, took but a moment to reject each proffered green which did not please her, and in as brief a space had recognized the true delicate pale tint of ocean. It was one that few complexions could have borne, but their connoisseur, with one glance from it to her fresh cheek, owned her right, though much depended on the garniture, and he again brought forward his beloved lilac, insinuating that he should regard her selection of

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it as a personal attention. No; she laughed, and said she had made up her mind and would not change; and while he was presiding over Honora's black lace, she was beforehand with him, and her bill was being made out for her white muslin worked mantle, white bonnet with a tuft of lady grass, white evening dress, and wreath of lilies of the valley.

'Green and white, forsaken quite,' was the best revenge that occurred to him, and Miss Charlecote declared herself ashamed that the old lady's dress had caused so much more fuss than the young lady's.

It was of course too late for the Exhibition, so they applied themselves to further shopping, until Owen had come to the farthest point whence he could conveniently walk back to dine with his cousins, and go with them to the opera, and he expended some vituperation upon Ratia for an invitation which had prevented Phœbe from being asked to join the party.

Phœbe was happy enough without it, and though not morbidly bashful, felt that at present it was more comfortable to be under Miss Charlecote's wing than that of Lucilla, and that the quiet evening was more composing than fresh scenes of novelty.

The Woolstone-lane world was truly very different from that of which she had had a glimpse, and quite as new to her. Mr. Parsons, after his partial survey, was considering of possibilities, or more truly of endeavours at impossibilities, a mission to that dreadful population, means of discovering their sick, of reclaiming their children, of causing the true Light to shine in that frightful gross darkness that covered the people. She had never heard anything yet discussed save on the principle of self-pleasing or self-aggrandizement; here, self-spending was the axiom on which all the problems were worked.

After dinner, Mr. Parsons retired into the study, and while his wife and Miss Charlecote sat down for a friendly gossip over the marriages of the two daughters, Phœbe welcomed an unrestrained *tête-à-tête* with her brother. They were one on either seat of the old oriel window, she, with her work on her lap, full of pleasant things to tell him, but pausing as she looked up, and saw his eyes far far away, as he knelt on the cushion, his elbows on the sill of the open lattice, one hand supporting his chin, the other slowly erecting his hair into the likeness of the fretful porcupine. He had heard of, but barely assented to, the morrow's dinner, or the *fête* at Castle Blanch; he had not even asked her how Lucilla looked; and after waiting for some time, she said, as a feeler—'You go with us to-morrow?'

'I suppose I must.'

'Lucy said so much in her pretty way about catching the robin, that I am sure she was vexed at your not having called.'

No answer: his eyes had not come home.

Presently he mumbled something so much distorted by the compression of his chin, and by his face being out of window, that his sister could not make it out. In answer to her sound of inquiry, he took down one hand, removed the other from his temple, and emitting a modicum more voice from between his teeth, said, 'It is plain—it can't be—'

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'What can't be? Not—Lucy?' gasped Phœbe.

'I can't take shares in the business.'

Her look of relief moved him to explain, and drawing himself in, he sat down on his own window-seat, stretching a leg across, and resting one foot upon that where she was placed, so as to form a sort of barrier, shutting themselves into a sense of privacy.

'I can't do it,' he repeated, 'not if my bread depended on it.'

'What is the matter?'

'I have looked into the books, I have gone over it with Rawlins.'

'You don't mean that we are going to be ruined?'

'Better that we were than to go on as we do! Phœbe, it is wickedness.' There was a long pause. Robert rested his brow on his hand, Phœbe gazed intently at him, trying to unravel the idea so suddenly presented. She had reasoned it out before he looked up, and she roused him by softly saying, 'You mean that you do not like the manufacture of spirits because they produce so much evil.'

Though he did not raise his head, she understood his affirmation, and went on with her quiet logic, for, poor girl, hers was not the happy maiden's defence—'What my father does cannot be wrong.' Without condemning her father, she instinctively knew that weapon was not in her armoury, and could only betake herself to the merits of the case. 'You know how much rather I would see you a clergyman, dear Robin,' she said; 'but I do not understand why you change your mind. We always knew that spirits were improperly used, but that is no reason why none should be made, and they are often necessary.'

'Yes,' he answered; 'but, Phœbe, I have learnt to-day that our trade is not supported by the lawful use of spirits. It is the ministry of hell.'

Phœbe raised her startled eyes in astonished inquiry.

'I would have credited nothing short of the books, but there I find that not above a fifth part of our manufacture goes to respectable houses, where it is applied properly. The profitable traffic, which it is the object to extend, is the supply of the gin palaces of the city. The leases of most of those you see about here belong to the firm, it supplies them, and gains enormously on their receipts. It is to extend the dealings in this way that my legacy is demanded.'

The enormity only gradually beginning to dawn upon Phœbe, all she said was a meditative—'You would not like that.'

'You did not realize it,' he said, nettled at her quiet tone. 'Do not you understand? You and I, and all of us, have eaten and drunk, been taught more than we could learn, lived in a fine house, and been made into ladies and gentlemen, all by battenning on the vice and misery of this wretched population. Those unhappy men and women are lured into the gaudy palaces at the corners of the streets to purchase a moment's oblivion of conscience, by stinting their children of bread, that we may wear fine clothes, and call ourselves county people.'

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'Do not talk so, Robert,' she exclaimed, trembling; 'it cannot be right to say such things—'

'It is only the bare fact! it is no pleasure to me to accuse my own father, I assure you, Phœbe, but I cannot blind myself to the simple truth.'

'He cannot see it in that light.'

'He *will* not.'

'Surely,' faltered Phœbe, 'it cannot be so bad when one does not know it is—'

'So far true. The conscience does not waken quickly to evils with which our lives have been long familiar.'

'And Mervyn was brought up to it—'

'That is not my concern,' said Robert, too much in the tone of 'Am I my brother's keeper?'

'You will at least tell your reasons for refusing.'

'Yes, and much I shall be heeded! However, my own hands shall be pure from the wages of iniquity. I am thankful that all I have comes from the Mervyns.'

'It is a comfort, at least, that you see your way.'

'I suppose it is;' but he sighed heavily, with a sense that it was almost profanation to have set such a profession in the balance against the sacred ministry.

'I know *she* will like it best.'

Dear Phœbe! in spite of Miss Fennimore, faith must still have been much stronger than reason if she could detect the model parsoness in yonder firefly.

Poor child, she went to bed, pondering over her brother's terrible discoveries, and feeling as though she had suddenly awakened to find herself implicated in a web of iniquity; her delightful parcel of purchases lost their charms, and oppressed her as she thought of them in connection with the rags of the squalid children the rector had described, and she felt as if there were no escape, and she could never be happy again under the knowledge of the price of her luxuries, and the dread of judgment. 'Much good had their wealth done them,' as Robert truly said. The house of Beauchamp had never been nearly so happy as if their means had been moderate. Always paying court to their own station, or they were disunited among themselves, and not yet amalgamated with the society to which they had attained, the younger ones passing their elders in cultivation, and every discomfort of change of position felt, though not acknowledged. Even the mother, lady as she was by birth, had only belonged to the second-rate class of gentry, and while elevated by wealth, was lowered by connection, and not having either mind or strength enough to stand on her own ground, trod with an ill-assured foot on that to which she aspired.

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Not that all this crossed Phœbe's mind. There was merely a dreary sense of depression, and of living in the midst of a grievous mistake, from which Robert alone had the power of disentangling himself, and she fell asleep sadly enough; but, fortunately, sins, committed neither by ourselves, nor by those for whom we are responsible, have not a lasting power of paining; and she rose up in due time to her own calm sunshiny spirit of anticipation of the evening's meeting between Robin and Lucy—to say nothing of her own first dinner-party.

CHAPTER IV

And instead of 'dearest Miss,'
Jewel, honey, sweetheart, bliss,
And those forms of old admiring,
Call her cockatrice and siren.—C. LAMB

The ladies of the house were going to a ball, and were in full costume: Eloïsa a study for the Arabian Nights, and Lucilla in an azure gossamer-like texture surrounding her like a cloud, turquoises on her arms, and blue and silver ribbons mingled with her blonde tresses.

Very like the clergyman's wife!

O sage Honor, were you not provoked with yourself for being so old as to regard that bewitching sprite, and marvel whence comes the cost of those robes of the woof of Faerie?

Let Oberon pay Titania's bills.

That must depend on who Oberon is to be.

Phœbe, to whom a doubt on that score would have appeared high treason, nevertheless hated the presence of Mr. Calthorp as much as she could hate anything, and was in restless anxiety as to Titania's behaviour. She herself had no cause to complain, for she was at once singled out and led away from Miss Charlecote, to be shown some photographic performances, in which Lucy and her cousin had been dabbling.

'There, that horrid monster is Owen—he never will come out respectable. Mr. Prendergast, he is better, because you don't see his face. There's our school, Edna Murrell and all; I flatter myself that *is* a work of art; only this little wretch fidgeted, and muddled himself.'

'Is that the mistress? She does not look like one.'

'Not like Sally Page? No; she would bewilder the Hiltonbury mind. I mean you to see her; I would not miss the shock to Honor. No, don't show it to her! I won't have any preparation.'

'Do you call that preparation?' said Owen, coming up, and taking up the photograph indignantly. 'You should not do such things, Cilly!'

'Tisn't I that do them—it's Phœbe's brother—the one in the sky I mean, Dan Phœbus, and if he won't flatter, I can't help it. No, no, I'll not have it broken; it is an exact likeness of all the children's spotted frocks, and if it be not of Edna, it ought to be.'

'Look, Robert,' said Phœbe, as she saw him standing shy, grave, and monumental, with nervous hands clasped over the back of a chair, neither advancing nor retreating, 'what a beautiful place this is!'

'Oh! that's from a print—Glendalough! I mean to bring you plenty of the real place.'

'Kathleen's Cave,' said the unwelcome millionaire.

'Yes, with a comment on Kathleen's awkwardness! I should like to see the hermit who could push me down.'

'You! You'll never tread in Kathleen's steps!'

'Because I shan't find a hermit in the cave.'

'Talk of skylarking on "the lake whose gloomy shore!"' They all laughed except the two Fulmorts.

'There's a simpler reason,' said one of the Guardsmen, 'namely, that neither party will be there at all.'

'No, not the saint—'

'Nor the lady. Miss Charteris tells me all the maiden aunts are come up from the country.' (How angry Phœbe was!)

'Happily it is an article I don't possess.'

'Well, we will not differ about technicalities, as long as the fact is the same. You'll remember my words when you are kept on a diet of Hannah More and Miss Edgeworth till you shall have abjured hounds, balls, and salmon-flies.'

'The woman lives not who has the power!'

'What bet will you take, Miss Sandbrook?'

'What bet will you take, Lord William, that, maiden aunts and all, I appear on the 3rd, in a dress of salmon-flies?'

'A hat trimmed with goose feathers to a pocket-handkerchief, that by that time you are in the family mansion, repenting of your sins.'

Phœbe looked on like one in a dream, while the terms of the wager were arranged with playful precision. She did not know that dinner had been announced, till she found people moving, and in spite of her antipathy to Mr. Calthorp, she rejoiced to find him assigned to herself—dear, good Lucy must have done it to keep Robin to herself, and dear, good Lucy she shall be, in spite of the salmon, since in the progress down-stairs she has cleared the cloud from his brow.

It was done by a confiding caressing clasp on his arm, and the few words, 'Now for old friends! How charming little Phœbe looks!'

How different were his massive brow and deep-set eyes without their usual load, and how sweet his gratified smile!

'Where have you been, you Robin? If I had not passed you in the Park, I should never have guessed there was such a bird in London. I began to change my mind, like Christiana—"I thought Robins were harmless and gentle birds, wont to hop about men's doors, and feed on

crumbs, and such-like harmless food.”

‘And have you seen me eating worms?’

‘I’ve not seen you at all.’

‘I did not think you had leisure—I did not believe I should be welcome.’

‘The cruellest cut of all! positive irony—’

‘No, indeed! I am not so conceited as—’

‘As what?’

‘As to suppose you could want me.’

‘And there was I longing to hear about Phœbe! If you had only come, I could have contrived her going to the *Zauberflöte* with us last night, but I didn’t know the length of her tether.’

‘I did not know you were so kind.’

‘Be kinder yourself another time. Don’t I know how I have been torn to pieces at Hiltonbury, without a friend to say one word for the poor little morsel!’ she said, piteously.

He was impelled to an eager ‘No, no!’ but recalling facts, he modified his reply into, ‘Friends enough, but very anxious!’

‘There, I knew none of you trusted me,’ she said, pretending to pout.

‘When play is so like earnest—’

‘Slow people are taken in! That’s the fun! I like to show that I can walk alone sometimes, and not be snatched up the moment I pop my head from under my leading-strings.’

Her pretty gay toss of the head prevented Robert from thinking whether woman is meant to be without leading-strings.

‘And it was to avoid countenancing my vagaries that you stayed away?’ she said, with a look of injured innocence.

‘I was very much occupied,’ answered Robert, feeling himself in the wrong.

‘That horrid office! You aren’t thinking of becoming a Clarence, to drown yourself in brandy—that would never do.’

‘No, I have given up all thoughts of that!’

‘You *thought*, you wretched Redbreast! I *thought* you knew better.’

‘So I ought,’ said Robert, gravely, ‘but my father wished me to make the experiment, and I must own, that before I looked into the details, there were considerations which—which—’

‘Such considerations as *£ s. d.*? For shame!’

‘For shame, indeed,’ said the happy Robert. ‘Phœbe judged you truly. I did not know what might be the effect of habit—’ and he became embarrassed, doubtful whether she would accept the assumption on which he spoke; but she went beyond his hopes.

‘The only place I ever cared for is a very small old parsonage,’ she said, with feeling in her tone.

‘Wrapworth? that is near Castle Blanch.’

‘Yes! I must show it you. You shall come with Honor and Phœbe on Monday, and I will show you everything.’

‘I should be delighted—but is it not arranged?’

‘I’ll take care of that. Mr. Prendergast shall take you in, as he would a newly-arrived rhinoceros, if I told him. He was our curate, and used to live in the house even in our time. Don’t say a word, Robin; it is to be. I must have you see my river, and the stile where my father used to sit when he was tired. I’ve never told any one which that is.’

Ordinarily Lucilla never seemed to think of her father, never named him, and her outpouring was doubly prized by Robert, whose listening face drew her on.

‘I was too much of a child to understand how fearfully weak he must have been, for he could not come home from the castle without a rest on that stile, and we used to play round him, and bring him flowers. My best recollections are all of that last summer—it seems like my whole life at home, and much longer than it could really have been. We were all in all to one another. How different it would have been if he had lived! I think no one has believed in me since.’

There was something ineffably soft and sad in the last words, as the beautiful, petted, but still lonely orphan cast down her eyelids with a low long sigh, as though owning her errors, but pleading this extenuation. Robert, much moved, was murmuring something incoherent, but she went on. ‘Rashe does, perhaps. Can’t you see how it is a part of the general disbelief in me to suppose that I come here only for London seasons, and such like? I must live where I have what

the dear old soul there has not got to give.'

'You cannot doubt of her affection. I am sure there is nothing she would not do for you.'

"Do!" that is not what I want. It can't be done, it must be *felt*, and that it never will be. When there's a mutual antagonism, gratitude becomes a fetter, intolerable when it is strained.'

'I cannot bear to hear you talk so; revering Miss Charlecote as I do, and feeling that I owe everything to her notice.'

'Oh, I find no fault, I reverence her too! It was only the nature of things, not her intentions, nor her kindness, that was to blame. She meant to be justice and mercy combined towards us, but I had all the one, and Owen all the other. Not that I am jealous! Oh, no! Not that she could help it; but no woman can help being hard on her rival's daughter.'

Nothing but the sweet tone and sad arch smile could have made this speech endurable to Robert, even though he remembered many times when the trembling of the scale in Miss Charlecote's hands had filled him with indignation. 'You allow that it was justice,' he said, smiling.

'No doubt of that,' she laughed. 'Poor Honor! I must have been a grievous visitation, but I am very good now; I shall come and spend Sunday as gravely as a judge, and when you come to Wrapworth, you shall see how I can go to the school when it is not forced down my throat—no merit either, for our mistress is perfectly charming, with *such* a voice! If I were Phœbe I would look out, for Owen is desperately smitten.'

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'Phœbe!' repeated Robert, with a startled look.

'Owen and Phœbe! I considered it *une affaire arrangée* as much as—' She had almost said you and me: Robert could supply the omission, but he was only blind of *one* eye, and gravely said, 'It is well there is plenty of time before Owen to tame him down.'

'Oney,' laughed Lucilla; 'yes, he has a good deal to do in that line, with his opinions in such a mess that I really don't know what he does believe.'

Though the information was not new to Robert, her levity dismayed him, and he gravely began, 'If you have such fears—' but she cut him off short.

'Did you ever play at bagatelle?'

He stared in displeased surprise.

'Did you never see the ball go joggling about before it could settle into its hole, and yet abiding there very steadily at last? Look on quietly, and you will see the poor fellow as sober a parish priest as yourself.'

'You are a very philosophical spectator of the process,' Robert said, still displeased.

'Just consider what a capacious swallow the poor boy had in his tender infancy, and how hard it was crammed with legends, hymns, and allegories, with so many scruples bound down on his poor little conscience, that no wonder, when the time of expansion came, the whole concern should give way with a jerk.'

'I thought Miss Charlecote's education had been most anxiously admirable.'

'Precisely so! Don't you see? Why, how dull you are for a man who has been to Oxford!'

'I should seriously be glad to hear your view, for Owen's course has always been inexplicable to me.'

'To you, poor Robin, who lived gratefully on the crumbs of our advantages! The point was that to you they were crumbs, while we had a surfeit.'

'Owen never seemed overdone. I used rather to hate him for his faultlessness, and his familiarity with what awed my ignorance.'

'The worse for him! He was too apt a scholar, and received all unresisting, unsifting—Anglo-Catholicism, slightly touched with sentiment, enthusiasm for the Crusades, passive obedience—acted faithfully up to it; imagined that to be "not a good Churchman," as he told Charles, expressed the seven deadly sins, and that reasoning was the deadliest of all!'

'As far as I understand you, you mean that there was not sufficient distinction between proven and non-proven—important and unimportant.'

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'You begin to perceive. If Faith be overworked, Reason kicks; and, of course, when Owen found the Holt was not the world; that thinking was not the exclusive privilege of demons; that habits he considered as imperative duties were inconvenient, not to say impracticable; that his articles of faith included much of the apocryphal,—why, there was a general downfall!'

'Poor Miss Charlecote,' sighed Robert, 'it is a disheartening effect of so much care.'

'She should have let him alone, then, for Uncle Kit to make a sailor of. Then he would have had something better to do than to *think!*'

'Then you are distressed about him?' said Robert, wistfully.

'Thank you,' said she, laughing; 'but you see I am too wise ever to think or distress myself. He'll think himself straight in time, and begin a reconstruction from his scattered materials, I suppose, and meantime he is a very comfortable brother, as such things go; but it is one of the grudges I can't help owing to Honora, that such a fine fellow as that is not an independent sailor or soldier, able to have some fun, and not looked on as a mere dangler after the Holt.'

'I thought the reverse was clearly understood?'

'She ought to have "acted as sich." How my relatives, and yours too, would laugh if you told them so! Not that I think, like them, that it is Elizabethan dislike to naming a successor, nor to keep him on his good behaviour; she is far above that, but it is plain how it will be. The only other relation she knows in the world is farther off than we are—not a bit more of a Charlecote, and twice her age; and when she has waited twenty or thirty years longer for the auburn-haired lady my father saw in a chapel at Toronto, she will bethink herself that Owen, or Owen's eldest son, had better have it than the Queen. That's the sense of it; but I hate the hanger-on position it keeps him in.'

'It is a misfortune,' said Robert. 'People treat him as a man of expectations, and at his age it would not be easy to disown them, even to himself. He has an eldest son air about him, which makes people impose on him the belief that he is one; and yet, who could have guarded against the notion more carefully than Miss Charlecote?'

'I'm of Uncle Kit's mind,' said Lucilla, 'that children should be left to their natural guardians. What! is Lolly really moving before I have softened down the edge of my ingratitude?'

'So!' said Miss Charteris, as she brought up the rear of the procession of ladies on the stairs.

Lucilla faced about on the step above, with a face where interrogation was mingled with merry defiance.

'So that is why the Calthorp could not get a word all the livelong dinner-time!'

'Ah! I used you ill; I promised you an opportunity of studying "Cock Robin," but you see I could not help keeping him myself—I had not seen him for so long.'

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'You were very welcome! It is the very creature that baffles me. I can talk to any animal in the world except an incipient parson.'

'Owen, for instance?'

'Oh! if people choose to put a force on nature, there can be no general rules. But, Cilly, you know I've always said you should marry whoever you liked; but I require another assurance—on your word and honour—that you are not irrevocably Jenny Wren as yet!'

'Did you not see the currant wine?' said Cilly, pulling leaves off a myrtle in a tub on the stairs, and scattering them over her cousin.

'Seriously, Cilly! Ah, I see now—your exclusive attention to him entirely reassures me. You would never have served him so, if you had meant it.'

'It was commonplace in me,' said Lucilla, gravely, 'but I could not help it; he made me feel so good—or so bad—that I believe I shall—'

'Not give up the salmon,' cried Horatia. 'Cilly, you will drive me to commit matrimony on the spot.'

'Do,' said Lucilla, running lightly up, and dancing into the drawing-room, where the ladies were so much at their ease, on low couches and ottomans, that Phœbe stood transfixed by the novelty of a drawing-room treated with such freedom as was seldom permitted in even the schoolroom at Beauchamp, when Miss Fennimore was in presence.

'Phœbe, bright Phœbe!' cried Lucilla, pouncing on both her hands, and drawing her towards the other room, 'it is ten ages since I saw you, and you must bring your taste to aid my choice of the fly costume. Did you hear, Rashe? I've a bet with Lord William that I appear at the ball all in flies. Isn't it fun?'

'Oh, jolly!' cried Horatia. 'Make yourself a pike-fly.'

'No, no; not a guy for any one. Only wear a trimming of salmon-flies, which will be lovely.'

'You do not really mean it?' said Phœbe.

'Mean it? With all my heart, in spite of the tremendous sacrifice of good flies. Where honour is concerned—'

'There, I knew you would not shirk.'

'Did I ever say so?'—in a whisper, not unheard by Phœbe, and affording her so much satisfaction that she only said, in a grave, puzzled voice, 'The hooks?'

'Hooks and all,' was the answer. 'I do nothing by halves.'

'What a state of mind the fishermen will be in! proceeded Horatia. 'You'll have every one of them at your feet.'

'I shall tell them that two of a trade never agree. Come, and let us choose.' And opening a drawer, Lucilla took out her long parchment book, and was soon eloquent on the merits of the doctor, the butcher, the duchess, and all her other radiant fabrications of gold pheasants' feathers, parrot plumes, jays' wings, and the like. Phœbe could not help admiring their beauty, though she was perplexed all the while, uncomfortable on Robert's account, and yet not enough assured of the usages of the London world to be certain whether this were unsuitable. The Charteris family, though not of the most *élite* circles of all, were in one to which the Fulmorts had barely the *entrée*, and the ease and dash of the young ladies, Lucilla's superior age, and caressing patronage, all made Phœbe in her own eyes too young and ignorant to pass an opinion. She would have known more about the properties of a rectangle or the dangers of a paper currency.

Longing to know what Miss Charlecote thought, she stood, answering as little as possible, until Rashe had been summoned to the party in the outer room, and Cilly said, laughing, 'Well, does she astonish your infant mind?'

'I do not quite enter into her,' said Phœbe, doubtfully.

'The best-natured and most unappreciated girl in the world. Up to anything, and only a victim to prejudice. You, who have a strong-minded governess, ought to be superior to the delusion that it is interesting to be stupid and helpless.'

'I never thought so,' said Phœbe, feeling for a moment in the wrong, as Lucilla always managed to make her antagonists do.

'Yes, you do, or why look at me in that pleading, perplexed fashion, save that you have become possessed with the general prejudice. Weigh it, by the light of Whately's logic, and own candidly wherefore Rashe and I should be more liable to come to grief, travelling alone, than two men of the same ages.'

'I have not grounds enough to judge,' said Phœbe, beginning as though Miss Fennimore were giving an exercise to her reasoning powers; then, continuing with her girlish eagerness of entreaty, 'I only know that it cannot be right, since it grieves Robin and Miss Charlecote so much.'

'And all that grieves Robin and Miss Charlecote must be shocking, eh? Oh, Phœbe, what very women all the Miss Fennimores in the world leave us, and how lucky it is!'

'But I don't think you are going to grieve them,' said Phœbe, earnestly.

'I hate the word!' said Lucilla. 'Plaguing is only fun, but grieving, that is serious.'

'I do believe this is only plaguing!' cried Phœbe, 'and that this is your way of disposing of all the flies. I shall tell Robin so!'

'To spoil all my fun,' exclaimed Lucilla. 'No, indeed!'

Phœbe only gave a nod and smile of supreme satisfaction.

'Ah! but, Phœbe, if I'm to grieve nobody, what's to become of poor Rashe, you little selfish woman?'

'Selfish, no!' sturdily said Phœbe. 'If it be wrong for you, it must be equally wrong for her; and perhaps' she added, slowly, 'you would both be glad of some good reason for giving it up. Lucy, dear, do tell me whether you really like it, for I cannot fancy you so.'

'Like it? Well, yes! I like the salmons, and I dote on the fun and the fuss. I say, Phœbe, can you bear the burden of a secret? Well—only mind, if you tell Robin or Honor, I shall certainly go; we never would have taken it up in earnest if such a rout had not been made about it, that we were driven to show we did not care, and could be trusted with ourselves.'

'Then you don't mean it?'

'That's as people behave themselves. Hush! Here comes Honor. Look here, Sweet Honey, I am in a process of selection. I am pledged to come out at the ball in a unique trimming of salmon-flies.'

'My dear!' cried poor Honor, in consternation, 'you can't be so absurd.'

'It is so slow not to be absurd.'

'At fit times, yes; but to make yourself so conspicuous!'

'They say I can't help that,' returned Lucy, in a tone of comical melancholy.

'Well, my dear, we will talk it over on Sunday, when I hope you may be in a rational mood.'

'Don't say so,' implored Lucilla, 'or I shan't have the courage to come. A rational mood! It is enough to frighten one away; and really I do want very much to come. I've not heard a word yet about the Holt. How is the old dame, this summer?'

And Lucy went on with unceasing interest about all Hiltonbury matters, great and small, bewitching Honora more than would have seemed possible under the circumstances. She was

such a winning fairy that it was hardly possible to treat her seriously, or to recollect causes of displeasure, when under the spell of her caressing vivacity, and unruffled, audacious fun.

So impregnable was her gracious good-humour, so untameable her high spirits, that it was only by remembering the little spitfire of twelve or fourteen years ago that it was credible that she had a temper at all; the temper erst wont to exhale in chamois bounds and dervish pirouettes, had apparently left not a trace behind, and the sullen ungraciousness to those who offended her had become the sunniest sweetness, impossible to disturb. Was it real improvement? Concealment it was not, for Lucilla had always been transparently true. Was it not more probably connected with that strange levity, almost insensibility, that had apparently indurated feelings which in early childhood had seemed sensitive even to the extent of violence? Was she only good-humoured because nothing touched her? Had that agony of parting with her gentle father seared her affections, till she had become like a polished gem, all bright glancing beauty, but utterly unfeeling?

CHAPTER V

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Reproof falleth on the saucy as water.—FEEJEE PROVERB

Considerate of the slender purses of her children, Honora had devoted her carriage to fetch them to St. Wulstan's on the Sunday morning, but her offer had been declined, on the ground that the Charteris conveyances were free to them, and that it was better to make use of an establishment to which Sunday was no object, than to cloud the honest face of the Hiltonbury coachman by depriving his horses of their day of rest. Owen would far rather take a cab than so affront Grey! Pleased with his bright manner, Honora had yet reason to fear that expense was too indifferent to both brother and sister, and that the Charteris household only encouraged recklessness. Wherever she went she heard of the extravagance of the family, and in the shops the most costly wares were recommended as the choice of Mrs. Charteris. Formerly, though Honor had equipped Lucilla handsomely for visits to Castle Blanch, she had always found her wardrobe increased by the gifts of her uncle and aunt. The girl had been of age more than a year, and in the present state of the family, it was impossible that her dress could be still provided at their expense, yet it was manifestly far beyond her means; and what could be the result? She would certainly brook no interference, and would cast advice to the winds. Poor Honor could only hope for a crash that would bring her to reason, and devise schemes for forcing her from the effects of her own imprudence without breaking into her small portion. The great fear was lost false pride, and Charteris influence, should lead her to pay her debts at the cost of a marriage with the millionaire; and Honor could take little comfort in Owen's assurance that the Calthorp had too much sense to think of Cilly Sandbrook, and only promoted and watched her vagaries for the sake of amusement and curiosity. There was small satisfaction to her well-wishers in hearing that no sensible man could think seriously of her.

Anxiously was that Sunday awaited in Woolstone-lane, the whole party feeling that this was the best chance of seeing Lucilla in a reasonable light, and coming to an understanding with her. Owen was often enough visible in the interim, and always extremely agreeable; but Lucilla never, and he only brought an account of her gaieties, shrugging his shoulders over them.

The day came; the bells began, they chimed, they changed, but still no Sandbrooks appeared. Mr. Parsons set off, and Robert made an excursion to the corner of the street. In vain Miss Charlecote still lingered; Mrs. Parsons, in despair, called Phœbe on with her as the single bell rang, and Honor and Robert presently started with heads turned over their shoulders, and lips laying all blame on Charteris' delays of breakfast. A last wistful look, and the church porch engulfed them; but even when enclosed in the polished square pew, they could not resign hope at every tread on the matted floor, and finally subsided into a trust that the truants might after service emerge from a seat near the door. There were only too many to choose from.

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That hope baffled, Honora still manufactured excuses which Phœbe greedily seized and offered to her brother, but she read his rejection of them in his face, and to her conviction that it was all accident, he answered, as she took his arm, 'A small accident would suffice for Sandbrook.'

'You don't think he is hindering his sister!'

'I can't tell. I only know that he is one of the many stumbling-blocks in her way. He can do no good to any one with whom he associates intimately. I hate to see him reading poetry with you.'

'Why did you never tell me so?' asked the startled Phœbe.

'You are so much taken up with him that I can never get at you, when I am not devoured by that office.'

'I am sure I did not know it,' humbly answered Phœbe. 'He is very kind and amusing, and Miss Charlecote is so fond of him that, of course, we must be together; but I never meant to neglect you, Robin, dear.'

'No, no, nonsense, it is no paltry jealousy; only now I can speak to you, I must,' said Robert, who had been in vain craving for this opportunity of getting his sister alone, ever since the alarm excited by Lucilla's words.

'What is this harm, Robin?'

'Say not a word of it. Miss Charlecote's heart must not be broken before its time, and at any rate it shall not come through me.'

'What, Robert?'

'The knowledge of what he is. Don't say it is prejudice. I know I never liked him, but you shall hear why. You ought now—'

Robert's mind had often of late glanced back to the childish days when, with their present opinions reversed, he thought Owen a muff, and Owen thought him a reprobate. To his own blunt and reserved nature, the expressions, so charming to poor Miss Charlecote, had been painfully distasteful. Sentiment, profession, obtrusive reverence, and fault-finding scruples had revolted him, even when he thought it a proof of his own irreligion to be provoked. Afterwards, when both were schoolboys, Robert had yearly increased in conscientiousness under good discipline and training, but, in their holiday meetings, had found Owen's standard receding as his own advanced, and heard the once-deficient manly spirit asserted by boasts of exploits and deceptions repugnant to a well-conditioned lad. He saw Miss Charlecote's perfect confidence abused and trifled with, and the more he grew in a sense of honour, the more he disliked Owen Sandbrook.

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At the University, where Robert's career had been respectable and commonplace, Owen was at once a man of mark. Mental and physical powers alike rendered him foremost among his compeers; he could compete with the fast, and surpass the slow on their own ground; and his talents, ready celerity, good-humoured audacity, and quick resource, had always borne him through with the authorities, though there was scarcely an excess or irregularity in which he was not a partaker; and stories of Sandbrook's daring were always circulating among the undergraduates. But though Robert could have scared Phœbe with many a history of lawless pranks, yet these were not his chief cause for dreading Owen's intimacy with her. It was that he was one of the youths on whom the spirit of the day had most influence, one of the most adventurous thinkers and boldest talkers: wild in habits, not merely from ebullition of spirits, but from want of faith in the restraining power.

All this Robert briefly expressed in the words, 'Phœbe, it is not that his habits are irregular and unsteady; many are so whose hearts are sound. But he is not sound—his opinions are loose, and he only respects and patronizes Divine Truth as what has approved itself to so many good, great, and beloved human creatures. It is not denial—it is patronage. It is the commonsense heresy—'

'I thought we all ought to learn common sense.'

'Yes, in things human, but in things Divine it is the subtle English form of rationalism. This is no time to explain, Phœbe; but human sense and intellect are made the test, and what surpasses them is only admired as long as its stringent rules do not fetter the practice.'

'I am sorry you told me,' said Phœbe, thoughtfully, 'for I always liked him; he is so kind to me.'

Had not Robert been full of his own troubles he would have been reassured, but he only gave a contemptuous groan.

'Does Lucy know this?' she asked.

'She told me herself what I well knew before. She does not reflect enough to take it seriously, and contrives to lay the blame upon the narrowness of Miss Charlecote's training.'

'Oh, Robin! When all our best knowledge came from the Holt!'

'She says, perhaps not unjustly, that Miss Charlecote overdid things with him, and that this is reaction. She observes keenly. If she would only *think!* She would have been perfect had her father lived, to work on her by affection.'

'The time for that is coming—'

Robert checked her, saying, 'Stay, Phœbe. The other night I was fooled by her engaging ways, but each day since I have become more convinced that I must learn whether she be only using me like the rest. I want you to be a witness of my resolution, lest I should be tempted to fail. I came to town, hesitating whether to enter the business for her sake. I found that this could not be done without a great sin. I look on myself as dedicated to the ministry, and thus bound to have a household suited to my vocation. All must turn on her willingness to conform to this standard. I shall lay it before her. I can bear the suspense no longer. My temper and resolution are going, and I am good for nothing. Let the touchstone be, whether she will resign her expedition to Ireland, and go quietly home with Miss Charlecote. If she will so do, there is surely that within her that will shine out brighter when removed from irritation on the one side, or folly on the other. If she will not, I have no weight with her; and it is due to the service I am to undertake, to force myself away from a pursuit that could only distract me. I have no right to be a clergyman and choose a hindrance not a help—one whose tastes would lead back to the world, instead of to my work!'

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As he spoke, in stern, rigid resolution—only allowing himself one long, deep, heavy sigh at the end—he stood still at the gates of the court, which were opened as the rest of the party came up; and, as they crossed and entered the hall, they beheld, through the open door of the drawing-room, two figures in the window—one, a dark torso, perched outside on the sill; the other, in blue

skirt and boy-like bodice, negligently reposing on one side of the window-seat, her dainty little boots on the other; her coarse straw bonnet, crossed with white, upon the floor; the wind playing tricks with the silky glory of her flaxen ringlets; her cheek flushed with lovely carnation, declining on her shoulder; her eyes veiled by their fair fringes.

'Hallo!' she cried, springing up, 'almost caught asleep!' And Owen, pocketing his pipe, spun his legs over the windowsill, while both began, in rattling, playful vindication and recrimination—

(he wouldn't.'

'It wasn't my fault (

(she wouldn't.'

'Indeed, I wasn't a wilful heathen; Mr. Parsons, it was he—'

'It was she who chose to take the by-ways, and make us late. Rush into church before a whole congregation, reeking from a six-miles walk! I've more respect for the Establishment.'

'You walked!' cried five voices.

'See her Sabbatarianism!'

'Nonsense! I should have driven Charlie's cab.'

'Charlie has some common sense where his horse is concerned.'

'He wanted it himself, you *know*.'

'She grew sulky, and victimized me to a walk.'

'I'm sure it was excellent fun.'

'Ay, and because poor Calthorp had proffered his cab for her to drive to Jericho, and welcome, she drags me into all sorts of streets of villainous savours, that he might not catch us up.'

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'Horrid hard mouth that horse of his,' said Lucilla, by way of dashing the satisfaction on Miss Charlecote's face.

'I do not wonder you were late.'

'Oh! that was all Owen's doing. He vowed that he had not nerve to face the pew-opener!'

'The grim female in weeds—no, indeed!' said Owen. 'Indeed, I objected to entering in the guise of flaming meteors both on reverential and sanatory grounds.'

'Insanatory, methinks,' said Miss Charlecote; 'how could you let her sleep, so much heated, in this thorough draught!'

'Don't flatter yourself,' said Cilly, quaintly shaking her head; 'I'm not such a goose as to go and catch cold! Oh! Phœbe, my salmon-flies are loveliness itself; and I hereby give notice, that a fine of three pairs of thick boots has been proclaimed for every pun upon sisters of the angle and sisters of the angels! So beware, Robin!'—and the comical audacity with which she turned on him, won a smile from the grave lips that had lately seemed so remote from all peril of complimenting her whimsies. Even Mr. Parsons said 'the fun was tempting.'

'Come and get ready for luncheon,' said the less fascinated Honora, moving away.

'Come and catch it!' cried the elf, skipping up-stairs before her and facing round her 'Dear old Honeyseed.' 'I honour your motives; but wouldn't it be for the convenience of all parties, if you took *Punch's* celebrated advice—"don't"?''

'How am I to speak, Lucy,' said Honora, 'if you come with the avowed intention of disregarding what I say?'

'Then hadn't you better not?' murmured the girl, in the lowest tone, drooping her head, and peeping under her eyelashes, as she sat with a hand on each elbow of her arm-chair, as though in the stocks.

'I would not, my child,' was the mournful answer, 'if I could help caring for you.'

Lucilla sprang up and kissed her. 'Don't, then; I don't like anybody to be sorry,' she said. 'I'm sure I'm not worth it.'

'How can I help it, when I see you throwing away happiness—welfare—the good opinion of all your friends?'

'My dear Honora, you taught me yourself not to mind Mrs. Grundy! Come, never mind, the reasonable world has found out that women are less dependent than they used to be.'

'It is not what the world thinks, but what is really decorous.'

Lucilla laughed—though with some temper—'I wonder what we are going to do otherwise!'

'You are going beyond the ordinary restraints of women in your station; and a person who does so, can never tell to what she may expose herself. Liberties are taken when people come out to

meet them.'

'That's as they choose!' cried Lucilla, with such a gesture of her hand, such a flash of her blue eyes, that she seemed trebly the woman, and it would have been boldness indeed to presume with her.

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'Yes; but a person who has even had to protect herself from incivility, to which she has wilfully exposed herself, does not remain what she might be behind her screen.'

'*Omne ignotum pro terribili*,' laughed Lucilla, still not to be made serious. 'Now, I don't believe that the world is so flagrantly bent on annoying every pretty girl. People call me vain, but I never was so vain as that. I've always found them very civil; and Ireland is the land of civility. Now, seriously, my good cousin Honor, do you candidly expect any harm to befall us?'

'I do not think you likely to meet with absolute injury.' Lucilla clapped her hands, and cried, 'An admission, an admission! I told Rashe you were a sincere woman.' But Miss Charlecote went on, 'But there is harm to yourself in the affectation of masculine habits; it is a blunting of the delicacy suited to a Christian maiden, and not like the women whom St. Paul and St. Peter describe. You would find that you had forfeited the esteem, not only of ordinary society, but of persons whose opinions you do value; and in both these respects you would suffer harm. You, my poor child, who have no one to control you, or claim your obedience as a right, are doubly bound to be circumspect. I have no power over you; but if you have any regard for her to whom your father confided you—nay, if you consult what you know would have been his wishes—you will give up this project.'

The luncheon-bell had already rung, and consideration for the busy clergyman compelled her to go down with these last words, feeling as if there were a leaden weight at her heart.

Lucilla remained standing before the glass, arranging her wind-tossed hair; and, in her vehemence, tearing out combfuls, as she pulled petulantly against the tangled curls. 'Her old way—to come over me with my father! Ha!—I love him too well to let him be Miss Charlecote's engine for managing me!—her *dernier ressort* to play on my feelings. Nor will I have Robin set at me! Whether I go or not, shall be as I please, not as any one else does; and if I stay at home, Rashe shall own it is not for the sake of the conclave here. I told her she might trust me.'

Down she went, and at luncheon devoted herself to the captivation of Mr. Parsons; afterwards insisting on going to the schools—she, whose aversion to them was Honora's vexation at home. Strangers to make a sensation were contrary to the views of the Parsonses; but the wife found her husband inconsistent—'one lady, more or less, could make no difference on this first Sunday;' and, by and by, Mrs. Parsons found a set of little formal white-capped faces, so beaming with entertainment, at the young lady's stories, and the young lady herself looking so charming, that she, too, fell under the enchantment.

After church, Miss Charlecote proposed a few turns in the garden; dingy enough, but a marvel for the situation: and here the tacit object of herself and Phœbe was to afford Robert an opportunity for the interview on which so much depended. But it was like trying to catch a butterfly; Lucilla was here, there, everywhere; and an excuse was hardly made for leaving her beside the grave, silent young man, ere her merry tones were heard chattering to some one else. Perhaps Robert, heart-sick and oppressed with the importance of what trembled on his tongue, was not ready in seizing the moment; perhaps she would not let him speak; at any rate, she was aware of some design; since, baffling Phœbe's last attempt, she danced up to her bedroom after her, and throwing herself into a chair, in a paroxysm of laughter, cried, 'You abominable little pussycat of a manœuvrer; I thought you were in a better school for the proprieties! No, don't make your round eyes, and look so dismayed, or you'll kill me with laughing! Cooking *tête-à-têtes*, Phœbe—I thought better of you. Oh, fie!' and holding up her finger, as if in displeasure, she hid her face in ecstasies of mirth at Phœbe's bewildered simplicity.

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'Robert wanted to speak to you,' she said, with puzzled gravity.

'And you would have set us together by the ears! No, no, thank you, I've had enough of that sort of thing for one day. And what shallow excuses. Oh! what fun to hear your pretexts. Wanting to see what Mrs. Parsons was doing, when you knew perfectly well she was deep in a sermon, and wished you at the antipodes. And blushing all the time, like a full-blown poppy,' and off she went on a fresh score—but Phœbe, though disconcerted for a moment, was not to be put out of countenance when she understood her ground, and she continued with earnestness, undesired by her companion—'Very likely I managed badly, but I know you do not really think it improper to see Robert alone, and it is very important that you should do so. Indeed it is, Lucy,' she added—the youthful candour and seriousness of her pleading, in strong contrast to the flighty, mocking carelessness of Lucilla's manners; 'do pray see him; I know he would make you listen. Will you be so very kind? If you would go into the little cedar room, I could call him at once.'

'Point blank! Sitting in my cedar parlour! Phœbe, you'll be the death of me,' cried Cilly, between peals of merriment. 'Do you think I have nerves of brass?'

'You would not laugh, if you knew how much he feels.'

'A very good thing for people to feel! It saves them from torpor.'

'Lucy, it is not kind to laugh when I tell you he is miserable.'

'That's only proper, my dear,' said Lucilla, entertained by teasing.

'Not miserable from doubt,' answered Phœbe, disconcerting in her turn. 'We know you too well for that;' and as an expression, amused, indignant, but far from favourable, came over the fair face she was watching, she added in haste, 'It is this project, he thought you had said it was given up.'

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'I am much indebted,' said Lucilla, haughtily, but again relapsing into laughter; 'but to find myself so easily disposed of . . . Oh! Phœbe, there's no scolding such a baby as you; but if it were not so absurd—'

'Lucy, Lucy, I beg your pardon; is it all a mistake, or have I said what was wrong? Poor Robin will be so unhappy.'

Phœbe's distress touched Lucilla.

'Nonsense, you little goose; aren't you woman enough yet to know that one flashes out at finding oneself labelled, and made over before one's time?'

'I'm glad if it was all my blundering,' said Phœbe. 'Dear Lucy, I was very wrong, but you see I always was so happy in believing it was understood!'

'How stupid,' cried Lucilla; 'one would never have any fun; no, you haven't tasted the sweets yet, or you would know one has no notion of being made sure of till one chooses! Yes, yes, I saw he was primed and cocked, but I'm not going to let him go off.'

'Lucy, have you no pity?'

'Not a bit! Don't talk commonplaces, my dear.'

'If you knew how much depends upon it.'

'My dear, I know that,' with an arch smile.

'No, you do not,' said Phœbe, so stoutly that Lucilla looked at her in some suspense.

'You think,' said honest Phœbe, in her extremity, 'that he only wants to make—to propose to you! Now, it is not only that, Lucilla,' and her voice sank, as she could hardly keep from crying; 'he will never do that if you go on as you are doing now; he does not think it would be right for a clergyman.'

'Oh! I dare say!' quoth Lucilla, and then a silence. 'Did Honor tell him so, Phœbe?'

'Never, never!' cried Phœbe; 'no one has said a word against you! only don't you know how quiet and good any one belonging to a clergyman should be?'

'Well, I've heard a great deal of news to-day, and it is all my own fault, for indulging in sentiment on Wednesday. I shall know better another time.'

'Then you don't care!' cried Phœbe, turning round, with eyes flashing as Lucilla did not know they could lighten. 'Very well! If you don't think Robert worth it, I suppose I ought not to grieve, for you can't be what I used to think you and it will be better for him when he once has settled his mind—than if—if afterwards you disappointed him and were a fine lady—but oh! he will be so unhappy,' her tears were coming fast; 'and, Lucy, I did like you so much!'

'Well, this is the funniest thing of all,' cried Lucilla, by way of braving her own emotion; 'little Miss Phœbe gone into the heroics!' and she caught her two hands, and holding her fast, kissed her on both cheeks; 'a gone coon, am I, Phœbe, no better than one of the wicked; and Robin, he grew angry, hopped upon a twig, did he! I beg your pardon, my dear, but it makes me laugh to think of his dignified settling of his mind. Oh! how soon it could be unsettled again! Come, I won't have any more of this; let it alone, Phœbe, and trust me that things will adjust themselves all the better for letting them have their swing. Don't you look prematurely uneasy, and don't go and make Robin think that I have immolated him at the altar of the salmon. Say nothing of all this; you will only make a mess in narrating it.'

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'Very likely I may,' said Phœbe; 'but if you will not speak to him yourself, I shall tell him how you feel.'

'If you can,' laughed Lucilla.

'I mean, how you receive what I have told you of his views; I do not think it would be fair or kind to keep him in ignorance.'

'Much good may it do him,' said Lucy; 'but I fancy you will tell him, whether I give you leave or not, and it can't make much difference. I'll tackle him, as the old women say, when I please, and the madder he may choose to go, the better fun it will be.'

'I believe you are saying so to tease me' said Phœbe; 'but as I know you don't mean it, I shall wait till after the party; and then, unless you have had it out with him, I shall tell him what you have said.'

'Thank you,' said Lucilla, ironically conveying to Phœbe's mind the conviction that she did not believe that Robert's attachment could suffer from what had here passed. Either she meant to

grant the decisive interview, or else she was too confident in her own power to believe that he could relinquish her; at all events, Phœbe had sagacity enough to infer that she was not indifferent to him, though as the provoking damsel ran down-stairs, Phœbe's loyal spirit first admitted a doubt whether the tricky sprite might not prove as great a torment as a delight to Robin. 'However,' reflected she, 'I shall make the less mischief if I set it down while I remember it.'

Not much like romance, but practical sense was both native and cultivated in Miss Fennimore's pupil. Yet as she recorded the sentences, and read them over bereft of the speaker's caressing grace, she blamed herself as unkind, and making the worst of gay retorts which had been provoked by her own home thrusts. 'At least,' she thought, 'he will be glad to see that it was partly my fault, and he need never see it at all if Lucy will let him speak to her himself.'

Meantime, Honora had found from Owen that the young ladies had accepted an invitation to a very gay house in Cheshire, so that their movements would for a fortnight remain doubtful. She recurred to her view that the only measure to be taken was for him to follow them, so as to be able to interpose in any emergency, and she anxiously pressed on him the funds required.

'Shouldn't I catch it if they found me out!' said Owen, shrugging his shoulders. 'No, but indeed, Sweet Honey, I meant to have made up for this naughty girl's desertion. You and I would have had such rides and readings together: I want you to put me on good terms with myself.'

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'My dear boy! But won't that best be done by minding your sister? She does want it, Owen; the less she will be prudent for herself, the more we must think for her!'

'She can do better for herself than you imagine,' said Owen. 'Men say, with all her free ways, they could not go the least bit farther with her than she pleases. You wouldn't suppose it, but she can keep out of scrapes better than Rashe can—never has been in one yet, and Rashe in twenty. Never mind, your Honor, there's sound stuff in the bonny scapegrace; all the better for being free and unconventional. The world owes a great deal to those who dare to act for themselves; though, I own, it is a trial when one's own domestic womankind take thereto.'

'Or one's mankind to encouraging it,' said Honor, smiling, but showing that she was hurt.

'I don't encourage it; I am only too wise to give it the zest of opposition. Was Lucy ever bent upon a naughty trick without being doubly incited by the pleasure of showing that she cared not for her younger brother?'

'I believe you are only too lazy! But, will you go? I don't think it can be a penance. You would see new country, and get plenty of sport.'

'Come with me, Honey,' said he with the most insinuating manner, which almost moved her. 'How jolly it would be!'

'Nonsense! an elderly spinster,' she said, really pleased, though knowing it impossible.

'Stuff!' he returned in the same tone. 'Make it as good as a honeymoon. Think of Killarney, Honor!'

'You silly boy, I can't. There's harvest at home; besides, it would only aggravate that mad girl doubly to have me coming after her.'

'Well, if you will not take care of me on a literal wild-goose chase,' said Owen, with playful disconsolateness, 'I'll not answer for the consequences.'

'But, you go?'

'Vacation rambles are too tempting to be resisted; but, mind, I don't promise to act good genius save at the last extremity, or else shall never get forgiven, and I shall keep some way in the rear.'

So closed the consultation; and after an evening which Lucilla perforce rendered lively, she and her brother took their leave. The next day they were to accompany the Charterises to Castle Blanch to prepare for the festivities; Honor and her two young friends following on the Wednesday afternoon.

CHAPTER VI

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He who sits by haunted well
Is subject to the Nixie's spell;
He who walks on lonely beach
To the mermaid's charmed speech;
He who walks round ring of green
Offends the peevish Fairy Queen.—SCOTT

At the station nearest to Castle Blanch stood the tall form of Owen Sandbrook, telling Honor that he and his sister had brought the boat; the river was the longer way, but they would prefer it to the road; and so indeed they did, for Phœbe herself had had enough of the City to appreciate the cool verdure and calm stillness of the meadow pathway, by which they descended to the majestic river, smoothly sleeping in glassy quiet, or stealing along in complacently dimpling ripples.

On the opposite bank, shading off the sun, an oak copse sloped steeply towards the river,

painting upon the surface a still shimmering likeness of the summit of the wood, every mass of foliage, every blushing spray receiving a perfect counterpart, and full in the midst of the magic mirror floated what might have been compared to the roseate queen lily of the waters on her leaf.

There, in the flat, shallow boat reclined the maiden, leaning over the gunwale, gazing into the summer wavelets with which one bare pinkly-tinted hand was toying, and her silken ringlets all but dipping in, from beneath the round black hat, archly looped up on one side by a carnation bow, and encircled by a series of the twin jetty curls of the mallard; while the fresh rose colour of the spreading muslin dress was enhanced by the black scarf that hung carelessly over it. There was a moment's pause, as if no one could break the spell; but Owen, striding on from behind, quickly dissolved the enchantment.

'You monkey, you've cast off. You may float on to Greenwich next!' he indignantly shouted.

She started, shaking her head saucily. "'Twas so slow there, and so broiling,' she called back, 'and I knew I should only drift down to meet you, and could put in when I pleased.'

Therewith she took the sculls and began rowing towards the bank, but without force sufficient to prevent herself from being borne farther down than she intended.

'I can't help it,' she exclaimed, fearlessly laughing as she passed them.

Robert was ready to plunge in to stem her progress, lest she should meet with some perilous eddy, but Owen laid hold on him, saying, 'Don't be nervous, she's all right; only giving trouble, after the nature of women. There; are you satisfied?' he called to her, as she came to a stop against a reed bed, with a tall fence interposed between boat and passengers. 'A nice ferry-woman you.'

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'Come and get me up again,' was all her answer.

'Serve you right if I never picked you up till London-bridge,' he answered. 'Stand clear, Fulmort,' and with a run and a bound, he vaulted over the high hedge, and went crackling through the nodding bulrushes and reed-maces; while Lucy, having accomplished pulling up one of the latter, was pointing it lancewise at him, singing,

'With a bulrush for his spear, and a thimble for a hat,
Wilt thou fight a traverse with the castle cat.'

'Come, come; 'tis too squashy here for larking,' he said authoritatively, stepping into the boat, and bringing it up with such absence of effort that when a few minutes after he had brought it to the landing-place, and the freight was seated, Robert had no sooner taken the other oar than he exclaimed at the force of the stream with which Owen had dealt so easily, and Lucilla so coolly.

'It really was a fearful risk,' he said reproachfully to her.

'Oh!' she said, 'I know my Thames, and my Thames knows me!'

'Now's the time to improve it,' said Owen; 'one or other should preach about young ladies getting loose, and not knowing where they may be brought up.'

'But you see I did know; besides, Phœbe's news from Paris will be better worth hearing,' said Lucilla, tickling her friend's face with the soft long point of her dark velvety mace.

'My news from Paris?'

'For shame, Phœbe! Your face betrays you.'

'Lucy; how could you know? I had not even told Miss Charlecote!'

'It's true! it's true!' cried Lucilla. 'That's just what I wanted to know!'

'Lucy, then it was not fair,' said Phœbe, much discomposed. 'I was desired to tell no one, and you should not have betrayed me into doing so.'

'Phœbe, you always were a green oasis in a wicked world!'

'And now, let me hear,' said Miss Charlecote. 'I can't flatter you, Phœbe; I thought you were labouring under a suppressed secret.'

'Only since this morning,' pleaded Phœbe, earnestly; 'and we were expressly forbidden to mention it; I cannot imagine how Lucy knows.'

'By telegraph!'

Phœbe's face assumed an expression of immeasurable wonder.

'I almost hope to find you at cross purposes, after all,' said Honora.

'No such good luck,' laughed Lucilla. 'Cinderella's seniors never could go off two at a time. Ah! there's the name. I beg your pardon, Phœbe.'

'But, Lucy, what can you mean? Who can have telegraphed about Augusta?'

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'Ah! you knew not the important interests involved, nor Augusta how much depended on her

keeping the worthy admiral in play. It was the nearest thing—had she only consented at the end of the evening instead of the beginning, poor Lord William would have had the five guineas that he wants so much more than Mr. Calthorp!’

‘Lucy!’

‘It was a bet that Sir Nicholas would take six calendar months to supply the place of Lady Bannerman. It was the very last day. If Augusta had only waited till twelve!’

‘You don’t mean that he has been married before. I thought he was such an excellent man!’ said Phœbe, in a voice that set others besides Lucilla off into irresistible mirth.

‘Once, twice, thrice!’ cried Lucilla. ‘Catch her, Honor, before she sinks into the river in disgust with this treacherous world.’

‘Do you know him, Lucy?’ earnestly said Phœbe.

‘Yes, and two of the wives; we used to visit them because he was an old captain of Uncle Kit’s.’

‘I would not believe in number three, Phœbe, if I were you,’ said Owen, consolingly; ‘she wants confirmation.’

‘Two are as bad as three,’ sighed Phœbe; ‘and Augusta did not even call him a widower.’

‘Cupid bandaged! It was a case of love at first sight. Met at the *Trois Frères Provençaux*, heard each other’s critical remarks, sought an introduction, compared notes; he discovered her foresight with regard to pale ale; each felt that here was a kindred soul!’

‘That could not have been telegraphed!’ said Phœbe, recovering spirit and incredulity.

‘No; the telegram was simply “Bannerman, Fulmort. 8.30 p.m., July 10th.” The other particulars followed by letter this morning.’

‘How old is he?’ asked Phœbe, with resignation.

‘Any age above sixty. What, Phœbe, taking it to heart? I was prepared with congratulations. It is only second best, to be sure; but don’t you see your own emancipation?’

‘I believe that had never occurred to Phœbe,’ said Owen.

‘I beg your pardon, Lucy,’ said Phœbe, thinking that she had appeared out of temper; ‘only it had sounded so nice in Augusta’s letter, and she was so kind, and somehow it jars that there should have been that sort of talk.’

Cilly was checked. In her utter want of thought it had not occurred to her that Augusta Fulmort could be other than a laughing-stock, or that any bright anticipations could have been spent by any reasonable person on her marriage. Perhaps the companionship of Rashe, and the satirical outspoken tone of her associates, had somewhat blunted her perception of what might be offensive to the sensitive delicacy of a young sister; but she instantly perceived her mistake, and the carnation deepened in her cheek, at having distressed Phœbe, and . . . Not that she had deigned any notice of Robert after the first cold shake of the hand, and he sat rowing with vigorous strokes, and a countenance of set gravity, more as if he were a boatman than one of the party; Lucilla could not even meet his eye when she peeped under her eyelashes to recover defiance by the sight of his displeasure.

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It was a relief to all when Honora exclaimed, ‘Wrapworth! how pretty it looks.’

It was, indeed, pretty, seen through the archway of the handsome stone bridge. The church tower and picturesque village were set off by the frame that closed them in; and though they lost somewhat of the enchantment when the boat shot from under the arch, they were still a fair and goodly English scene.

Lucilla steered towards the steps leading to a smooth shaven lawn, shaded by a weeping willow, well known to Honor.

‘Here we land you and your bag, Robert,’ said Owen, as he put in. ‘Cilly, have a little sense, do.’

But Lucilla, to the alarm of all, was already on her feet, skipped like a chamois to the steps, and flew dancing up the sward. Ere Owen and Robert had helped the other two ladies to land in a more rational manner, she was shaking her mischievous head at a window, and thrusting in her sceptral reed-mace.

‘Neighbour, oh, neighbour, I’m come to torment you! Yes, here we are in full force, ladies and all, and you must come out and behave pretty. Never mind your slippers; you ought to be proud of the only thing I ever worked. Come out, I say; here’s your guest, and you must be civil to him.’

‘I am very glad to see Mr. Fulmort,’ said Mr. Prendergast, his only answer in words to all this, though while it was going on, as if she were pulling him by wires, as she imperiously waved her bulrush, he had stuck his pen into the inkstand, run his fingers in desperation through his hair, risen from his seat, gazed about in vain for his boots, and felt as fruitlessly on the back of the door for a coat to replace the loose alpaca article that hung on his shoulders.

‘There. You’ve gone through all the motions,’ said Cilly; ‘that’ll do; now, come out and receive

them.'

Accordingly, he issued from the door, shy and slouching; rusty where he wore cloth, shiny where he wore alpaca, wild as to his hair, gay as to his feet, but, withal, the scholarly gentleman complete, and not a day older or younger, apparently, than when Honor had last seen him, nine years since, in bondage then to the child playing at coquetry, as now to the coquette playing at childhood. It was curious, Honor thought, to see how, though so much more uncouth and negligent than Robert, the indefinable signs of good blood made themselves visible, while they were wanting in one as truly the Christian gentleman in spirit and in education.

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Mr. Prendergast bowed to Miss Charlecote, and shook hands with his guest, welcoming him kindly; but the two shy men grew more bashful by contact, and Honor found herself, Owen, and Lucilla sustaining the chief of the conversation, the curate apparently looking to the young lady to protect him and do the honours, as she did by making him pull down a cluster of his roses for her companions, and conducting them to eat his strawberries, which she treated as her own, flitting, butterfly like, over the beds, selecting the largest and ruddiest specimens, while her slave plodded diligently to fill cabbage leaves, and present them to the party in due gradation.

Owen stood by amused, and silencing the scruples of his companions.

'He is in Elysium,' he said; 'he had rather be plagued by Cilly than receive a mitre! Don't hinder him, Honey; it is his pride to treat us as if we were at home and he our guest.'

'Wrapworth has not been seen without Edna Murrell,' said Lucilla, flinging the stem of her last strawberry at her brother, 'and Miss Charlecote is a woman of schools. What, aren't we to go, Mr. Prendergast?'

'I beg your pardon. I did not know.'

'Well; what is it?'

'I do sometimes wish Miss Murrell were not such an attraction.'

'You did not think that of yourself.'

'Well, I don't know; Miss Murrell is a very nice young woman,' he hesitated, as Cilly seemed about to thrust him through with her reed; 'but couldn't you, Cilla, now, give her a hint that it would be better if she would associate more with Mrs. Jenkyns, and—'

'Couldn't Mr. Prendergast; I've more regard for doing as I would be done by. When you see Edna, Honor—'

'They are very respectable women,' said the curate, standing his ground; 'and it would be much better for her than letting it be said she gives herself airs.'

'That's all because we have had her up to the castle to sing.'

'Well, so it is, I believe. They do say, too—I don't know whether it is so—that the work has not been so well attended to, nor the children so orderly.'

'Spite, spite, Mr. Prendergast; I had a better opinion of you than to think you could be taken in by the tongues of Wrapworth.'

'Well, certainly I did hear a great noise the other day.'

'I see how it is! This is a systematic attempt to destroy the impression I wished to produce.'

He tried to argue that he thought very well of Miss Murrell, but she would not hear; and she went on with her pretty, saucy abuse, in her gayest tones, as she tripped along the churchyard path, now, doubtless, too familiar to renew the associations that might have tamed her spirits. Perhaps the shock her vivacity gave to the feeling of her friends was hardly reasonable, but it was not the less real; though, even in passing, Honora could not but note the improved condition of the two graves, now carefully tended, and with a lovely white rose budding between them.

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A few more steps, and from the open window of the schoolhouse there was heard a buzz and hum, not outrageous, but which might have caused the item of discipline not to figure well in an inspector's report; but Mr. Prendergast and Lucilla appeared habituated to the like, for they proceeded without apology.

It was a handsome gable-ended building, Elizabethan enough to testify to the taste that had designed it, and with a deep porch, where Honor had advanced, under Lucilla's guidance, so as to have a moment's view of the whole scene before their arrival had disturbed it.

The children's backs were towards the door, as they sat on their forms at work. Close to the oriel window, the only person facing the door, with a table in front of her, there sat, in a slightly reclining attitude, a figure such as all reports of the new race of schoolmistresses had hardly led Honor to imagine to be the *bonâ fide* mistress. Yet the dress was perfectly quiet, merely lilac cotton, with no ornament save the small bow of the same colour at the throat, and the hair was simply folded round the head, but it was magnificent raven hair; the head and neck were grandly made; the form finely proportioned, on a large scale; the face really beautiful, in a pale, dark, Italian style; the complexion of the clearest olive, but as she became aware of the presence of the visitors it became overspread with a lovely hue of red; while the eyelids revealed a superb pair of

eyes, liquid depths of rich brown, soft and languid, and befitting the calm dignity with which she rose, curtseyed, and signed to her scholars to do the same; the deepening colour alone betraying any sense of being taken by surprise.

Lucilla danced up to her, chattering with her usual familiar, airy grace. 'Well, Edna, how are you getting on? Have I brought a tremendous host to invade you? I wanted Miss Charlecote to see you, for she is a perfect connoisseur in schools.'

Edna's blush grew more carnation, and the fingers shook so visibly with which she held the work, that Honora was provoked with Lucy for embarrassing the poor young thing by treating her as an exhibition, especially as the two young gentlemen were present, Robert with his back against the door-post in a state of resignation, Owen drawing Phœbe's attention to the little ones whom he was puzzling with incomprehensible remarks and questions. Hoping to end the scene, Honor made a few commonplace inquiries as to the numbers and the habits of the school; but the mistress, though preserving her dignity of attitude, seemed hardly able to speak, and the curate replied for her.

'I see,' said Lucilla, 'your eye keeps roaming to the mischief my naughty brother is doing among the fry down there.'

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'Oh, no! ma'am. I beg your pardon—'

'Never mind, I'll remove the whole concern in a moment, only we must have some singing first.'

'Don't, Lucy!' whispered Honor, looking up from an inspection of some not first-rate needlework; 'it is distressing her, and displays are contrary to all rules of discipline.'

'Oh! but you must,' cried Cilly. 'You have not seen Wrapworth without. Come, Edna, my bonnie-bell,' and she held out her hand in that semi-imperious, semi-caressing manner which very few had ever withstood.

'One song,' echoed Owen, turning towards the elder girls. 'I know you'll oblige me; eh, Fanny Blake?'

To the scholars the request was evidently not distasteful; the more tuneful were gathering together, and the mistress took her station among them, all as if the exhibition were no novelty. Lucilla, laying her hand on the victim's arm, said, 'Come, don't be nervous, or what will you do to-morrow? Come.'

'"Goddess of the Silver Bow,"' suggested Owen. 'Wasn't it that which your mother disapproved, Fanny, because it was worshipping idols to sing about great Diana of the Ephesians?'

'Yes, sir,' said rather a conceited voice from the prettiest of the elder girls; 'and you told us it was about Phœbe Bright, and gave her the blue and silver ribbon.'

'And please, sir,' said another less prepossessing damsel, 'Mrs. Jenkyns took it away, and I said I'd tell you.'

Owen shrugged up his shoulders with a comical look, saying, as he threw her a shilling, 'Never mind; there's a silver circle instead of a bow—that will do as well. Here's a rival goddess for you, Phœbe; two moons in a system.'

The girls were in a universal titter, the mistress with her eyes cast down, blushing more than ever. Lucilla muttered an amused but indignant, 'For shame, Owen!' and herself gave the key-note. The performance was not above the average of National School melody, but no sooner was it over, than Owen named, in an under-tone, another song, which was instantly commenced, and in which there joined a voice that had been still during the first, but which soon completely took the lead. And such a voice, coming as easily as the notes of the nightingale from the nobly-formed throat, and seeming to fill the room with its sweet power! Lucilla's triumph was complete; Honor's scruples were silenced by the admiring enjoyment, and Phœbe was in a state of rapture. The nervous reluctance had given way to the artistic delight in her own power, and she readily sang all that was asked for, latterly such pieces as needed little or no support from the children—the 'Three Fishers' Wives' coming last, and thrilling every one with the wondrous pathos and sadness of the tones that seemed to come from her very heart.

It seemed as if they would never have come away, had not Mr. Prendergast had pity on the restless movements of some of the younglings, who, taking no part in the display, had leisure to perceive that the clock had struck their hour of release, and at the close of 'The Fishers' Wives,' he signed to Lucilla to look at the hour.

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'Poor little things!' said she, turning round to the gaping and discontented collection, 'have we used you so ill? Never mind.' Again using her bulrush to tickle the faces that looked most injured, and waken them into smiles—'Here's the prison house open,' and she sprang out. 'Now—come with a whoop and come with a call—I'll give my club to anybody that can catch me before I get down to the vicarage garden.'

Light as the wind, she went bounding flying across the churchyard like a butterfly, ever and anon pausing to look round, nod, and shake her sceptre, as the urchins tumbled confusedly after, far behind, till closing the gate, she turned, poised the reed javelin-wise in the air, and launched it among them.

'It is vain to try to collect them again,' sighed Mr. Prendergast; 'we must shut up. Good night, Miss Murrell;' and therewith he turned back to his garden, where the freakish sprite, feigning flight, took refuge in the boat, cowering down, and playfully hiding her face in deprecation of rebuke, but all she received was a meekly melancholy, 'O Cilla! prayers.'

'One day's less loathing of compulsory devotion,' was her answer in saucy defiance. 'I owed it to them for the weariness of listening for ten minutes to the "Three Fishers' Wives," which they appreciated as little as their pastor did!'

'I know nothing about songs, but when one wants them—poor things—to look to something better than sleep.'

'Oh, hush! Here are Miss Charlecote and Mr. Fulmort on your side, and I can't be crushed with united morality in revenge for the tears Edna caused you all to shed. There, help Miss Charlecote in; where can Owen be dawdling? You can't pull, Phœbe, or we would put off without him. Ah, there!' as he came bounding down, 'you intolerable loiterer, I was just going to leave you behind.'

'The train starting without the engine,' he said, getting into his place; 'yes, take an oar if you like, little gnat, and fancy yourself helping.'

The gay warfare, accompanied by a few perilous tricks on Lucilla's part, lasted through the further voyage. Honora guessed at a purpose of staving off graver remonstrance, but Phœbe looked on in astonishment. Seventeen is often a more serious time of life than two-and twenty, and the damsel could not comprehend the possibility of thoughtlessness when there was anything to think about. The ass's bridge was nothing compared with Lucy! Moreover the habits of persiflage of a lively family often are confusing to one not used to the tone of jest and repartee, and Phœbe had as little power as will to take part in what was passing between the brother and sister; she sat like the spectator of a farce in a foreign tongue, till the boat had arrived at the broad open extent of park gently sweeping down towards the river, the masses of trees kept on either side so as to leave the space open where the castle towered in pretentious grandeur, with a flag slowly swaying in the summer wind on the top of the tallest turret.

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The trees made cool reaches of shade, varied by intervals of hot sunshine, and much longer did the way appear, creeping onward in the heat, than it had looked when the eye only took in the simple expanse of turf, from river to castle. Phœbe looked to her arrival there, and to bedroom conferences, as the moment of recovering a reasonable Lucy, but as they neared the house, there was a shout from the wire fence enclosing the shrubbery on the eastern side, and Horatia was seen standing at the gate calling them to come into the cloisters and have some sustenance.

Passing the screen of shrubs, a scene lay before them almost fit for the gardens of Seville. Three sides of an extensive square were enclosed by the semi-gothic buildings, floridly decorated with stone carving; one consisted of the main edifice, the lower windows tented with striped projecting blinds; a second of the wing containing the reception rooms, fronted by the imitative cloister, which was continued and faced with glass on the third side—each supporting column covered with climbing plants, the passion-flower, the tropæolum, the trumpet honeysuckle, or even the pomegranate, opening their gay blooms on every side. The close-shaven turf was broken by small patches of gorgeously-tinted flower-beds, diversified by vases filled with trailing plants, and lines of orange trees and fuchsias, with here and there a deep-belled datura, all converging towards the central marble fountain, where the water played high, and tinkled coolly in sparkling jets. Between it and the house, there were placed in the shade some brightly-tinted cushions and draperies, lounging chairs, and a low table, bearing an oriental-looking service of tiny cups, of all kinds of bright and fantastic hues, no two alike. Near it reclined on her cushions a figure in perfect keeping with the scene, her jetty hair contrasting with her gold and coral net, her scarlet gold-embroidered slipper peeping out from her pale buff-coloured dress, deeply edged with rich purple, and partly concealed by a mantle of the unapproachable pink which suggests Persia, all as gorgeous in apparel as the blue and yellow macaw on his pole, and the green and scarlet lorries in their cage. Owen made a motion of smoking with Honor's parasol, whispering, 'Fair Fatima! what more is wanting?'

'There! I've got Lolly out!' cried Horatia, advancing with her vehement cordiality, and grasping their hands with all her might; 'I would have come and pulled you up the river, Miss Charlecote, but for imperative claims. Here's some tea for you; I know you must be parched.'

And while Mrs. Charteris, scarcely rising, held out her ring encrusted fingers, and murmured a greeting, Ratia settled them all, pushed a chair behind Miss Charlecote, almost threw Phœbe on a cushion, handed tea, scolded Owen, and rattled away to Lucilla with an impetus that kept Phœbe in increased wonder. It was all about the arrangements for the morrow, full of the utmost good-nature and desire to secure every one's pleasure, but all discussed in a broad out-spoken way, with a liberal use of slang phrases, and of unprefaced surnames, a freedom of manner and jovial carelessness of voice that specially marked Rashe Charteris at home.

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Phœbe had a good deal of opportunity for these observations, for as soon as her stream of information was exhausted, Rashe jumped up and insisted on conducting the guests round the hothouses and pleasure-grounds. She knew Miss Charlecote was a famous hand at such things. Lucilla remained on the grass, softly teasing Lolly about the exertions of the morrow, and Owen applying himself to the care of Honor, Rashe took possession of Phœbe with all the tyrannous good-nature that had in baby days rendered her hateful to Lucilla. She showed off the parrots

and gold fish as to a child, she teased the sensitive plant, and explained curiosities down to the level of the youthful intellect; and Phœbe, scientific enough to know if she went wrong in botany or locality, began a word or two of modest suggestion, only to be patronizingly enlightened, and stopped short, in the fear of pedantry. Phœbe had yet to learn the ignorance of the world.

At last, with a huge torrent of explanations and excuses, Ratia consigned the two guests to share the same bedroom and dressing-room. The number of gentlemen visitors had necessitated close packing, and Cilly, she said, had come to sleep in her room. Another hope had failed! But at the moment when the door was shut, Phœbe could only sink into a chair, untie her bonnet, and fan herself. Such oppressive good-nature was more fatiguing than a ten miles' walk, or than the toughest lesson in political economy.

'If nature have her own ladies,' was Honora's comment on her young friend's exhaustion, 'she likewise has her own dairy-maids!'

'Miss Charteris is a lady,' said Phœbe, her sense of the intended kindness of her hostess calling her to speak in vindication.

'Yes,' said Honor, hesitating; 'it is station that emboldens her. If she had been a dairy-maid, she would have been a bouncing rude girl; if a farmer's daughter, she would be hearty and useful; if one of the boasters of gentility, she would think it worth while to restrain herself; as she is, her acknowledged birth and breeding enable her to follow her inclinations without fear of opinion.'

'I thought refinement was one great characteristic of a lady,' said Phœbe.

'So it is, but affectation and false shame are the contrary. Refinement was rather overworked, and there has been a reaction of late; simplicity and unconstraint have been the fashion, but unfortunately some dispositions are not made to be unconstrained.'

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'Lucy is just as unrestrained as her cousin,' said Phœbe, 'but she never seems like her. She offends one's judgment sometimes, but never one's taste—at least hardly ever;' and Phœbe blushed as she thought of what had passed about her sister that day.

'Poor Lucy! it is one misfortune of pretty people, that they can seldom do what is taken amiss. She is small and feminine too, and essentially refined, whatever she can do. But I was very sorry for you to-day, Phœbe. Tell me all about your sister, my dear.'

'They knew more than I did, if all that is true,' said Phœbe. 'Augusta wrote—oh! so kindly—and seemed so glad, that it made me very happy. And papa gave his consent readily to Robert's doing as he pleased, and almost said something about his taking me to the wedding at Paris. If Lucy should—should accept Robin, I wonder if she would go too, and be bridesmaid!'

So they comforted themselves with a few pretty auguries, dressed, and went down to dinner, where Phœbe had made sure that, as before, Lucy would sit next Robin, and be subdued. Alas, no! Ladies were far too scarce articles for even the last but one to be the prize of a mere B.A. To know who were Phœbe's own neighbours would have been distraction to Juliana, but they were lost on one in whom the art of conversation was yet undeveloped, and who was chiefly intent on reading her brother's face, and catching what Lucy was saying. She had nearly given up listening in despair, when she heard, 'Pistols? oh, of course. Rashe has gone to the expense of a revolver, but I extracted grandpapa's from the family armoury—such little darlings. I'm strongly tempted to send a challenge, just to keep them in use—that's because you despise me—I'm a crack shot—we practised every day last winter—women shoot much better than men, because they don't make their hands unsteady—what can be better than the guidance of Ratia, the feminine of Ratio, reason, isn't it?'

It is not quite certain that this horrible Latinity did not shock Miss Fennimore's discreet pupil more than all the rest, as a wilful insult to Miss Charlecote's education!

She herself was not to escape 'the guidance of Ratia,' after dinner. Her silence had been an additional proof to the good-natured Rashe that she was a child to be protected and entertained, so she paraded her through the rooms, coaxed her to play when no one was listening, showed her illustrated books and new-fashioned puzzles, and domineered over her so closely, that she had not a moment in which to speak a word to her brother, whom she saw disconsolately watching the hedge of gentlemen round Lucy. Was it wrong to feel so ungrateful to a person exclusively devoted to her entertainment for that entire evening?

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Phœbe had never known a room-mate nor the solace of a bed-time gossip, and by the time Miss Charlecote began to think of opening the door between their rooms, and discussing the disgusts of the day, the sounds of moving about had ceased. Honor looked in, and could not help advancing to the bedside to enjoy the sight of the rosy face in the sound healthful sleep, the lips unclosed, and the silken brown hair wound plainly across the round brow, the childish outline and expression of the features even sweeter in sleep than awake. It rested Honora's wearied anxious spirit to watch the perfect repose of that innocent young face, and she stood still for some minutes, breathing an ejaculation that the child might ever be as guileless and peaceful as now, and then sighing at the thought of other young sleepers, beside whose couches even fonder prayers had been uttered, only, as it seemed, to be blown aside.

She was turning away, when Phœbe suddenly awoke, and was for a moment startled, half rising, asking if anything were the matter.

'No, my dear; only I did not think you would have been in bed so quickly. I came to wish you good night, and found you asleep.' And with the strong tender impulse of a gentle wounded spirit, Honor hung over the maiden, recomposing the clothes, and fondling her, with a murmured blessing.

'Dear Miss Charlecote,' whispered Phœbe, 'how nice it is! I have so often wondered what it would be like, if any one came in to pet us at night, as they do in books; and oh! it is so nice! Say *that* again, please.'

That was the blessing which would have made Lucilla in angry reserve hide her head in the clothes!

CHAPTER VII

But, ah me! she's a heart of stone,
Which Cupid uses for a hone,
I verily believe;
And on it sharpens those eye-darts,
With which he wounds the simple hearts
He bribes her to deceive.—*A Coquette*, by X.

Breakfast was late, and lengthened out by the greater lateness of many of the guests, and the superlative tardiness of the lady of the house, who had repudiated the cares of the hostess, and left the tea-equipage to her sister-in-law. Lucilla had been down-stairs among the first, and hurried away again after a rapid meal, forbidding any one to follow her, because she had so much to do, and on entering the drawing-room, she was found with a wilderness of flowers around her, filling vases and making last arrangements.

Honora and Phœbe were glad to be occupied, and Phœbe almost hoped to escape from Rashe. Speaking to Lucilla was not possible, for Eloïsa had been placed by Rashe in a low chair, with a saucer before her, which she was directed to fill with verbenas, while the other four ladies, with Owen, whom his cousin had called to their aid, were putting last touches to wreaths, and giving the final festal air to the rooms.

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Presently Robert made his appearance as the bearer of Mr. Prendergast's flowers, and setting his back against a shutter, in his favourite attitude, stood looking as if he wanted to help, but knew not how. Phœbe, at least, was vividly conscious of his presence, but she was supporting a long festoon with which Owen was adorning a pier-glass, and could hardly even turn her head to watch him.

'Oh, horrid!' cried Lucilla, retreating backwards to look at Ratia's performance; 'for love or money a bit of clematis!'

'Where shall I find one?' said Robert, unseeing the masses waving on the cloister, if, good youth, he even knew what clematis was.

'You there, Mr. Fulmort!' exclaimed Rashe; 'for goodness gracious sake, go out to tennis or something with the other men. I've ordered them all out, or there'll be no good to be got out of Cilly.'

Phœbe flashed out in his defence, 'You are letting Owen alone.'

'Ah! by the bye, that wreath of yours has taken an unconscionable time!' said Miss Charteris, beginning to laugh; but Phœbe's grave straightforward eyes met her with such a look, as absolutely silenced her merriment into a mere mutter of 'What a little chit it is!' Honora, who was about indignantly to assume the protection of her charge, recognized in her what was fully competent to take care of herself.

'Away with both of you,' said Lucilla; 'here is Edna come for a last rehearsal, and I won't have you making her nervous. Take away that Robin, will you, Owen?'

Horatia flew gustily to greet and reassure the schoolmistress as she entered, trembling, although moving with the dignity that seemed to be her form of embarrassment. Lucilla meanwhile sped to the others near the window. 'You must go,' she said, 'or I shall never screw her up; it is a sudden access of stage fright. She is as pale as death.'

Owen stepped back to judge of the paleness, and Robert contrived to say, 'Cannot you grant me a few words, Lucy?'

'The most impossible thing you could have asked,' she replied. 'There's Rashe's encouragement quite done for her now!'

She bounded back to the much-overcome Edna, while Phœbe herself, perceiving how ill-advised an opportunity Robert had chosen, stepped out with him into the cloister, saying, 'She can't help it, dear Robin; she cannot think, just now.'

'When can she?' he asked, almost with asperity.

'Think how full her hands are, how much excited she is,' pleaded Phœbe, feeling that this was no fair moment for the crisis.

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'Ireland?' almost groaned Robert, but at the same moment grasped her roughly to hinder her from replying, for Owen was close upon them, and he was the person to whom Robert would have been most reluctant to display his feelings.

Catching intuitively at his meaning, Phœbe directed her attention to some clematis on the opposite side of the cloister, and called both her companions to gather it for her, glad to be with Robert and to relieve Miss Murrell of the presence of another spectator. Charles Charteris coming up, carried the two young men to inspect some of his doings out of doors, and Phœbe returned with her wreaths of creepers to find that the poor schoolmistress had become quite hysterical, and had been taken away by Lucilla.

Rashe summoned her at the same time to the decoration of the music-room, and on entering, stopped in amusement, and made her a sign in silence to look into a large pier-glass, which stood so as to reflect through an open door what was passing in the little fanciful boudoir beyond, a place fitted like a tent, and full of quaint Dresden china and toys of *bijouterie*. There was a complete picture within the glass. Lucilla, her fair face seen in profile, more soft and gentle than she often allowed it to appear, was kneeling beside the couch where half reclined the tall, handsome Edna, whose raven hair, and pale, fine features made her like a heroine, as she nervously held the hands which Lucilla had placed within her grasp. There was a low murmur of voices, one soothing, the other half sobbing, but nothing reached the outer room distinctly, till, as Phœbe was holding a long wreath, which Ratia was tying up, she heard—'Oh! but it is so different with me from you young ladies who are used to company and all. I dare say that young lady would not be timid.'

'What young lady, Edna? Not the one with the auburn hair?'

Ratia made an ecstatic face which disgusted Phœbe.

'Oh, no!—the young lady whom Mr. Sandbrook was helping. I dare say she would not mind singing—or anything,' came amid sobs.

Ratia nodded, looked excessively arch, and formed a word with her lips, which Phœbe thought was 'jealous,' but could not imagine what she could mean by it.

'I don't know why you should think poor Phœbe Fulmort so brazen. She is a mere child, taking a holiday from her strict governess.'

Phœbe laughed back an answer to Rashe's pantomime, which in this case she understood.

'She has not had half your training in boldness, with your inspectors and examinations, and all those horrid things. Why, you never thought of taking fright before, even when you have sung to people here. Why should you now?' p. 177

'It is so different, now—so many more people. Oh, so different! I shall never be able.'

'Not at all. You will quite forget all about yourself and your fears when the time comes. You don't know the exhilaration of a room full of people, all lights and music! That symphony will lift you into another world, and you will feel quite ready for "Men must work and women must weep."'

'If I can only begin—but oh! Miss Sandbrook, shall you be far away from me?'

'No, I promise you not. I will bring you down, if you will come to Ratia's room when you are dressed. The black silk and the lilac ribbon Owen and I chose for you; I must see you in it.'

'Dear Miss Sandbrook, you are so kind! What shall I do when you have left?'

'You are going yourself for the holidays, silly puss!'

'Ah! but no one else sympathizes or enters into my feelings.'

'Feelings!' said Lucilla, lightly, yet sadly. 'Don't indulge in them, Edna; they are no end of a torment.'

'Ah! but if they prey on one, one cannot help it.'

Rashe made a face of great distaste. Phœbe felt as if it were becoming too confidential to permit of listening, all the more as she heard Lucilla's reply.

'That's what comes of being tall, and stately, and dignified! There's so much less of me that I can carry off my troubles twice as well.'

'Oh, dear Miss Sandbrook, you can have no troubles!'

'Haven't I? Oh, Edna, if you knew! You that have a mother can never know what it is to be like me! I'm keeping it all at bay, lest I should break down; but I'm in the horriest bother and trouble.'

Not knowing what might come next, ashamed of having listened to so much, yet with one gleam of renewed hope, Phœbe resolutely disobeyed Ratia's frowns and gestures, and made her presence known by decided movements and words spoken aloud.

She saw the immediate effect in Edna Murrell's violent start; but Lucilla, without moving, at once

began to sing, straining her thin though sweet voice, as though to surmount a certain tremulousness. Edna joined, and the melody was lovely to hear; but Phœbe was longing all the time for Robert to be at hand for this softer moment, and she hoped all the more when, the practising being over, and Edna dismissed, Lucy came springing towards her, notifying her presence by a caress—to outward appearance merely playful, but in reality a convulsive clasp of vehement affection—and Phœbe was sure that there had been tears in those eyes that seemed to do nothing but laugh.

The security that this wild elf was true at heart was, however, not enough for Phœbe. There was the knowledge that each moment's delay would drive Robert farther aloof, and that it was a mere chance whether he should encounter this creature of impulse at a propitious instant. Nay, who could tell what was best for him after all? Even Phœbe's faithful acceptance of her on his word had undergone sundry severe shocks, and she had rising doubts whether Lucy, such as she saw her, could be what would make him happy.

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If the secrets of every guest at a *fête* were told, would any be found unmixedly happy? Would there be no one devoid of cares of their own or of other people's, or if exempt from these, undisturbed by the absence of the right individual or by the presence of the wrong one, by mishaps of deportment, difficulties of dress, or want of notice? Perhaps, after all, it may be best to have some one abiding anxiety, strong enough to destroy tedium, and exclude the pettier distresses, which are harder to contend with, though less dignified; and most wholesome of all is it that this should be an interest entirely external. So, after all, Phœbe's enjoyment might hardly have been increased had her thoughts been more free from Robin's troubles, when she came down dressed for her first party, so like a lily of the valley in her delicate dress, that Owen acknowledged that it justified her choice, and murmured something of 'in vernal green and virgin white, her festal robes, arrayed.' Phœbe was only distressed at what she thought the profanation of quoting from such a source in compliment to her. Honora was gratified to find the lines in his memory upon any terms. Poor dear Honor, in one case at least believing all things, hoping all things!

Phœbe ought to have made the most of her compliment. It was all she obtained in that line. Juliana herself could not have taken umbrage at her success. Nobody imagined her come out, no one attempted to disturb her from under Miss Charlecote's wing, and she kept close to her the whole afternoon, sometimes sitting upon a haycock, sometimes walking in the shrubbery, listening to the band, or looking at the archery, in company with dignified clergyman, or elderly lady, astonished to meet Honor Charlecote in so unwonted a scene. Owen Sandbrook was never far off. He took them to eat ices, conducted them to good points of view, found seats for them, and told them who every one was, with droll comments or anecdotes which entertained them so much, that Phœbe almost wished that Robin had not made her sensible of the grain of irreverence that seasoned all Owen's most brilliant sallies.

They saw little of the others. Mr. and Mrs. Charteris walked about together, the one cordial, the other stately and gorgeous, and Miss Charlecote came in for her due and passing share of their politeness. Rashe once invited Phœbe to shoot, but had too many on her hands to be solicitous about one. Flirting no longer herself, Rashe's delight was in those who did flirt, and in any assembly her extreme and unscrupulous good-nature made her invaluable to all who wanted to have themselves taken off their own hands, or pushed into those of others. She ordered people about, started amusements, hunted gentlemen up, found partners, and shook up the bashful. Rashe Charteris was the life of everything. How little was wanting to make her kind-hearted activity admirable!

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Lucilla never came in their way at all. She was only seen in full and eager occupation embellishing the archery, or forcing the 'decidedly pious' to be fascinated by her gracious self-adaptation. Robert was equally inaccessible, always watching her, but keeping aloof from his sister, and only consorting at times with Mr. Prendergast.

It was seven o'clock when this act of the drama was finally over, and the parties staying in the house met round a hurried meal. Rashe lounging and yawning, laughing and quizzing, in a way amazing to Phœbe; Lucilla in the very summit of spirits, rattling and laughing away in full swing. Thence the party dispersed to dress, but Honora had no sooner reached her room than she said, 'I must go and find Lucy. I must do my duty by her, little hope as I have. She has avoided me all day; I must seek her now.'

What a difference time and discipline had made in one formerly so timid and gentle as to be alarmed at the least encounter, and nervous at wandering about a strange house. Nervous and frightened, indeed, she still was, but self-control kept this in check, and her dislike was not allowed to hold her back from her duty. Humfrey's representative was seldom permitted to be weak. But there are times when the difference between man and woman is felt in their dealings with others. Strength can be mild, but what is strained can seldom be gentle, and when she knocked at Horatia Charteris's door, her face, from very unhappiness and effort, was sorrowfully reproachful, as she felt herself an unwelcome apparition to the two cousins, who lay on their bed still laughing over the day's events.

Rashe, who was still in her morning dress, at once gave way, saying she must go and speak to Lolly, and hastened out of the room. Lucy, in her dishabille, sat crouched upon the bed, her white bare shoulders and floating hair, together with the defiant glance of the blue eye, and the hand moodily compressing the lips, reminding Honor of the little creature who had been summarily carried into her house sixteen years since. She came towards her, but there was no

invitation to give the caress that she yearned to bestow, and she leant against the bed, trembling, as she said, 'Lucy, my poor child, I am come that you may not throw away your last chance without knowing it. You do not realize what you are about. If you cast aside esteem and reliance, how can you expect to retain the affection you sometimes seem to prize?'

'If I am not trusted, what's the good of affection?'

'How can you expect trust when you go beyond the bounds of discretion?' said Honor, with voice scarcely steadied into her desired firmness.

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'I can, I do!'

'Lucy, listen to me.' She gave way to her natural piteous, pleading tone: 'I verily believe that this is the very turn. Remember how often a moment has decided the fate of a life!' She saw the expression relax into some alarm, and continued: 'The Fulmorts do not say so, but I see by their manner that his final decision will be influenced by your present proceedings. You have trifled with him too long, and with his mind made up to the ministry, he cannot continue to think of one who persists in outraging decorum.'

Those words were effort enough, and had better have been unsaid. 'That is as people may think,' was all the answer.

'As he thinks?'

'How do I know what he thinks?'

Heartsick at such mere fencing, Honor was silent at first, then said, 'I, for one, shall rate your good opinion by your endeavour to deserve it. Who can suppose that you value what you are willing to risk for an unladylike bet, or an unfeminine sporting expedition!'

'You may tell him so,' said Lucilla, her voice quivering with passion.

'You think a look will bring him back, but you may find that a true man is no slave. Prove his affection misplaced, and he will tear it away.'

Had Honora been discreet as she was good, she would have left those words to settle down; but, woman that she was, she knew not when to stop, and coaxingly coming to the small bundle of perverseness, she touched the shoulder, and said, 'Now you won't make an object of yourself to-night?'

The shoulder shook in the old fashion.

'At least you will not go to Ireland.'

'Yes, I shall.'

'Miss Charlecote, I beg your pardon—' cried Rashe, bursting in—(oh! that she had been five seconds earlier)—'but dressing is imperative. People are beginning to come.'

Honora retreated in utter discomfiture.

'Rashe! Rashe! I'm in for it!' cried Lucilla, as the door shut, springing up with a look of terror.

'Proposed by deputy?' exclaimed Horatia, aghast.

'No, no!' gasped Lucilla; 'it's this Ireland of yours—that—that—' and she well-nigh sobbed.

'My bonny bell! I knew you would not be bullied into deserting.'

'Oh! Rashe, she was very hard on me. Every one is but you!' and Lucilla threw herself into her cousin's arms in a paroxysm of feeling; but their maid's knock brought her back to composure sooner than poor Honora, who shed many a tear over this last defeat, as, looking mournfully to Phœbe, she said, 'I have done, Phœbe. I can say no more to her. She will not hear anything from me. Oh! what have I done that my child should be hardened against me!'

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Phœbe could offer nothing but caresses full of indignant sorrow, and there was evidently soothing in them, for Miss Charlecote's tears became softer, and she fondly smoothed Phœbe's fair hair, saying, as she drew the clinging arms closer round her: 'My little woodbine, you must twine round your brother and comfort him, but you can spare some sweetness for me too. There, I will dress. I will not keep you from the party.'

'I do not care for that; only to see Robin.'

'We must take our place in the crowd,' sighed Honora, beginning her toilet; 'and you will enjoy it when you are there. Your first quadrille is promised to Owen, is it not?'

'Yes,' said Phœbe, dreamily, and she would have gone back to Robin's sorrows, but Honora had learnt that there were subjects to be set aside when it was incumbent on her to be presentable, and directed the talk to speculations whether the poor schoolmistress would have nerve to sing; and somehow she talked up Phœbe's spirits to such a hopeful pitch, that the little maiden absolutely was crossed by a gleam of satisfaction from the ungrateful recollection that poor Miss Charlecote had done with the affair. Against her will, she had detected the antagonism between the two, and bad as it was of Lucy, was certain that she was more likely to be amenable where there was no interference from her best friend.

The music-room was already crowded when the two made their way into it, and Honora's inclination was to deposit herself on the nearest seat, but she owed something otherwise to her young charge, and Phœbe's eyes had already found a lonely black figure with arms crossed, and lowering brow. Simultaneously they moved towards him, and he towards them. 'Is she come down?' he asked.

Phœbe shook her head, but at the same moment another door near the orchestra admitted a small white butterfly figure, leading in a tall queenly apparition in black, whom she placed in a chair adjacent to the bejewelled prima donna of the night—a great contrast with her dust-coloured German hair and complexion, and good-natured plain face.

Robert's face cleared with relief; he evidently detected nothing *outré* in Lucilla's aspect, and was rejoicing in the concession. Woman's eyes saw further; a sigh from Honora, an amused murmur around him, caused him to bend his looks on Phœbe. She knew his eyes were interrogating her, but could not bear to let her own reply, and kept them on the ground.

He was moving towards Lucilla, who, having consigned her *protégée* to the good-humoured German, had come more among the guests, and was exchanging greetings and answering comments with all her most brilliant airs of saucy animation.

And who could quarrel with that fairy vision? Her rich double-skirted watered silk was bordered with exquisitely made and coloured flies, radiant with the hues of the peacock, the gold pheasant, the jay, parrots of all tints, everything rich and rare in plumage. A coronal of the same encircled her glossy hair, the tiny plumes contrasting with the blonde ringlets, and the *bonâ fide* hooks ostentatiously displayed; lesser and more innocuous flies edged the sleeves, corsage, shoes, and gloves; and her fan, which she used as skilfully as Jenny Wren, presented a Watteau-like picture of an angling scene. Anything more daintily, quaintly pretty could not be imagined, and the male part of the assembly would have unanimously concurred in Sir Harry Buller's 'three cheers for the queen of the anglers.'

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But towards the party most concerned in her movements, Lucilla came not; and Phœbe, understanding a desire to keep as near as might be to Miss Murrell, tried to suggest it as the cause, and looking round, saw Owen standing by Miss Charlecote, with somewhat of an uneasy countenance.

'Terribly hot here,' he said, restlessly; 'suffocating, aren't you, Honor? Come and take a turn in the cloister; the fountain is stunning by moonlight.'

No proposal could have been more agreeable to Honora; and Phœbe was afraid of losing her chaperon, though she would rather have adhered to her brother, and the barbs of that wicked little angler were tearing him far too deeply to permit him to move out of sight of his tormentor.

But for this, the change would have been delicious. The white lights and deep shadows from the calm, grave moon contrasted with the long gleams of lamp-light from every window, reddened by the curtains within; the flowers shone out with a strange whiteness, the taller ones almost like spiritual shapes; the burnished orange leaves glistened, the water rose high in silvery spray, and fell back into the blackness of the basin made more visible by one trembling, shimmering reflection; the dark blue sky above seemed shut into a vault by the enclosing buildings, and one solitary planet shone out in the lustrous neighbourhood of the moon. So still, so solemn, so cool! Honora felt it as repose, and pensively began to admire—Owen chimed in with her. Feverish thoughts and perturbations were always gladly soothed away in her company. Phœbe alone stood barely confessing the beauty, and suppressing impatience at their making so much of it; not yet knowing enough of care or passion to seek repose, and much more absorbed in human than in any other form of nature.

The music was her first hope of deliverance from her namesake in the sky; but, behold, her companions chose to prefer hearing that grand instrumental piece softened by distance; and even Madame Hedwig's quivering notes did not bring them in. However, at the first sounds of the accompaniment to the 'Three Fishers' Wives,' Owen pulled back the curtain, and handed the two ladies back into the room, by a window much nearer to the orchestra than that by which they had gone out, not far from where Edna Murrell had just risen, her hands nervously clasped together, her colour rapidly varying, and her eyes roaming about as though in quest of something. Indeed, through all the music, the slight sounds of the entrance at the window did not escape her, and at the instant when she should have begun to sing, Phœbe felt those black eyes levelled on herself with a look that startled her; they were at once removed, the head turned away; there was an attempt at the first words, but they died away on her lips; there was a sudden whiteness, Lucilla and the German both tried to resear her; but with readier judgment Owen made two long steps, gathered her up in his strong arms, and bore her through the curtains and out at the open window like a mere infant.

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'Don't come, don't—it will only make more fuss—nobody has seen. Go to Madame Hedwig; tell her from me to go on to her next, and cover her retreat,' said Lucilla, as fast as the words would come, signing back Honora, and hastily disappearing between the curtains.

There was a command in Lucilla's gestures which always made obedience the first instinct even with Honora, and her impulse to assist thus counteracted, she had time to recollect that Lucy might be supposed to know best what to do with the schoolmistress, and that to dispose of her among her ladies' maid friends was doubtless the kindest measure.

'I must say I am glad,' she said; 'the poor thing cannot be quite so much spoilt as they wished.'

The concert proceeded, and in the next pause Honor fell into conversation with a pleasant lady who had brought one pair of young daughters in the morning, and now was doing the same duty by an elder pair.

Phœbe was standing near the window when a touch on her arm and a whispered 'Help! hush!' made her look round. Holding the curtain apart, so as to form the least possible aperture, and with one finger on her lip, was Lucy's face, the eyes brimming over with laughter, as she pointed to her head—three of the hooks had set their barbs deep into the crimson satin curtain, and held her a prisoner!

'Hush! I'll never forgive you if you betray me,' she whispered, drawing Phœbe by the arm behind the curtain; 'I should expire on the spot to be found in Absalom's case. All that little goose's fault—I never reckoned on having to rush about this way. Can't you do it? Don't spare scissors,' and Lucilla produced a pair from under her skirt. 'Rashe and I always go provided.'

'How is she?—where is she?' asked Phœbe.

'That's exactly what I can't tell. He took her out to the fountain; she was quite like a dead thing. Water wouldn't make her come to, and I ran for some salts; I wouldn't call anybody, for it was too romantic a condition to have Owen discovered in, with a fainting maiden in his arms. Such a rummage as I had. My own things are all jumbled up, I don't know how, and Rashe keeps nothing bigger than globules, only fit for fainting lady-birds, so I went to Lolly's, but her bottles have all gold heads, and are full of uncanny-looking compounds, and I made a raid at last on Sweet Honey's rational old dressing-case, poked out her keys from her pocket, and got in; wasting interminable time. Well, when I got back to my fainting damsel, *non est inventus*.'

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'*Inventa*,' murmured the spirit of Miss Fennimore within Phœbe. 'But what? had she got well?'

'So I suppose. Gone off to the servants' rooms, no doubt; as there is no White Lady in the fountain to spirit them both away. What, haven't you done that, yet?'

'Oh! Lucy, stand still, please, or you'll get another hook in.'

'Give me the scissors; I know I could do it quicker. Never mind the curtain, I say; nobody will care.'

She put up her hand, and shook head and feet to the entanglement of a third hook; but Phœbe, decided damsel that she was, used her superior height to keep her mastery, held up the scissors, pressed the fidgety shoulder into quiescence, and kept her down while she extricated her, without fatal detriment to the satin, though with scanty thanks, for the liberation was no sooner accomplished than the sprite was off, throwing out a word about Rashe wanting her.

Phœbe emerged to find that she had not been missed, and presently the concert was over, and tea coming round, there was a change of places. Robert came towards her. 'I am going,' he said.

'Oh! Robert, when dancing would be one chance?'

'She does not mean to give me that chance; I would not ask it while she is in that dress. It is answer sufficient. Good night, Phœbe; enjoy yourself.'

Enjoy herself! A fine injunction, when her brother was going away in such a mood! Yet who would have suspected that rosy, honest apple face of any grievance, save that her partner was missing?

Honora was vexed and concerned at his neglect, but Phœbe appeased her by reporting what Lucy had said. 'Thoughtless! reckless!' sighed Honora; 'if Lucy *would* leave the poor girl on his hands, of course he is obliged to make some arrangement for getting her home! I never knew such people as they are here! Well, Phœbe, you *shall* have a partner next time!'

Phœbe had one, thanks chiefly to Rashe, and somehow the rapid motion shook her out of her troubles, and made her care much less for Robin's sorrows than she had done two minutes before. She was much more absorbed in hopes for another partner.

Alas! he did not come; neither then nor for the ensuing. Owen's value began to rise.

Miss Charlecote did not again bestir herself in the cause, partly from abstract hatred of waltzes, partly from the constant expectation of Owen's reappearance, and latterly from being occupied in a discussion with the excellent mother upon young girls reading novels.

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At last, after a *galoppe*, at which Phœbe had looked on with wishful eyes, Lucilla dropped breathless into the chair which she relinquished to her.

'Well, Phœbe, how do you like it?'

'Oh! very much,' rather ruefully; 'at least it would be if—'

'If you had any partners, eh, poor child? Hasn't Owen turned up?'

'It's that billiard-room; I tried to make Charlie shut it up. But we'll disinter him; I'll rush in like a sky-rocket, and scatter the gentlemen to all quarters.'

'No, no, don't!' cried Phœbe, alarmed, and catching hold of her. 'It is not that, but Robin is gone.'

'Atrocious,' returned Cilly, disconcerted, but resolved that Phœbe should not perceive it; 'so we are both under a severe infliction,—both ashamed of our brothers.'

'I am not ashamed of mine,' said Phœbe, in a tone of gravity.

'Ah! there's the truant,' said Lucilla, turning aside. 'Owen, where have you hidden yourself? I hope you are ready to sink into the earth with shame at hearing you have rubbed off the bloom from a young lady's first ball.'

'No! it was not he who did so,' stoutly replied Phœbe.

'Ah! it was all the consequence of the green and white; I told you it was a sinister omen,' said Owen, chasing away a shade of perplexity from his brow, and assuming a certain air that Phœbe had never seen before, and did not like. 'At least you will be merciful, and allow me to retrieve my character.'

'You had nothing to retrieve,' said Phœbe, in the most straightforward manner; 'it was very good in you to take care of poor Miss Murrell. What became of her? Lucy said you would know.'

'I—I?' he exclaimed, so vehemently as to startle her by the fear of having ignorantly committed some egregious blunder; 'I'm the last person to know.'

'The last to be seen with the murdered always falls under suspicion,' said Lucilla.

'Drowned in the fountain?' cried Owen, affecting horror.

'Then you must have done it,' said his sister, 'for when I came back, after ransacking the house for salts, you had both disappeared. Have you been washing your hands all this time after the murder?'

'Nothing can clear me but an appeal to the fountain,' said Owen; 'will you come and look in, Phœbe? It is more delicious than ever.'

But Phœbe had had enough of the moonlight, did not relish the subject, and was not pleased with Owen's manner; so she refused by a most decided 'No, thank you,' causing Lucy to laugh at her for thinking Owen dangerous.

'At least you will vouchsafe to trust yourself with me for the Lancers,' said Owen, as Cilla's partner came to claim her, and Phœbe rejoiced in anything to change the tone of the conversation; still, however, asking, as he led her off, what had become of the poor schoolmistress.

'Gone home, very sensibly,' said Owen; 'if she is wise she will know how to trust to Cilly's invitations! People that do everything at once never do anything well. It is quite a rest to turn to any one like you, Phœbe, who are content with one thing at a time! I wish—'

'Well, then, let us dance,' said Phœbe, abruptly; 'I can't do that well enough to talk too.'

It was not that Owen had not said the like things to her many times before; it was his eagerness and fervour that gave her an uncomfortable feeling. She was not sure that he was not laughing at her by putting on these devoted airs, and she felt herself grown up enough to put an end to being treated as a child. He made her a profound bow in a mockery of acquiescence, and preserved absolute silence during the first figures, but she caught his eye several times gazing on her with looks such as another might have interpreted into mingled regret and admiration, but which were to her simply discomfiting and disagreeable, and when he spoke again, it was not in banter, but half in sadness. 'Phœbe, how do you like all this?'

'I think I could like it very much.'

'I am almost sorry to hear you say so; anything that should tend to make you resemble others is detestable.'

'I should be very sorry not to be like other people.'

'Phœbe, you do not know how much of the pleasure of my life would be lost if you were to become a mere conventional young lady.'

Phœbe had no notion of being the pleasure of any one's life except Robin's and Maria's, and was rather affronted that Owen should profess to enjoy her childish ignorance and *naïveté*.

'I believe,' she said, 'I was rude just now when I told you not to talk. I am sorry for it; I shall know better next time.'

'Your knowing better is exactly what I deprecate. But there it is; unconsciousness is the charm of simplicity. It is the very thing aimed at by Rashe and Cilly, and all their crew, with their eccentricities.'

'I am sorry for it,' seriously returned Phœbe, who had by this time, by quiet resistance, caused him to land her under the lee of Miss Charlecote, instead of promenading with her about the room. He wanted her to dance with him again, saying she owed it to him for having sacrificed

the first to common humanity, but great as was the pleasure of a polka, she shrank from him in this complimentary mood, and declared she should dance no more that evening. He appealed to Honora, who, disliking to have her boy balked of even a polka, asked Phœbe if she were *very* tired, and considering her 'rather not' as equivalent to such a confession, proposed a retreat to their own room.

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Phœbe was sorry to leave the brilliant scene, and no longer to be able to watch Lucilla, but she wanted to shake Owen off, and readily consented. She shut her door after one good night. She was too much grieved and disappointed to converse, and could not bear to discuss whether the last hope were indeed gone, and whether Lucilla had decided her lot without choosing to know it. Alas! how many turning-points may be missed by those who never watch!

How little did Phœbe herself perceive the shoal past which her self-respect had just safely guided her!

'I wonder if those were ball-room manners? What a pity if they were, for then I shall not like balls,' was all the thought that she had leisure to bestow on her own share in the night's diversions, as through the subsequent hours she dozed and dreamt, and mused and slept again, with the feverish limbs and cramp-tormented feet of one new to balls; sometimes teased by entangling fishing flies, sometimes interminably detained in the moonlight, sometimes with Miss Fennimore waiting for an exercise, and the words not to be found in the dictionary; and even this unpleasant counterfeit of sleep deserting her after her usual time for waking, and leaving her to construct various fabrics of possibilities for Robin and Lucy.

She was up in fair time, and had written a long and particular account to Bertha of everything in the festivities not recorded in this narrative, before Miss Charlecote awoke from the compensating morning slumber that had succeeded a sad and unrestful night. Late as they were, they were down-stairs before any one but the well-seasoned Rashe, who sat beguiling the time with a Bradshaw, and who did *not* tell them how intolerably cross Cilly had been all the morning.

Nor would any one have suspected it who had seen her, last of all, come down at a quarter to eleven, in the most exultant spirits, talking the height of rodomontade with the gentlemen guests, and dallying with her breakfast, while Phœbe's heart was throbbing at the sight of two grave figures, her brother and the curate, slowly marching up and down the cloister, in waiting till this was over.

And there sat Lucilla inventing adventures for an imaginary tour to be brought out on her return by the name of 'Girls in Galway'—'From the Soirée to the Salmon'—'Flirts and Fools-heads,' as Owen and Charles discontentedly muttered to each other, or, as Mr. Calthorp proposed, 'The Angels and the Anglers.' The ball was to be the opening chapter. Lord William entreated for her costume as the frontispiece, and Mr. Calthorp begged her to re-assume it, and let her cousin photograph her on the spot.

Lucilla objected to the impracticability of white silk, the inconvenience of unpacking the apparatus, the nuisance of dressing, the lack of time; but Rashe was delighted with the idea, and made light of all, and the gentlemen pressed her strongly, till with rather more of a consent than a refusal, she rose from her nearly untasted breakfast, and began to move away.

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'Cilla,' said Mr. Prendergast, at the window, 'can I have a word with you?'

'At your service,' she answered, as she came out to him, and saw that Robert had left him. 'Only be quick; they want to photograph me in my ball-dress.'

'You won't let them do it, though,' said the curate.

'White comes out hideous,' said Lucilla; 'I suppose you would not have a copy, if I took one off for you?'

'No; I don't like those visitors of yours well enough to see you turned into a merry-andrew to please them.'

'So that's what Robert Fulmort told you I did last night,' said Lucilla, blushing at last, and thoroughly.

'No, indeed; you didn't?' he said, regarding her with an astonished glance.

'I *did* wear a dress trimmed with salmon-flies, because of a bet with Lord William,' said Lucilla, the suffusion deepening on brow, cheek, and throat, as the confiding esteem of her fatherly friend effected what nothing else could accomplish. She would have given the world to have justified his opinion of his late rector's little daughter, and her spirits seemed gone, though the worst he did was to shake his head at her.

'If you did not know it, why did you call me *that*?' she asked.

'A merry-andrew?' he answered; 'I never meant that you had been one. No; only an old friend like me doesn't like the notion of your going and dressing up in the morning to amuse a lot of scamps.'

'I won't,' said Lucilla, very low.

'Well, then,' began Mr. Prendergast, as in haste to proceed to his own subject; but she cut him short.

'It is not about Ireland?'

'No; I know nothing about young ladies; and if Mr. Charteris and your excellent friend there have nothing to say against it, I can't.'

'My excellent friend had so much to say against it, that I was pestered into vowing I would go! Tell me not, Mr. Prendergast,—I should not mind giving up to you;' and she looked full of hope.

'That would be beginning at the wrong end, Cilla; you are not my charge.'

'You are my clergyman,' she said, pettishly.

'You are not my parishioner,' he answered.

'Pish!' she said; 'when you know I want you to tell me.'

'Why, you say you have made the engagement.'

'So what I said when she fretted me past endurance must bind me!'

Be it observed that, like all who only knew Hiltonbury through Lucilla, Mr. Prendergast attributed any blemishes which he might detect in her to the injudicious training of an old maid; so he sympathized. 'Ah! ladies of a certain age never get on with young ones! But I thought it was all settled before with Miss Charteris.'

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'I never quite said I would go, only we got ready for the sake of the fun of talking of it, and now Rashe has grown horridly eager about it. She did not care at first—only to please me.'

'Then wouldn't it be using her ill to disappoint her now? You couldn't do it, Cilla. Why, you have given your word, and she is quite old enough for anything. Wouldn't Miss Charlecote see it so?'

To regard Ratia as a mature personage robbed the project of romance, and to find herself bound in honour by her inconsiderate rattle was one of the rude shocks which often occur to the indiscriminate of tongue; but the curate had too much on his mind to dwell on what concerned him more remotely, and proceeded, 'I came to see whether you could help me about poor Miss Murrell. You made no arrangement for her getting home last night?'

'No!'

'Ah, you young people! But it is my fault; I should have recollected young heads. Then I am afraid it must have been—'

'What?'

'She was seen on the river very late last night with a stranger. He went up to the school with her, remained about a quarter of an hour, and then rowed up the river again. I am afraid it is not the first time she has been seen with him.'

'But, Mr. Prendergast, she was here till at least ten! She fainted away just as she was to have sung, and we carried her out into the cloister. When she recovered she went away to the housekeeper's room—' (a bold assertion, built on Owen's partially heard reply to Phœbe). 'I'll ask the maids.'

'It is of no use, Cilla; she allows it herself.'

'And pray,' cried Lucilla, rallying her sauciness, 'how do you propose ever to have banns to publish, if young men and maidens are never to meet by water nor by land?'

'Then you do know something?'

'No; only that such matters are not commonly blazoned in the commencement.'

'I don't wish her to blazon it, but if she would only act openly by me,' said the distressed curate. 'I wish nothing more than that she was safe married; and then if you ladies appoint another beauty, I'll give up the place, and live at --- college.'

'We'll advertise for the female Chimpanzee, and depend upon it she will marry at the end of six weeks. So you have attacked her in person. What did she say?'

'Nothing that she could help. She stood with those great eyes cast down, looking like a statue, and sometimes vouchsafing "yes, sir," or "no, sir." It was "no, sir," when I asked if her mother knew. I am afraid it must be something very unsatisfactory, Cilla; but she might say more to you if you were not going away.'

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'Oh! Mr. Prendergast, why did you not come sooner?'

'I did come an hour ago, but you were not come down.'

'I'll walk on at once; the carriage can pick me up. I'll fetch my hat. Poor Edna! I'll soon make her satisfy your mind. Has any one surmised who it can be?'

'The notion is that it is one of your musicians—very dangerous, I am afraid; and I say, Cilla, did you ever do such a thing—you couldn't, I suppose—as lend her Shelley's poems?'

'I? No; certainly not.'

'There was a copy lying on the table in her little parlour, as if she had been writing something out from it. It is very odd, but it was in that peculiar olive-green morocco that some of the books in your father's library were bound in.'

'Not mine, certainly,' said Lucilla. 'Good Honor Charlecote would have run crazy if she thought I had touched a Shelley; a very odd study for Edna. But as to the olive-green, of course it was bound under the same star as ours.'

'Cilly, Cilly, now or never! photograph or not?' screamed Rashe, from behind her three-legged camera.

'Not!' was Lucilla's cavalier answer. 'Pack up; have done with it, Rashe. Pick me up at the school.'

Away she flew headlong, the patient and disconcerted Horatia following her to her room to extract hurried explanations, and worse than no answers as to the sundries to be packed at the last moment, while she hastily put on hat and mantle, and was flying down again, when her brother, with outspread arms, nearly caught her in her spring. 'Hollo! what's up?'

'Don't stop me, Owen! I'm going to walk on with Mr. Prendergast and be picked up. I must speak to Edna Murrell.'

'Nonsense! The carriage will be out in five minutes.'

'I must go, Owen. There's some story of a demon in human shape on the water with her last night, and Mr. Prendergast can't get a word out of her.'

'Is that any reason you should go ramping about, prying into people's affairs?'

'But, Owen, they will send her away. They will take away her character.'

'The—the—the more reason you should have nothing to do with it,' he exclaimed. 'It is no business for you, and I won't have you meddle in it.'

Such a strong and sudden assumption of fraternal authority took away her breath; and then, in terror lest he should know cause for this detention, she said—

'Owen! you don't guess who it was?'

'How should I?' he roughly answered. 'Some villainous slander, of course, there is, but it is no business of yours to be straking off to make it worse.'

'I should not make it worse.'

'Women always make things worse. Are you satisfied now?' as the carriage was seen coming round.

'That is only to be packed.'

'Packed with folly, yes! Look here! 11.20, and the train at 12.5!'

'I will miss the train, go up later, and sleep in London.'

'Stuff and nonsense! Who is going to take you? Not I.'

In Lucilla's desperation in the cause of her favourite Edna, she went through a rapid self-debate. Honor would gladly wait for her for such a cause; she could sleep at Woolstone-lane, and thence go on to join Horatia in Derbyshire, escorted by a Hiltonbury servant. But what would that entail? She would be at their mercy. Robert would obtain his advantage—it would be all over with her! Pride arose; Edna's cause sank. How many destinies were fixed in the few seconds while she stood with one foot forward, spinning her black hat by the elastic band!

'Too late, Mr. Prendergast; I cannot go,' she said, as she saw him waiting for her at the door. 'Don't be angry with me, and don't let the womankind prejudice you against poor Edna. You forgive me! It is really too late.'

'Forgive *you*?' smiled Mr. Prendergast, pressing her caressing hand in his great, lank grasp; 'what for?'

'Oh, because it is too late; and I can't help it. But don't be hard with her. Good-bye.'

Too late! Why did Lucilla repeat those words so often? Was it a relief to that irreflective nature to believe the die irrevocably cast, and the responsibility of decision over? Or why did she ask forgiveness of the only one whom she was not offending, but because there was a sense of need of pardon where she would not stoop to ask it.

Miss Charlecote and the Fulmorts, Rashe and Cilly, were to be transported to London by the same train, leaving Owen behind to help Charles Charteris entertain some guests still remaining, Honora promising him to wait in town until Lucilla should absolutely have started for Ireland, when she would supply him with the means of pursuit.

Lucilla's delay and change of mind made the final departure so late that it was needful to drive excessively fast, and the train was barely caught in time. The party were obliged to separate, and Robert took Phœbe into a different carriage from that where the other three found places.

In the ten minutes' transit by railway, Lucy, always softened by parting, was like another being towards Honor, and talked eagerly of 'coming home' for Christmas, sent messages to Hiltonbury friends, and did everything short of retractation to efface the painful impression she had left.

'Sweetest Honey!' she whispered, as they moved on after the tickets had been taken, thrusting her pretty head over into Honor's place. 'Nobody's looking, give me a kiss, and say you don't bear malice, though your kitten has been in a scratching humour.'

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'Malice! no indeed!' said Honor, fondly; 'but, oh! remember, dear child, that frolics may be at too dear a price.'

She longed to say more, but the final stop was made, and their roads diverged. Honor thought that Lucy looked white and trembling, with an uneasy eye, as though she would have given much to have been going home with her.

Nor was the consoling fancy unfounded. Lucilla's nerves were not at their usual pitch, and an undefined sense of loss of a safeguard was coming over her. Moreover, the desire for a last word to Robert was growing every moment, and he *would* keep on hunting out those boxes, as if they mattered to anybody.

She turned round on his substitute, and said, 'I've not spoken to Robin all this time. No wonder his feathers are ruffled. Make my peace with him, Phœbe dear.'

On the very platform, in that moment of bustle, Phœbe conscientiously and reasonably began, 'Will you tell me how much you mean by that?'

'Cilly—King's-cross—1.15,' cried Ratia, snatching at her arm.

'Oh! the slave one is! Next time we meet, Phœbe, the redbreast will be in a white tie, I shall—'

Hurry and agitation were making her flippant, and Robert was nearer than she deemed. He was assisting her to her seat, and then held out his hand, but never raised his eyes. 'Goodbye, Robin,' she said; 'Reason herself shall meet you at the Holt at Christmas.'

'Good-bye,' he said, but without a word of augury, and loosed her hand. Her fingers clung one moment, but he drew his away, called 'King's-cross' to the coachman, and she was whirled off. Angler as she was, she no longer felt her prey answer her pull. Had the line snapped?

When Owen next appeared in Woolstone-lane he looked fagged and harassed, but talked of all things in sky, earth, or air, politics, literature, or gossip, took the bottom of the table, and treated the Parsonses as his guests. Honora, however, felt that something was amiss; perhaps Lucilla engaged to Lord William; and when, after luncheon, he followed her to the cedar room, she began with a desponding 'Well?'

'Well, she is off!'

'Alone with Rashe?'

'Alone with Rashe. Why, Sweet Honey, you look gratified!'

'I had begun to fear some fresh news,' said Honor, smiling with effort. 'I am sure that something is wrong. You do not look well, my dear. How flushed you are, and your forehead is so hot!' as she put her hand on his brow.

'Oh, nothing!' he said, caressingly, holding it there. 'I'm glad to have got away from the castle; Charlie and his set drink an intolerable lot of wine. I'll not be there again in a hurry.'

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'I am glad of that. I wish you had come away with us.'

'I wish to heaven I had!' cried Owen; 'but it could not be helped! So now for my wild-goose chase. Cross to-morrow night; only you were good enough to say you would find ways and means.'

'There, that is what I intended, including your Midsummer quarter. Don't you think it enough?' as she detected a look of dissatisfaction.

'You are very good. It is a tremendous shame; but you see, Honor dear, when one is across the water, one may as well go the whole animal. If this wise sister of mine does not get into a mess, there is a good deal I could do—plenty of sport. Little Henniker and some Westminster fellows in the ---th are at Kilkenny.'

'You would like to spend the vacation in Ireland,' said Honor, with some disappointment. 'Well, if you go for my pleasure, it is but fair you should have your own. Shall I advance your September allowance?'

'Thank you. You do spoil one abominably, you concoction of honey and all things sweet. But the fact is, I've got uncommonly hard-up of late; no one would believe how ruinous it is being with the Charterises. I believe money evaporates in the atmosphere.'

'Betting?' asked Honor, gasping and aghast.

'On my honour, I assure you not *there*,' cried Owen, eagerly, 'I never did bet there but once, and that was Lolly's doing; and I could not get out of it. Jew that she is! I wonder what Uncle Kit

would say to that house now.'

'You are out of it, and I shall not regret the purchase of your disgust at their ways, Owen. It may be better for you to be in Ireland than to be tempted to go to them for the shooting season. How much do you want? You know, my dear, if there be anything else, I had rather pay anything that is right than have you in debt.'

'You were always the sweetest, best Honey living!' cried Owen, with much agitation; 'and it is a shame—' but there he stopped, and ended in a more ordinary tone—'shame to prey on you, as we both do, and with no better return.'

'Never mind, dear Owen,' she said, with moisture in her eye; 'your real happiness is the only return I want. Come, tell me your difficulty; most likely I can help you.'

'I've nothing to tell,' said Owen, with alarmed impetuosity; 'only that I'm a fool, like every one else, and—and—if you would only double that—'

'Double that! Owen, things cannot be right.'

'I told you they were not right,' was the impatient answer, 'or I should not be vexing you and myself; and,' as though to smooth away his rough commencement, 'what a comfort to have a Honey that will have patience!'

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She shook her head, perplexed. 'Owen, I wish you could tell me more. I do not like debts. You know, dear boy, I grudge nothing I can do for you in my lifetime; but for your own sake you must learn not to spend more than you will be able to afford. Indulgence now will be a penance to you by and by.'

Honora dreaded overdoing lectures to Owen. She knew that an old maid's advice to a young man was dangerous work, and her boy's submissive patience always excited her gratitude and forbearance, so she desisted, in hopes of a confession, looking at him with such tenderness that he was moved to exclaim—'Honor dear, you are the best and worst-used woman on earth! Would to heaven that we had requited you better!'

'I have no cause of complaint against you, Owen,' she said, fondly; 'you have always been the joy and comfort of my heart;' and as he turned aside, as though stricken by the words, 'whatever you may have to reproach yourself with, it is not with hurting me; I only wish to remind you of higher and more stringent duties than those to myself. If you have erred, as I cannot but fear, will you not let me try and smooth the way back?'

'Impossible,' murmured Owen; 'there are things that can never be undone.'

'Not undone, but repented,' said Honor, convinced that he had been led astray by his cousin Charles, and felt bound not to expose him; 'so repented as to become stepping-stones in our progress.'

He only shook his head with a groan.

'The more sorrow, the better hope,' she began; but the impatient movement of his foot warned her that she was only torturing him, and she proceeded,—'Well, I trust you implicitly; I can understand that there may be confidences that ought not to pass between us, and will give you what you require to help you out of your difficulty. I wish you had a father, or any one who could be of more use to you, my poor boy!' and she began to fill up the cheque to the utmost of his demand.

'It is too much—too much,' cried Owen. 'Honor, I must tell you at all costs. What will you think when—'

'I do not wish to purchase a confession, Owen,' she said; 'you know best whether it be a fit one to make to me, or whether for the sake of others you ought to withhold it.'

He was checked, and did not answer.

'I see how it is,' continued Honor; 'my boy, as far as I am concerned, I look on your confession as made. You will be much alone while thus hovering near your sister among the mountains and by the streams. Let it be a time of reflection, and of making your peace with Another. You may do so the more earnestly for not having cast off the burthen on me. You are no child now, to whom your poor Honey's pardon almost seems an absolution. I sometimes think we went on with that too long.'

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'No fear of my ever being a boy again,' said Owen, heavily, as he put the draft into his purse, and then bent his tall person to kiss her with the caressing fondness of his childhood, almost compensating for what his sister caused her to undergo.

Then, at the door, he turned to say, 'Remember, you would not hear.' He was gone, having left a thorn with Honor, in the doubt whether she ought not to have accepted his confidence; but her abstinence had been such a mortification both of curiosity and of hostility to the Charterises that she could not but commend herself for it. She had strong faith in the efficacy of trust upon an honourable mind, and though it was evident that Owen had, in his own eyes, greatly transgressed, she reserved the hope that his error was magnified by his own consciousness, and admired the generosity that refused to betray another. She believed his present suffering to be the beginning of that growth in true religion which is often founded on some shock leading to

self-distrust.

Alas! how many falls have been counted by mothers as the preludes to rising again, like the clearing showers of a stormy day.

CHAPTER VIII

Fearless she had tracked his feet
To this rocky, wild retreat,
And when morning met his view,
Her mild glances met it too.
Ah! your saints have cruel hearts,
Sternly from his bed he starts,
And with rude, repulsive shock,
Hurls her from the beetling rock.—T. MOORE

The deed was done. Conventionalities were defied, vaunts fulfilled, and Lucilla sat on a camp-stool on the deck of a steamer, watching the Welsh mountains rise, grow dim, and vanish gradually.

Horatia, in common with all the rest of the womankind, was prostrate on the cabin floor, treating Cilly's smiles and roses as aggravations of her misery. Had there been a sharer in her exultation, the gay pitching and dancing of the steamer would have been charming to Lucy, but when she retreated from the scene of wretchedness below, she felt herself lonely, and was conscious of some surprise among the surviving gentlemen at her reappearance.

She took out a book as a protection, and read more continuously than she had done since *Vanity Fair* had come to the Holt, and she had been pleased to mark Honora's annoyance at every page she turned.

But the July light faded, and only left her the poor amusement of looking over the side for the phosphorescence of the water, and watching the smoke of the funnel lose itself overhead. The silent stars and sparkling waves would have set Phœbe's dutiful science on the alert, or transported Honor's inward ear by the chant of creation, but to her they were of moderate interest, and her imagination fell a prey to the memory of the eyes averted, and hand withdrawn. 'I'll be exemplary when this is over,' said she to herself, and at length her head nodded till she dropped into a giddy doze, whence with a chilly start she awoke, as the monotonous jog and bounce of the steamer were exchanged for a snort of arrival, among mysterious lanes of sparkling lights apparently rising from the waters.

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She had slept just long enough to lose the lovely entrance of Dublin Bay, stiffen her limbs, and confuse her brains, and she stood still as the stream of passengers began to rush trampling by her, feeling bewildered and forlorn. Her cousin's voice was welcome, though over-loud and somewhat piteous. 'Where are you, stewardess? where's the young lady? Oh! Cilly, there you are. To leave me alone all this time, and here's the stewardess saying we must go ashore at once, or lose the train. Oh! the luggage, and I've lost my plaid,' and ghastly in the lamplight, limp and tottering, Rashe Charteris clasped her arm for support, and made her feel doubly savage and bewildered. Her first movement was to enjoin silence, then to gaze about for the goods. A gentleman took pity on the two ladies, and told them not to be deluded into trying to catch the train; there would be another in an hour's time, and if they had any one to meet them, they would most easily be found where they were.

'We have no one—we are alone,' said Lucilla; and his chivalry was so far awakened that he handed them to the pier, and undertook to find their boxes. Rashe was absolutely subdued, and hung shivering and helpless on her cousin, who felt as though dreaming in the strange scene of darkness made visible by the bright circles round the lamps, across which rapidly flitted the cloaked forms of travellers presiding over queer, wild, caricature-like shapes, each bending low under the weight of trunk or bag, in a procession like a magic lantern, save for the Babel of shrieks, cries, and expostulations everywhere in light or gloom.

A bell rang, an engine roared and rattled off. 'The train!' sighed Horatia; 'we shall have to stay here all night.'

'Nonsense,' said Lucy, ready to shake her; 'there is another in an hour. Stay quiet, do, or he will never find us.'

'Porter, ma'am—porrtterr—'

'No, no, thank you,' cried Lucilla, darting on her rod-case and carriage-bag to rescue them from a freckled countenance with claws attached.

'We shall lose everything, Cilla; that's your trusting to a stranger!'

'All right; thank you!' as she recognized her possessions, borne on various backs towards the station, whither the traveller escorted them, and where things looked more civilized. Ratia began to resume her senses, though weak and hungry. She was sorely discomfited at having to wait, and could not, like the seasoned voyagers, settle herself to repose on the long leathern couches of the waiting-room, but wandered, weebegone and impatient, scolding her cousin for choosing such an hour for their passage, for her desertion and general bad management. The

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merry, good-natured Rashe had disappeared in the sea-sick, cross, and weary wight, whose sole solace was grumbling, but her dolefulness only made Lucilla more mirthful. Here they were, and happen what would, it should only be 'such fun.' Recovered from the moment's bewilderment, Lucy announced that she felt as if she were at a ball, and whispered a proposal of astonishing the natives by a polka in the great empty boarded space. 'The suggestion would immortalize us; come!' And she threatened mischievously to seize the waist of the still giddy and aching-headed Horatia, who repulsed her with sufficient roughness and alarm to set her off laughing at having been supposed to be in earnest.

The hurry of the train came at last; they hastened down-stairs and found the train awaiting them, were told their luggage was safe, and after sitting till they were tired, shot onwards watching the beautiful glimpses of the lights in the ships off Kingstown. They would gladly have gone on all night without another disembarkation and scramble, but the Dublin station came only too soon; they were disgorged, and hastened after goods. Forth came trunk and portmanteau. Alas! none of theirs! Nothing with them but two carriage-bags and two rod-cases!

'It seems to be a common predicament,' said Lucilla; 'here are at least half-a-dozen in the same case.'

'Horrible management. We shall never see it more.'

'Nay, take comfort in the general lot. It will turn up to-morrow; and meantime sleep is not packed up in our boxes. Come, let's be off. What noises! How do these drivers keep from running over one another. Each seems ready to whip every one's beast but his own. Don't you feel yourself in Ireland, Rashe? Arrah! I shall begin to scream too if I stand here much longer.'

'We can't go in that thing—a fly!'

'Don't exist here, Rashe—vermin is unknown. Submit to your fate—' and ere another objection could be uttered, Cilly threw bags and rods into an inside car, and pushed her cousin after them, chattering all the time, to poor Horatia's distraction. 'Oh! delicious! A cross between a baker's cart and a Van Amburgh. A little more and it would overbalance and carry the horse head over heels! Take care, Rashe; you'll pound me into dust if you slip down over me.'

'I can't help it! Oh! the vilest thing in creation.'

'Such fun! To be taken when well shaken. Here we go up, up, up; and here we go down, down, down! Ha! ware fishing-rod! This is what it is to travel. No one ever described the experiences of an inside car!'

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'Because no one in their senses would undergo such misery!'

'But you don't regard the beauties, Rashe, beauties of nature and art combined—see the lights reflected in the river—what a width. Oh! why don't they treat the Thames as they do the Liffey?'

'I can't see, I shall soon be dead! and getting to an inn without luggage, it's not respectable.'

'If you depart this life on the way, the want of luggage will concern me the most, my dear. Depend on it, other people have driven up in inside cars, minus luggage, in the memory of man, in this City of Dublin. Are you such a worldling base as to depend for your respectability on a paltry leathern trunk?'

Lucilla's confidence did not appear misplaced, for neither waiters nor chambermaids seemed surprised, but assured them that people usually missed their luggage by that train, and asseverated that it would appear next morning.

Lucilla awoke determined to be full of frolic and enjoyment, and Horatia, refreshed by her night's rest, was more easily able to detect 'such fun' than on the previous night; so the two cousins sat down amicably to breakfast on the Sunday morning, and inquired about church-services.

'My mallard's tail hat is odd "go to meeting" head-gear,' said Cilla, 'but one cannot lapse into heathenism; so where, Rashe?'

'Wouldn't it be fun to look into a Roman Catholic affair?'

'No,' said Cilly, decidedly; 'where I go it shall be the genuine article. I don't like curiosities in religion.'

'It's a curiosity to go to church at twelve o'clock! If you are so orthodox, let us wait for St. Patrick's this afternoon.'

'And in the meantime? It is but eleven this minute, and St. Patrick's is not till three. There's nothing to be done but to watch Irish nature in the street. Oh! I never before knew the perfection of Carleton's illustration. See that woman and her cap, and the man's round eyebrows and projecting lips with shillelagh written on them. Would it be Sabbath-breaking to perpetrate a sketch?'

But as Ratia was advancing to the window, Lucy suddenly started back, seized her and whirled her away, crying, 'The wretch! I know him now! I could not make him out last night.'

'Who?' exclaimed Rashe, starting determinedly to the window, but detained by the two small but resolute hands clasped round her waist.

'That black-whiskered valet of Mr. Calthorp's. If that man has the insolence to dog me and spy me, I'll not stay in Ireland another day.'

'Oh, what fun!' burst out Horatia. 'It becomes romantic!'

'Atrocious impertinence!' said Lucilla, passionately. 'Why do you stand there laughing?'

'At you, my dear,' gasped Ratia, sinking on the sofa in her spasm of mirth. 'At your reception of chivalrous devotion.'

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'Pretty chivalry to come and spy and beset ladies alone.'

'He has not beset us yet. Don't flatter yourself!'

'What do you mean by that, Horatia?'

'Do you want to try your pistols on me? The waiter could show us the way to the Fifteen Acres, only you see it is Sunday.'

'I want,' said Lucy, all tragedy and no comedy, 'to know why you talk of my *flattering* myself that I am insulted, and my plans upset.'

'Why?' said Rashe, a little sneeringly. 'Why, a little professed beauty like you would be so disappointed not to be pursued, that she is obliged to be always seeing phantoms that give her no peace.'

'Thank you,' coolly returned Cilly. 'Very well, I'll say no more about it, but if I find that man to be in Ireland, the same day I go home!'

Horatia gave a loud, long, provoking laugh. Lucilla felt it was for her dignity to let the subject drop, and betook herself to the only volumes attainable, Bradshaw and her book of flies; while Miss Charteris repaired to the window to investigate for herself the question of the pursuer, and made enlivening remarks on the two congregations, the one returning from mass, the other going to church, but these were not appreciated. It seemed as though the young ladies had but one set of spirits between them, which were gained by the one as soon as lost by the other.

It was rather a dull day. Fast as they were, the two girls shrank from rambling alone in streets thronged with figures that they associated with ruffianly destitution. Sunday had brought all to light, and the large handsome streets were beset with barefooted children, elf-locked women, and lounging, beetle-browed men, such as Lucy had only seen in the purlieus of Whittingtonia, in alleys looked into, but never entered by the civilized. In reality 'rich and rare' was so true that they might have walked there more secure from insult than in many better regulated regions, but it was difficult to believe so, especially in attire then so novel as to be very remarkable, and the absence of protection lost its charm when there was no one to admire the bravado.

She did her best to embalm it for future appreciation by journalizing, making the voyage out a far better joke than she had found it, and describing the inside car in the true style of the facetious traveller. Nothing so drives away fun as the desire to be funny, and she began to grow weary of her work, and disgusted at her own lumbering attempts at pen-and-ink mirth; but they sufficed to make Rashe laugh, they would be quite good enough for Lord William, would grievously annoy Honora Charlecote, would be mentioned in all the periodicals, and give them the name of the Angel Anglers all the next season. Was not that enough to go to Ireland and write a witty tour for?

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The outside car took them to St. Patrick's, and they had their first real enjoyment in the lazy liveliness of the vehicle, and the droll ciceroneship of the driver, who contrived to convey such compliments to their pretty faces as only an Irishman could have given without offence.

Lucilla sprang down with exhilarated spirits, and even wished for Honor to share her indignation at the slovenliness around the cathedral, and the absence of close or cloister; nay, though she had taken an aversion to Strafford as a hero of Honor's, she forgave him, and resolved to belabour the House of Cork handsomely in her journal, when she beheld the six-storied monument, and imagined it, as he had found it, in the Altar's very place. 'Would that he had created an absolute Boylean vacuum!' What a grand *bon mot* for her journal!

However, either the spirit of indignation at the sight of the unkneeling congregation, or else the familiar words of the beautiful musical service, made her more than usually devout, and stirred up something within her that could only be appeased by the resolution that the singing in Robert Fulmort's parish should be super-excellent. After the service, the carman persuaded them to drive in the Phoenix Park, where they enjoyed the beautiful broken ground, the picturesque thickets, the grass whose colour reminded them that they were in the Emerald Isle, the purple outlines of the Wicklow hills, whence they thought they detected a fresh mountain breeze. They only wondered to find this delightful place so little frequented. In England, a Sunday would have filled it with holiday strollers, whereas here they only encountered a very few, and those chiefly gentlefolks. The populace preferred sitting on the doorsteps, or lounging against the houses, as if they were making studies of themselves for caricatures; and were evidently so much struck with the young ladies' attire, that the shelter of the hotel was gladly welcomed.

Lucilla was alone in the sitting-room when the waiter came to lay the cloth. He looked round, as if to secure secrecy, and then remarked in a low confidential voice, 'There's been a gentleman inquiring for you, ma'am.'

'Who was it?' said Lucy, with feigned coolness.

'It was when you were at church, ma'am; he wished to know whether two ladies had arrived here, Miss Charteris and Miss Sandbrook.'

'Did he leave his card?'

'He did not, ma'am, his call was to be a secret; he said it was only to be sure whether you had arrived.'

'Then he did not give his name?'

'He did, ma'am, for he desired to be let know what route the young ladies took when they left,' quoth the man, with a comical look, as though he were imparting a most delightful secret.

'Was he Mr. Calthorp?'

'I said I'd not mention his name,' said the waiter, with, however, such decided assent, that, as at the same moment he quitted the room and Horatia entered it, Cilly exclaimed, 'There, Rashe, what do you say now to the phantom of my vanity? Here has he been asking for us, and what route we meant taking.'

'He! Who?'

'Who?—why, who should it be? The waiter has just told me.'

'You absurd girl!'

'Well, ask him yourself.'

So when the waiter came up, Miss Charteris demanded, 'Has Mr. Calthorp been calling here?'

'What was the name, ma'am, if you please?'

'Calthorp. Has Mr. Calthorp been calling here?'

'Cawthorne? Was it Colonel Cawthorne, of the Royal Hussars, ma'am? He was here yesterday, but not to-day.'

'I said Calthorp. Has a Mr. Calthorp been inquiring for us to-day?'

'I have not heard, ma'am, I'll inquire,' said he, looking alert, and again disappearing, while Horatia looked as proud of herself as Cilly had done just before.

He came back again while Lucilla was repeating his communication, and assured Miss Charteris that no such person had called.

'Then, what gentleman has been here, making inquiries about us?'

'Gentleman! Indeed, ma'am, I don't understand your meaning.'

'Have you not been telling this young lady that a gentleman has been asking after us, and desiring to be informed what route we intended to take?'

'Ah, sure!' said the waiter, as if recollecting himself, 'I did mention it. Some gentleman did just ask me in a careless sort of way who the two beautiful young ladies might be, and where they were going. Such young ladies always create a sensation, as you must be aware, ma'am, and I own I did speak of it to the young lady, because I thought she had seen the attraction of the gentleman's eyes.'

So perfectly assured did he look, that Lucilla felt a moment's doubt whether her memory served her as to his former words, but just as she raised her eyes and opened her lips in refutation, she met a glance from him full of ludicrous reassurance, evidently meaning that he was guarding his own secret and hers. He was gone the next moment, and Horatia turned upon her with exultant merriment.

'I always heard that Ireland was a mendacious country,' said Cilly.

'And a country where people lose the use of their eyes and ears,' laughed Rashe. 'O what a foundation for the second act of the drama!'

'Of which the third will be my going home by the next steamer.'

'Because a stranger asked who we were?'

Each had her own interpretation of the double-faced waiter's assertion, and it served them to dispute upon all the evening.

Lucilla was persuaded that he imagined her an injured beauty, reft from her faithful adorer by her stern aunt or duenna, and that he considered himself to be doing her a kindness by keeping her informed of her hero's vicinity, while he denied it to her companion; but she scorned to enter into an explanation, or make any disavowal, and found the few displeased words she spoke were received with compassion, as at the dictation of the stern monitress.

Horatia, on the other hand, could not easily resign the comical version that Lucilla's inordinate opinion of her own attractions had made her imagine Mr. Calthorp's valet in the street, and

discover his master in the chance inquirer whom the waiter had mentioned; and as Cilly could not aver that the man had actually told her in so many words that it was Mr. Calthorp, Horatia had a right to her opinion, and though she knew she had been a young lady a good many years, she could not easily adopt the suggestion that she could pass for Cilly's cruel duenna.

Lucilla grew sullen, and talked of going home by the next steamer; Rashe, far from ready for another sea voyage, called herself ill used, and represented the absurdity of returning on a false alarm. Cilla was staggered, and thought what it would be, if Mr. Calthorp, smoking his cigar at his club, heard that she had fled from his imaginary pursuit. Besides, the luggage must be recovered, so she let Horatia go on arranging for an excursion for the Monday, only observing that it must not be in Dublin.

'No, bonnets are needful there. What do you think of Howth and Ireland's Eye, the place where Kirwan murdered his wife?' said Rashe, with great gusto, for she had a strong turn for the horrid murders in the newspaper.

'Too near, and too smart,' sulked Lucy.

'Well then, Glendalough, that is wild, and far off enough, and may be done in a day from Dublin. I'll ring and find out.'

'Not from that man.'

'Oh! we shall see Calthorps peopling the hill-sides! Well, let us have the landlord.'

It was found that both the Devil's Glen and the Seven Churches might be visited if they started by the seven o'clock train, and returned late at night, and Lucilla agreeing, the evening went off as best it might, the cousins being glad to get out of each other's company at nine, that they might be up early the next morning. Lucy had not liked Ratia so little since the days of her infantine tyranny.

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The morning, however, raised their spirits, and sent them off in a more friendly humour, enjoying the bustle and excitement that was meat and drink to them, and exclaiming at the exquisite views of sea and rugged coast along beautiful Kilmeny Bay. When they left the train, they were delighted with their outside car, and reclined on their opposite sides in enchantment with the fern-bordered lanes, winding between noble trees, between which came inviting glimpses of exquisitely green meadows and hill-sides. They stopped at a park-looking gate, leading to the Devil's Glen, which they were to traverse on foot, meeting the car at the other end.

Here there was just enough life and adventure to charm them, as they gaily trod the path, winding picturesquely beside the dashing, dancing, foaming stream, now between bare salient bluffs of dark rock, now between glades of verdant thicket, or bold shouldering slopes of purple heath and soft bent grass. They were constantly crying out with delight, as they bounded from one point of view to another, sometimes climbing among loose stones, leading between ferns and hazel stems to a well-planted hermitage, sometimes springing across the streamlet upon stepping-stones. At the end of the wood another lodge-gate brought them beyond the private grounds, that showed care, even in their rusticity, and they came out on the open hill-side in true mountain air, soft turf beneath their feet, the stream rushing away at the bottom of the slope, and the view closed in with blue mountains, on which the clouds marked purple shadows. This was freedom! this was enjoyment! this was worth the journey! and Cilla's elastic feet sprang along as if she had been a young kid. How much was delight in the scenery, how much in the scramble, need not be analyzed.

There was plenty of scrambling before it was over. A woman who had been lying in wait for tourists at the gate, guided them to the bend of the glen, where they were to climb up to pay their respects to the waterfall. The ascent was not far from perpendicular, only rendered accessible by the slope of fallen debris at the base, and a few steps cut out from one projecting rock to another, up to a narrow shelf, whence the cascade was to be looked down on. The more adventurous spirits went on to a rock overhanging the fall, and with a curious chink or cranny, forming a window with a seat, and called King O'Toole's chair. Each girl perched herself there, and was complimented on her strong head and active limbs, and all their powers were needed in the long breathless pull up craggy stepping-stones, then over steep slippery turf, ere they gained the summit of the bank. Spent, though still gasping out, 'such fun!' they threw themselves on their backs upon the thymy grass, and lay still for several seconds ere they sat up to look back at the thickly-wooded ravine, winding crevice-like in and out between the overlapping skirts of the hills, whose rugged heads cut off the horizon. Then merrily sharing the first instalment of luncheon with their barefooted guide, they turned their faces onwards, where all their way seemed one bare gray moor, rising far off into the outline of Luggela, a peak overhanging the semblance of a crater.

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Nothing afforded them much more mirth than a rude bridge, consisting of a single row of square-headed unconnected posts, along the heads of which Cilla three times hopped backwards and forwards for the mere drollery of the thing, with vigour unabated by the long walk over the dreary moorland fields with their stone walls.

By the side of the guide's cabin the car awaited them, and mile after mile they drove on through treeless wastes, the few houses with their thatch anchored down by stones, showing what winds must sweep along those unsheltered tracts. The desolate solitude began to weary the volatile pair into silence; ere the mountains rose closer to them, they crossed a bridge over a stony

stream begirt with meadows, and following its course came into sight of their goal.

Here was Glendalough, a *cul de sac* between the mountains, that shelved down, enclosing it on all sides save the entrance, through which the river issued. Their summits were bare, of the gray stone that lay in fragments everywhere, but their sides were clothed with the lovely Irish green pasture-land, intermixed with brushwood and trees, and a beautiful meadow surrounded the white ring-like beach of pure white sand and pebbles bordering the outer lake, whose gray waters sparkled in the sun. Its twin lake, divided from it by so narrow a belt of ground, that the white beaches lay on their green setting, like the outline of a figure of 8, had a more wild and gloomy aspect, lying deeper within the hollow, and the hills coming sheer down on it at the further end in all their grayness unsoftened by any verdure. The gray was that of absolute black and white intermingled in the grain of the stone, and this was peculiarly gloomy, but in the summer sunshine it served but to set off the brilliance of the verdure, and the whole air of the valley was so bright that Cilly declared that it had been traduced, and that no skylark of sense need object thereto.

Losing sight of the lakes as they entered the shabby little town, they sprang off the car before a small inn, and ere their feet were on the ground were appropriated by one of a shoal of guides, in dress and speech an ultra Irishman, exaggerating his part as a sort of buffoon for the travellers. Rashe was diverted by his humours; Cilla thought them in bad taste, and would fain have escaped from his brogue and his antics, with some perception that the scene ought to be left to make its impression in peace.

Small peace, however, was there among the scores of men, women, and children within the rude walls containing the most noted relics; all beset the visitors with offers of stockings, lace, or stones from the hills; and the chatter of the guide was a lesser nuisance for which she was forced to compound for the sake of his protection. When he had cleared away his compatriots, she was able to see the remains of two of the Seven Churches, the Cathedral, and St. Kevin's Kitchen, both of enduring gray stone, covered with yellow lichen, which gave a remarkable golden tint to their extreme old age. Architecture there was next to none. St. Kevin's so-called kitchen had a cylindrical tower, crowned by an extinguisher, and within the roofless walls was a flat stone, once the altar, and still a station for pilgrims; and the cathedral contained two broken coffin-lids with floriated crosses, but it was merely four rude roofless walls, enclosing less space than a cottage kitchen, and less ornamental than many a barn. The whole space was encumbered with regular modern headstones, ugly as the worst that English graveyards could show, and alternating between the names of Byrne and O'Toole, families who, as the guide said, would come 'hundreds of miles to lie there.' It was a grand thought, that those two lines, in wealth or in poverty, had been constant to that one wild mountain burying-place, in splendour or in ruin, for more than twelve centuries.

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Here, some steps from the cathedral on the top of the slope was the chief grandeur of the view. A noble old carved granite cross, eight or ten feet high, stood upon the brow, bending slightly to one side, and beyond lay the valley cherishing its treasure of the twin lakelets, girt in by the band across them, nestled in the soft lining of copsewood and meadow, and protected by the lofty massive hills above. In front, but below, and somewhat to the right, lay another enclosure, containing the ivied gable of St. Mary's Church, and the tall column-like Round Tower, both with the same peculiar golden hoariness. The sight struck Lucilla with admiration and wonder, but the next moment she heard the guide exhorting Rashe to embrace the stem of the cross, telling her that if she could clasp her arms round it, she would be sure of a handsome and rich husband within the year.

Half superstitious, and always eager for fun, Horatia spread her arms in the endeavour, but her hands could not have met without the aid of the guide, who dragged them together, and celebrated the exploit with a hurrah of congratulation, while she laughed triumphantly, and called on her companion to try her luck. But Lucy was disgusted, and bluntly refused, knowing her grasp to be far too small, unable to endure the touch of the guide, and maybe shrinking from the failure of the augury.

'Ah! to be shure, an' it's not such a purty young lady as yourself that need be taking the trouble,' did not fall pleasantly on her ears, and still less Ratia's laugh and exclamation, 'You make too sure, do you? Have a care. There were black looks at parting! But you need not be afraid, if handsome be a part of the spell.'

There was no answer, and Horatia saw that the outspoken raillery that Cilly had once courted now gave offence. She guessed that something was amiss, but did not know that what had once been secure had been wilfully imperilled, and that suspense was awakening new feelings of delicacy and tenderness.

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The light words and vulgar forecasting had, in spite of herself, transported Lucilla from the rocky thicket where she was walking, even to the cedar room at Woolstone-lane, and conjured up before her that grave, massive brow, and the eye that would not meet her. She had hurried to these wilds to escape that influence, and it was holding her tighter than ever. To hasten home on account of Mr. Calthorp's pursuit would be the most effectual vindication of the feminine dignity that she might have impaired in Robert's eyes, but to do this on what Ratia insisted on believing a false alarm would be the height of absurdity. She was determined on extracting proofs sufficient to justify her return, and every moment seemed an hour until she could feel herself free to set her face homewards. A strange impatience seized her at every spot where the guide stopped them to admire, and Ratia's encouragement of his witticisms provoked her excessively.

With a kind of despair she found herself required, before taking boat for St. Kevin's Cave, to mount into a wood to admire another waterfall.

'See two waterfalls,' she muttered, 'and you have seen them all. There are only two kinds, one a bucket of water thrown down from the roof of a house, the other over a staircase. Either the water was a fiction, or you can't get at them for the wet!'

'That was a splendid fellow at the Devil's Glen.'

'There's as good a one any day at the lock on the canal at home! only we do not delude people into coming to see it. Up such places, too!'

'Cilly, for shame. What, tired and giving in?'

'Not tired in the least; only this place is not worth getting late for the train.'

'Will the young lady take my hand? I'd be proud to have the honour of helping her up,' said the guide. But Lucilla disdainfully rejected his aid, and climbed among the stones and brushwood aloof from the others, Ratia talking in high glee to the Irishman, and adventurously scrambling.

'Cilly, here it is,' she cried, from beneath a projecting elbow of rock; 'you look down on it. It's a delicious fall. I declare one can get into it;' and, by the aid of a tree, she lowered herself down on a flat stone, whence she could see the cascade better than above. 'This is stunning. I vow one can get right into the bed of the stream right across. Don't be slow, Cilly; this is the prime fun of all!'

'You care for the romp and nothing else,' grumbled Lucilla. That boisterous merriment was hateful to her, when feeling that the demeanour of gentlewomen must be their protection, and with all her high spirit, she was terrified lest insult or remark should be occasioned. Her signs of remonstrance were only received with a derisive outburst, as Rashe climbed down into the midst of the bed of the stream. 'Come, Cilla, or I shall indite a page in the diary, headed Faint heart—Ah!' as her foot slipped on the stones, and she fell backwards, but with instant efforts at rising, such as assured her cousin that no harm was done, 'Nay, Nonsensical clambering will be the word,' she said.

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'Serves you right for getting into such places! What! hurt!' as Horatia, after resting in a sitting posture, tried to get up, but paused, with a cry.

'Nothing,' she said, 'I'll—' but another attempt ended in the same way. Cilla sprang to her, followed by the guide, imprecating bad luck to the slippery stones. Herself standing in the water, Lucilla drew her cousin upright, and with a good deal of help from the guide, and much suffering, brought her up the high bank, and down the rough steep descent through the wood.

She had given her back and side a severe twist, but she moved less painfully on more level ground, and, supported between Lucilla and the guide, whom the mischance had converted from a comedy clown to a delicately considerate assistant, she set out for the inn where the car had been left. The progress lasted for two doleful hours, every step worse than the last, and, much exhausted, she at length sank upon the sofa in the little sitting-room of the inn.

The landlady was urgent that the wet clothes should be taken off; and the back rubbed with whiskey, but Cilla stood agitating her small soaked foot, and insisting that the car should come round at once, since the wet had dried on them, and they had best lose no time in returning to Dublin, or at least to Bray.

But Rashe cried out that the car would be the death of her; she could not stir without a night's rest.

'And be all the stiffer to-morrow? Once on the car, you will be very comfortable—'

'Oh, no! I can't! This is a horrid place. Of all the unlucky things that could have happened—'

'Then,' said Cilla, fancying a little coercion would be wholesome, 'don't be faint-hearted. You will be glad to-morrow that I had the sense to make you move to-day. I shall order the car.'

'Indeed!' cried Horatia, her temper yielding to pain and annoyance; 'you seem to forget that this expedition is mine! I am paymaster, and have the only right to decide.'

Lucilla felt the taunt base, as recalling to her the dependent position into which she had carelessly rushed, relying on the family feeling that had hitherto made all things as one. 'Henceforth,' said she, 'I take my share of all that we spend. I will not sell my free will.'

'So you mean to leave me here alone?' said Horatia, with positive tears of pain, weariness, and vexation at the cruel unfriendliness of the girl she had petted.

'Nonsense! I must abide by your fate. I only hate to see people chicken-hearted, and thought you wanted shaking up. I stay so long as you own me an independent agent.'

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The discussion was given up, when it was announced that a room was ready; and Rashe underwent so much in climbing the stairs, that Cilly thought she could not have been worse on the car.

The apartment was not much behind that at the village inn at Hiltonbury. In fact, it had gay

curtains and a grand figured blind, but the door at the Charlecote Arms had no such independent habits of opening, the carpet would have been whole, and the chairs would not have creaked beneath Lucy's grasshopper weight; when down she sat in doleful resignation, having undressed her cousin, sent her *chaussure* to dry, and dismissed the car, with a sense of bidding farewell to the civilized world, and entering a desert island, devoid of the zest of Robinson Crusoe.

What an endless evening it was, and how the ladies detested each other! There lay Horatia, not hurt enough for alarm, but quite cross enough to silence pity, suffering at every move, and sore at Cilly's want of compassion; and here sat Lucilla, thoroughly disgusted with her cousin, her situation, and her expedition. Believing the strain a trifle, she not unjustly despised the want of resolution that had shrunk from so expedient an exertion as the journey, and felt injured by the selfish want of consideration that had condemned her to this awkward position in this forlorn little inn, without even the few toilette necessaries that they had with them at Dublin, and with no place to sit in, for the sitting-room below stairs served as a coffee-room, where sundry male tourists were imbibing whiskey, the fumes of which ascended to the young ladies above, long before they could obtain their own meal.

The chops were curiosities; and as to the tea, the grounds, apparently the peat of the valley, filled up nearly an eighth of the cup, causing Lucilla in lugubrious mirth to talk of 'That lake whose gloomy tea, ne'er saw Hyson nor Bohea,' when Rashe fretfully retorted, 'It is very unkind in you to grumble at everything, when you know I can't help it!'

'I was not grumbling, I only wanted to enliven you.'

'Queer enlivenment!'

Nor did Lucilla's attempts at body curing succeed better. Her rubbing only evoked screeches, and her advice was scornfully rejected. Horatia was a determined homœopath, and sighed for the globules in her wandering box, and as whiskey and tobacco both became increasingly fragrant, averred again and again that nothing should induce her to stay here another night.

Nothing? Lucilla found her in the morning in all the aches and flushes of a feverish cold, her sprain severely painful, her eyes swollen, her throat so sore, that in alarm Cilly besought her to send for advice; but Rashe regarded a murderous allopathist as near akin to an executioner, and only bewailed the want of her minikin doses.

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Giving up the hope of an immediate departure, Lucilla despatched a messenger to Bray, thence to telegraph for the luggage; and the day was spent in fears lest their landlord at Dublin might detain their goods as those of suspicious characters.

Other excitement there was none, not even in quarrelling, for Rashe was in a sleepy state, only roused by interludes of gloomy tea and greasy broth; and outside, the clouds had closed down, such clouds as she had never seen, blotting out lake and mountain with an impervious gray curtain, seeming to bathe rather than to rain on the place. She longed to dash out into it, but Ratia's example warned her against drenching her only garments, though indoors the dryness was only comparative. Everything she touched, herself included, seemed pervaded by a damp, limp rawness, that she vainly tried to dispel by ordering a fire. The turf smouldered, the smoke came into the room, and made their eyes water, and Rashe insisted that the fire should be put out.

Cilla almost envied her sleep, as she sat disconsolate in the window, watching the comparative density of the rain, and listening to the extraordinary howls and shrieks in the town, which kept her constantly expecting that a murder or a rebellion would come to relieve the monotony of the day, till she found that nothing ensued, and no one took any notice.

She tried to sketch from memory, but nothing would hinder that least pleasant of occupations—thought. Either she imagined every unpleasant chance of detention, she worried herself about Robert Fulmort, or marvelled what Mr. Prendergast and the censorious ladies would do with Edna Murrell. Many a time did she hold her watch to her ear, suspecting it of having stopped, so slowly did it loiter through the weary hours. Eleven o'clock when she hoped it was one—half-past two when it felt like five.

By real five, the mist was thinner, showing first nearer, then remoter objects; the coarse slates of the roofs opposite emerged polished and dripping, and the cloud finally took its leave, some heavy flakes, like cotton wool, hanging on the hill-side, and every rock shining, every leaf glistening. Verdure and rosy cheeks both resulted from a perpetual vapour-bath.

Lucilla rejoiced in her liberty, and hurried out of doors, but leaning out of the coffee-room window, loungers were seen who made her sensible of the awkwardness of her position, and she looked about for yesterday's guide as a friend, but he was not at hand, and her uneasy gaze brought round her numbers, begging or offering guidance. She wished to retreat, but would not, and walked briskly along the side of the valley opposite to that she had yesterday visited, in search of the other four churches. Two fragments were at the junction of the lakes, another was entirely destroyed, but the last, called the Abbey, stood in ruins within the same wall as the Round Tower, which rose straight, round, mysterious, defying inquiry, as it caught the evening light on its summit, even as it had done for so many centuries past.

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Not that Cilla thought of the riddles of that tower, far less of the early Christianity of the isle of saints, of which these ruins and their wild legend were the only vestiges, nor of the mysticism

that planted clusters of churches in sevens as analogous to the seven stars of the Apocalypse. Even the rugged glories of the landscape chiefly addressed themselves to her as good to sketch, her highest flight in admiration of the picturesque. In the state of mind ascribed to the ancients, she only felt the weird unhomelikeness of the place, as though she were at the ends of the earth, unable to return, and always depressed by solitude; she could have wept. Was it for this that she had risked the love that had been her own from childhood, and broken with the friend to whom her father had commended her? Was it worth while to defy their censures for this dreary spot, this weak-spirited, exacting, unrefined companion, and the insult of Mr. Calthorp's pursuit?

Naturally shrewd, well knowing the world, and guarded by a real attachment, Lucilla had never regarded the millionaire's attentions as more than idle amusement in watching the frolics of a beauty, and had suffered them as adding to her own diversion; but his secretly following her, no doubt to derive mirth from her proceedings, revealed to her that woman could not permit such terms without loss of dignity, and her cheek burnt at the thought of the ludicrous light in which he might place her present predicament before a conclave of gentlemen.

The thought was intolerable. To escape it by rapid motion, she turned hastily to leave the enclosure. A figure was climbing over the steps in the wall with outstretched hand, as if he expected her to cling to him, and Mr. Calthorp, springing forward, eagerly exclaimed in familiar, patronizing tones, 'Miss Sandbrook! They told me you were gone this way.' Then, in a very different voice at the unexpected look and bow that he encountered: 'I hope Miss Charteris's accident is not serious.'

'Thank you, not serious,' was the freezing reply.

'I am glad. How did it occur?'

'It was a fall.' He should have no good story wherewith to regale his friends.

'Going on well, I trust? Chancing to be at Dublin, I heard by accident you were here, and fearing that there might be a difficulty, I ran down in the hope of being of service to you.'

'Thank you,' in the least thankful of tones.

'Is there nothing I can do for you?'

'Thank you, nothing.'

'Could I not obtain some advice for Miss Charteris?'

'Thank you, she wishes for none.'

'I am sure'—he spoke eagerly—'that in some way I could be of use to you. I shall remain at hand. I cannot bear that you should be alone in this remote place.'

'Thank you, we will not put you to inconvenience. We intended to be alone.'

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'I see you esteem it a great liberty,' said poor Mr. Calthorp; 'but you must forgive my impulse to see whether I could be of any assistance to you. I will do as you desire, but at least you will let me leave Stefano with you; he is a fellow full of resources, who would make you comfortable here, and me easy about you.'

'Thank you, we require no one.'

Those 'thank you's' were intolerable, but her defensive reserve and dignity attracted the gentleman more than all her dashing brilliancy, and he became more urgent. 'You cannot ask me to leave you entirely to yourselves under such circumstances.'

'I more than ask it, I insist upon it. Good morning.'

'Miss Sandbrook, do not go till you have heard and forgiven me.'

'I will not hear you, Mr. Calthorp. This is neither the time nor place,' said Lucilla, inly more and more perturbed, but moving along with slow, quiet steps, and betraying no emotion. 'The object of our journey was totally defeated by meeting any of our ordinary acquaintance, and but for this mischance I should have been on my way home to-day.'

'Oh! Miss Sandbrook, do you class me among your ordinary acquaintance?'

It was all she could do to hinder her walk from losing its calm slowness, and before she could divest her intended reply of undignified sharpness, he continued: 'Who could have betrayed my presence? But for this, I meant that you should never have been aware that I was hovering near to watch over you.'

'Yes, to collect good stories for your club.'

'This is injustice! Flagrant injustice, Miss Sandbrook! Will you not credit the anxiety that irresistibly impelled me to be ever at hand in case you should need a protector?'

'No,' was the point-blank reply.

'How shall I convince you?' he cried, vehemently. 'What have I done that you should refuse to believe in the feelings that prompted me?'

'What have you done?' said Lucilla, whose blood was up. 'You have taken a liberty, which is the best proof of what your feelings are, and every moment that you force your presence on me adds to the offence!'

She saw that she had succeeded. He stood still, bowed, and answered not, possibly deeming this the most effective means of recalling her; but from first to last he had not known Lucilla Sandbrook.

The eager, protecting familiarity of his first address had given her such a shock that she felt certain that she had no guard but herself from positively insulting advances; and though abstaining from all quickening of pace, her heart throbbed violently in the fear of hearing him following her, and the inn was a haven of refuge.

She flew up to her bedroom to tear about like a panther, as if by violence to work down the tumult in her breast. She had proved the truth of Honora's warning, that beyond the pale of ordinary *convenances*, a woman is exposed to insult, and however sufficient she may be for her own protection, the very fact of having to defend herself is well-nigh degradation. It was not owning the error. It was the agony of humiliation, not the meekness of humility, and she was as angry with Miss Charlecote for the prediction as with Mr. Calthorp for having fulfilled it, enraged with Horatia, and desperate at her present imprisoned condition, unable to escape, and liable to be still haunted by her enemy.

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At last she saw the discomfited swain re-enter the inn, his car come round, and finally drive off with him; and then she felt what a blank was her victory. If she breathed freely, it was at the cost of an increased sense of solitude and severance from the habitable world.

Hitherto she had kept away from her cousin, trusting that the visit might remain a secret, too mortifying to both parties to be divulged, but she found Horatia in a state of eager anticipation, awakened from the torpor to watch for tidings of a happy conclusion to their difficulties, and preparing jests on the pettish ingratitude with which she expected Lucilla to requite the services that would be nevertheless accepted.

Gone! Sent away! Not even commissioned to find the boxes. Horatia's consternation and irritation knew no bounds. Lucilla was no less indignant that she could imagine it possible to become dependent on his good offices, or to permit him to remain in the neighbourhood. Rashe angrily scoffed at her newborn scruples, and complained of her want of consideration for herself. Cilla reproached her cousin with utter absence of any sense of propriety and decorum. Rashe talked of ingratitude, and her sore throat being by this time past conversation, she came to tears. Cilla, who could not bear to see any one unhappy, tried many a 'never mind,' many a 'didn't mean,' many a fair augury for the morrow, but all in vain, and night came down upon the Angel Anglers more forlorn and less friendly than ever; and with all the invalid's discomforts so much aggravated by the tears and the altercation, that escape from this gloomy shore appeared infinitely remote.

There was an essential difference of tone of mind between those brought up at Hiltonbury or at Castle Blanch, and though high spirits had long concealed the unlikeness, it had now been made bare, and Lucy could not conquer her disgust and disappointment.

Sunshine was on Luggela, and Horatia's ailments were abating, so, as her temper was not alleviated, Lucilla thought peace would be best preserved by sallying out to sketch. A drawing from behind the cross became so engrossing that she was sorry to find it time for the early dinner, and her artistic pride was only allayed by the conviction that she should always hate what recalled Glendalough.

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Rashe was better, and was up and dressed. Hopes of departure produced amity, and they were almost lively over their veal broth, when sounds of arrival made Lucilla groan at the prospect of cockney tourists obstructing the completion of her drawing.

'There's a gentleman asking to see you, Miss.'

'I can see no one.'

'Cilla, now do.'

'Tell him I cannot see him,' repeated Lucy, imperiously.

'How can you be so silly? he may have heard of our boxes.'

'I would toss them into the lake rather than take them from him.'

'Eh! pray let me be present when you perform the ceremony! Cilla in the heroics! Whom is she expecting?' said a voice outside the door, ever ajar, a voice that made Lucilla clasp her hands in ecstasy.

'You, Owen! come in,' cried Horatia, writhing herself up.

'Owen, old Owen! that's right,' burst from Cilla, as she sprang to him.

'Right! Ah! that is not the greeting I expected; I was thinking how to guard my eyes. So, you have had enough of the unprotected dodge! What has Rashe been doing to herself? A desperate leap down the falls of Niagara.'

Horatia was diffuse in the narration; but, after the first, Lucy did not speak. She began by arming herself against her brother's derision, but presently felt perplexed by detecting on his countenance something unwontedly grave and preoccupied. She was sure that his attention was far away from Rashe's long story, and she abruptly interrupted it with, 'How came you here, Owen?'

He did not seem to hear, and she demanded, 'Is anything the matter? Are you come to fetch us because any one is ill?'

Starting, he said, 'No, oh no!'

'Then what brought you here? a family council, or Honor Charlecote?'

'Honor Charlecote,' he repeated mistily: then, making an effort, 'Yes, good old soul, she gave me a vacation tour on condition that I should keep an eye on you. Go on, Rashe; what were you saying?'

'Didn't you hear me, Owen? Why, Calthorp, the great Calthorp, is in our wake. Cilly is frantic.'

'Calthorp about!' exclaimed Owen, with a start of dismay. 'Where?'

'I've disposed of him,' quoth Lucilla; 'he'll not trouble us again.'

'Which way is he gone?'

'I would not tell you if I knew.'

'Don't be such an idiot,' he petulantly answered; 'I want nothing of the fellow, only to know whether he is clean gone. Are you sure whether he went by Bray?'

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'I told you I neither knew nor cared.'

'Could you have believed, Owen,' said Rashe, plaintively, 'that she was so absurd as never even to tell him to inquire for our boxes?'

'Owen knows better;' but Lucilla stopped, surprised to see that his thoughts were again astray. Giving a constrained smile, he asked, 'Well, what next?'

'To find our boxes,' they answered in a breath.

'Your boxes? Didn't I tell you I've got them here?'

'Owen, you're a trump,' cried Rashe.

'How on earth did you know about them?' inquired his sister.

'Very simply; crossed from Liverpool yesterday, reconnoitred at your hotel, was shown your telegram, went to the luggage-office, routed out that the things were taking a gentle tour to Limerick, got them back this morning, and came on. And what are you after next?'

'Home,' jerked out Lucy, without looking up, thinking how welcome he would have been yesterday, without the goods.

'Yes, home,' said Horatia. 'This abominable sprain will hinder my throwing a line, or jolting on Irish roads, and if Cilla is to be in agonies when she sees a man on the horizon, we might as well never have come.'

'Will you help me to carry home this poor invalid warrior, Owen?' said Lucilla; 'she will permit you.'

'I'll put you into the steamer,' said Owen; 'but you see, I have made my arrangements for doing Killarney and the rest of it.'

'I declare,' said Rashe, recovering benevolence with comfort, 'if they would send Scott from the castle to meet me at Holyhead, Cilly might as well go on with you. You would be sufficient to keep off the Calthorps.'

'I'm afraid that's no go,' hesitated Owen. 'You see I had made my plans, trusting to your bold assertions that you would suffer no one to approach.'

'Oh! never mind. It was no proposal of mine. I've had enough of Ireland,' returned Lucy, somewhat aggrieved.

'How soon shall you be sufficiently repaired for a start, Ratia?' asked Owen, turning quickly round to her. 'To-morrow? No! Well, I'll come over and see.'

'Going away?' cried the ladies, by no means willing to part with their guardian.

'Yes, I must. Expecting that we should be parallels never meeting, I had to provide for myself.'

'I see,' said Rashe; 'he has a merry party at Newragh Bridge, and will sit up over whist and punch till midnight!'

'You don't pretend to put yourselves in competition,' said he, snatching at the idea hastily.

'Oh! no,' said his sister, with an annoyed gesture. 'I never expect you to prefer me and my

comfort to any one.'

'Indeed, Cilla, I'm sorry,' he answered gently, but in perplexity, 'but I never reckoned on being wanted, and engagements are engagements.'

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'I'm sure I don't want you when anything pleasanter is going forward,' she answered, with vexation in her tone.

'I'll be here by eleven or twelve,' he replied, avoiding the altercation; 'but I must get back now. I shall be waited for.'

'Who is it that can't wait?' asked Rashe.

'Oh! just an English acquaintance of mine. There, goodbye. I wish I had come in time to surprise the modern St. Kevin! Are you sure there was no drowning in the lake?'

'You know it was blessed to drown no one after Kathleen.'

'Reassuring! Only mind you put a chapter about it into the tour.' Under the cover of these words he was gone.

'I declare there's some mystery about his companion!' exclaimed Horatia. 'Suppose it were Calthorp himself?'

'Owen is not so lost to respect for his sister.'

'But did you not see how little he was surprised, and how much preoccupied?'

'Very likely; but no one but you could imagine him capable of such an outrage.'

'You have been crazy ever since you entered Ireland, and expect every one else to be the same. Seriously, what damage did you anticipate from a little civility?'

'If you begin upon that, I shall go out and finish my sketch, and not unpack one of the boxes.'

Nevertheless, Lucilla spent much fretting guesswork on her cousin's surmise. She relied too much on Owen's sense of propriety to entertain the idea that he could be forwarding a pursuit so obviously insolent, but a still wilder conjecture had been set afloat in her mind. Could the nameless one be Robert Fulmort? Though aware of the anonymous nature of brother's friends, the secrecy struck her as unusually guarded; and to one so used to devotion, it seemed no extraordinary homage that another admirer should be drawn along at a respectful distance, a satellite to her erratic course; nay, probably all had been concerted in Woolstone-lane, and therewith the naughty girl crested her head, and prepared to take offence. After all, it could not be, or why should Owen have been bent on returning, and be so independent of her? Far more probably he had met a college friend or a Westminster schoolfellow, some of whom were in regiments quartered in Ireland, and on the morrow would bring him to do the lions of Glendalough, among which might be reckoned the Angel Anglers!

That possibility might have added some grains to the satisfaction of making a respectable toilette next day. Certain it is that Miss Sandbrook's mountain costume was an exquisite feat of elaborate simplicity, and that the completion of her sketch was interrupted by many a backward look down the pass, and many a contradictory mood, sometimes boding almost as harsh a reception for Robert as for Mr. Calthorp, sometimes relenting in the thrill of hope, sometimes accusing herself of arrant folly, and expecting as a *pis aller* the diversion of dazzling and tormenting an Oxonian, or a soldier or two! Be the meeting what it might, she preferred that it should be out of Horatia's sight, and so drew on and on to the detriment of her distances.

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Positively it was past twelve, and the desire to be surprised unconcernedly occupied could no longer obviate her restlessness, so she packed up her hair-pencil, and, walking back to the inn, found Rashe in solitary possession of the coffee-room.

'You have missed him, Cilly.'

'Owen? No one else?'

'No, not the Calthorp; I am sorry for you.'

'But who was here? tell me, Rashe.'

'Owen, I tell you,' repeated Horatia, playing with her impatience.

'Tell me; I will know whether he has any one with him.'

'Alack for your disappointment, for the waste of that blue bow; not a soul came here but himself.'

'And where is he? how did I miss him?' said Lucilla, forcibly repressing the mortification for which her cousin was watching.

'Gone. As I was not in travelling trim, and you not forthcoming, he could not wait; but we are to be off to-morrow at ten o'clock.'

'Why did he not come out to find me? Did you tell him I was close by?'

'He had to join his friend, and go to the Vale of Avoca. I've found out the man, Cilla. No, don't look so much on the *qui vive*; it's only Jack Hastings!'

'Jack Hastings!' said Lucilla, her looks fallen. 'No wonder he would not bring him here.'

'Why not, poor fellow? I used to know him very well before he was up the spout.'

'I wish Owen had not fallen in with him,' said the sister, gravely. 'Are you certain it is so, Rashe?'

'I taxed him with it, and he did not deny it; only put it from him, laughing. What's the harm? Poor Jack was always a good-natured, honourable fellow, uncommonly clever and amusing—a well-read man, too; and Owen is safe enough—no one could try to borrow of him.'

'What would Honor's feelings be?' said Lucilla, with more fellow-feeling for her than for months past. Lax as was the sister's tolerance, she was startled at his becoming the associate of an avowedly loose character under the stigma of the world, and with perilous abilities and agreeableness; and it was another of Horatia's offences against proper feeling, not only to regard such evil communications with indifference, but absolutely to wish to be brought into contact with a person of this description in their present isolated state. Displeased and uneasy, Lucilla assumed the *rôle* of petulance and quarrelsomeness for the rest of the day, and revenged herself to the best of her abilities upon Rashe and Owen, by refusing to go to inspect the scene of Kathleen's fatal repulse.

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True to his appointment, Owen arrived alone on a car chosen with all regard to Horatia's comfort, and was most actively attentive in settling on it the ladies and their luggage, stretching himself out on the opposite side, his face raised to the clouds, as he whistled an air; but his eye was still restless, and his sister resolved on questioning him.

Opportunities were, however, rare; whether or not with the design of warding off a *tête-à-tête*, he devoted himself to his cousin's service in a manner rare to her since she had laid herself out to be treated as though her name were Horace instead of Horatia. However, Lucilla was not the woman to be balked of a settled purpose; and at their hotel, at Dublin, she nailed him fast by turning back on him when Horatia bade them good night. 'Well, what do you want?' he asked, annoyed.

'I want to speak to you.'

'I hope it is to beg me to write to ask Honor to receive you at home, and promise to behave like a decent and respectable person.'

'I want neither a judge nor an intercessor in you.'

'Come, Lucy, it really would be for every one's good if you would go and take care of poor Honor. You have been using her vilely, and I should think you'd had enough of Rashe for one while.'

'If I have used her vilely, at least I have dealt openly by her,' said Lucilla. 'She has always seen the worst of me on the surface. Can you bear to talk of her when you know how you are treating her?'

He coloured violently, and his furious gesture would have intimidated most sisters; but she stood her ground, and answered his stammering demand what she dared to imply.

'You may go into a passion, but you cannot hinder me from esteeming it shameful to make her mission a cover for associating with one whom she would regard with so much horror as Jack Hastings.'

'Jack Hastings!' cried Owen, to her amazement, bursting into a fit of laughter, loud, long, and explosive. 'Well done, Rashe!'

'You told her so!'

'She told me so, and one does not contradict a lady.'

'Something must have put it into her head.'

'Only to be accounted for by an unrequited attachment,' laughed Owen; 'depend on it, a comparison of dates would show Hastings's incarceration to have been the epoch of Rashe's taking to the high masculine line—'

"If e'er she loved, 'twas him alone
Who lived within the jug of stone."

'For shame, Owen; Rashe never was in love.'

But he went on laughing at Rashe's disappointment at his solitary arrival till she said, tartly, 'You cannot wonder at our thinking you must have some reason for neither mentioning your companion's name nor bringing him with you.'

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'In fact, no man not under a cloud could abstain from paying homage to the queen of the anglers.'

It was so true as to raise an angry spot on her cheek, and provoke the hasty excuse, 'It would have been obvious to have brought your friend to see your cousin and sister.'

'One broken-backed, both unwashed! O, the sincerity of the resistance I overheard! No gentleman admitted, forsooth! O, for a lodge in some vast wilderness! Yes; St. Anthony would

have found it a wilderness indeed without his temptations. What would St. Dunstan have been minus the black gentleman's nose, or St. Kevin but for Kathleen? It was a fortunate interposition that Calthorp turned up the day before I came, or I might have had to drag the lake for you.'

This personal attack only made her persist. 'It was very different when we were alone or with you; you know very well that there could have been no objection.'

'No objection on your side, certainly, so I perceive; but suppose there were no desire on the other?'

'Oh!' in a piqued voice, 'I know many men don't care for ladies' society, but I don't see why they should be nameless.'

'I thought you would deem such a name unworthy to be mentioned.'

'Well, but who is the shy man? Is it the little Henniker, who used to look as if he would dive under the table when you brought him from Westminster?'

'If I told you, you would remember it against the poor creature for life, as a deliberate insult and want of taste. Good night.'

He took his hat, and went out, leaving Lucy balancing her guesses between Ensign Henniker and him whom she could not mention. Her rejection of Mr. Calthorp might have occasioned the present secrecy, and she was content to leave herself the pleasant mystery, in the hope of having it dispelled by her last glance of Kingstown quay.

In that hope, she rocked herself to sleep, and next morning was so extra vivacious as to be a sore trial to poor Rashe, in the anticipation of the *peine forte et dure* of St. George's Channel. Owen was also in high spirits, but a pattern of consideration and kind attention, as he saw the ladies on board, and provided for their comfort, not leaving them till the last moment.

Lucilla's heart had beaten fast from the moment she had reached Kingstown; she was keeping her hand free to wave a most encouraging kiss, and as her eye roamed over the heads upon the quay without a recognition, she felt absolutely baffled and cheated; and gloriously as the Bay of Dublin spread itself before her, she was conscious only of wrath and mortification, and of a bitter sense of dreariness and desertion. Nobody cared for her, not even her brother!

CHAPTER IX

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My pride, that took
Fully easily all impressions from below,
Would not look up, or half despised the height
To which I could not, or I would not climb.
I thought I could not breathe in that fine air.

Idylls of the King

'Can you come and take a turn in the Temple-gardens, Phœbe?' asked Robert, on the way from church, the day after Owen's visit to Woolstone-lane.

Phœbe rejoiced, for she had scarcely seen him since his return from Castle Blanch, and his state of mind was a mystery to her. It was long, however, before he afforded her any clue. He paced on, grave and abstracted, and they had many times gone up and down the least frequented path, before he abruptly said, 'I have asked Mr. Parsons to give me a title for Holy Orders.'

'I don't quite know what that means.'

'How simple you are, Phœbe,' he said, impatiently; 'it means that St. Wulstan's should be my first curacy. May my labours be accepted as an endeavour to atone for some of the evil we cause here.'

'Dear Robin! what did Mr. Parsons say? Was he not very glad?'

'No; there lies the doubt.'

'Doubt?'

'Yes. He told me that he had engaged as many curates as he has means for. I answered that my stipend need be no consideration, for I only wished to spend on the parish, but he was not satisfied. Many incumbents don't like to have curates of independent means; I believe it has an amateur appearance.'

'Mr. Parsons cannot think you would not be devoted.'

'I hope to convince him that I may be trusted. It is all that is left me now.'

'It will be very cruel to you, and to the poor people, if he will not,' said Phœbe, warmly; 'what will papa and Mervyn say?'

'I shall not mention it till all is settled; I have my father's consent to my choice of a profession, and I do not think myself bound to let him dictate my course as a minister. I owe a higher duty and if his business scatters the seeds of vice, surely "obedience in the Lord" should not prevent

me from trying to counteract them.'

It was a case of conscience to be only judged by himself, and where even a sister like Phœbe could do little but hope for the best, so she expressed a cheerful hope that her father must know that it was right, and that he would care less now that he was away, and pleased with Augusta's prospects.

'Yes,' said Robert, 'he already thinks me such a fool, that it may be indifferent to him in what particular manner I act it out.'

'And how does it stand with Mr. Parsons?'

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'He will give me an answer to-morrow evening, provided I continue in the same mind. There is no chance of my not doing so. My time of suspense is over!' and the words absolutely sounded like relief, though the set stern face, and the long breaths at each pause told another tale.

'I did not think she would really have gone!' said Phœbe.

'This once, and we will mention her no more. It is not merely this expedition, but all I saw at Wrapworth convinced me that I should risk my faithfulness to my calling by connecting myself with one who, with all her loveliness and generosity, lives upon excitement. She is the very light of poor Prendergast's eyes, and he cannot endure to say a word in her dispraise; she is constantly doing acts of kindness in his parish, and is much beloved there, yet he could not conceal how much trouble she gives him by her want of judgment and wilfulness; patronizing and forgetting capriciously, and attending to no remonstrance. You saw yourself the treatment of that schoolmistress. I thought the more of this, because Prendergast is so fond of her, and does her full justice. No; her very aspect proves that a parish priest has no business to think of her.'

Large tears swelled in Phœbe's eyes. The first vision of her youth was melting away, and she detected no relenting in his grave resolute voice.

'Shall you tell her?' was all she could say.

'That is the question. At one time she gave me reason to think that she accepted a claim to be considered in my plans, and understood what I never concealed. Latterly she has appeared to withdraw all encouragement, to reject every advance, and yet— Phœbe, tell me whether she has given you any reason to suppose that she ever was in earnest with me?'

'I know she respects and likes you better than any one, and speaks of you like no one else,' said Phœbe; then pausing, and speaking more diffidently, though with a smile, 'I think she looks up to you so much, that she is afraid to put herself in your power, for fear she should be made to give up her odd ways in spite of herself, and yet that she has no notion of losing you. Did you see her face at the station?'

'I would not! I could not meet her eyes! I snatched my hand from the little clinging fingers;' and Robert's voice almost became a gasp. 'It was not fit that the spell should be renewed. She would be miserable, I under constant temptation, if I endeavoured to make her share my work! Best as it is! She has so cast me off that my honour is no longer bound to her; but I cannot tell whether it be due to her to let her know how it is with me, or whether it would be mere coxcombr'y.'

'The Sunday that she spent here,' said Phœbe, slowly, 'she had a talk with me. I wrote it down. Miss Fennimore says it is the safest way—'

'Where is it?' cried Robert.

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'I kept it in my pocket-book, for fear any one should see it, and it should do harm. Here it is, if it will help you. I am afraid I made things worse, but I did not know what to say.'

It was one of the boldest experiments ever made by a sister; for what man could brook the sight of an unvarnished statement of his proxy's pleading, or help imputing the failure to the go-between?

'I would not have had this happen for a thousand pounds!' was his acknowledgment. 'Child as you are, Phœbe, had you not sense to know, that no woman could endure to have that said, which should scarcely be implied? I wonder no longer at her studied avoidance.'

'If it be all my bad management, cannot it be set right?' humbly and hopefully said Phœbe.

'There is no right!' he said. 'There, take it back. It settles the question. The security you childishly showed, was treated as offensive presumption on my part. It would be presuming yet farther to make a formal withdrawal of what was never accepted.'

'Then is it my doing? Have I made mischief between you, and put you apart?' said poor Phœbe, in great distress. 'Can't I make up for it?'

'You? No, you were only an over plain-spoken child, and brought about the crisis that must have come somehow. It is not what you have done, or not done; it is what Lucy Sandbrook has said and done, shows that I must have done with her for ever.'

'And yet,' said Phœbe, taking this as forgiveness, 'you see she never believed that you would give her up. If she did, I am sure she would not have gone.'

'She thinks her power over me stronger than my principles. She challenges me—desires you to

tell me so. We shall see.'

He spoke as a man whose steadfastness had been defied, and who was piqued on proving it to the utmost. Such feelings may savour of the wrath of man, they may need the purifying of chastening, and they often impel far beyond the bounds of sober judgment; but no doubt they likewise frequently render that easy which would otherwise have appeared impossible, and which, if done in haste, may be regretted, but not repented, at leisure.

Under some circumstances, the harshness of youth is a healthy symptom, proving force of character and conviction, though that is only when the foremost victim is self. Robert was far from perfect, and it might be doubted whether he were entering the right track in the right way, but at least his heart was sound, and there was a fair hope that his failings, in working their punishment, might work their cure.

It was in a thorough brotherly and Christian spirit that before entering the house he compelled himself to say, 'Don't vex yourself, Phœbe, I know you did the best you could. It made no real difference, and it was best that she should know the truth.'

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'Thank you, dear Robin,' cried Phœbe, grateful for the consolation; 'I am glad you do not think I misrepresented.'

'You are always accurate,' he answered. 'If you did anything undesirable, it was representing at all. But that is nothing to the purpose. It is all over now, and thank you for your constant goodwill and patience, my dear. There! now then it is an understood thing that her name is never spoken between us.'

Meanwhile, Robert's proposal was under discussion by the elders. Mr. Parsons had no abstract dread of a wealthy curate, but he hesitated to accept gratuitous services, and distrusted plans formed under the impulse of disappointment or of enthusiasm, since in the event of a change, both parties might be embarrassed. There was danger too of collisions with his family, and Mr. Parsons took counsel with Miss Charlecote, knowing indeed that where her affections were concerned, her opinions must be taken with a qualification, but relying on the good sense formed by rectitude of purpose.

Honor's affection for Robert Fulmort had always been moderated by Owen's antagonism; her moderation in superlatives commanded implicit credence, and Mr. Parsons inferred more, instead of less, than she expressed; better able as he was to estimate that manly character, gaining force with growth, and though slow to discern between good and evil, always firm to the duty when it was once perceived, and thus rising with the elevation of the standard. The undemonstrative temper and tardiness in adopting extra habits of religious observance and profession, which had disappointed Honor, struck the clergyman as evidences both of sincerity and evenness of development, proving the sterling reality of what had been attained.

'Not taking, but trusty,' judged the vicar.

But the lad was an angry lover. How tantalizing to be offered a fourth curate, with a long purse, only to find St. Wulstan's serving as an outlet for a lover's quarrel, and the youth restless and restive ere the end of his diaconate!

'How savage you are,' said his wife; 'as if the parish would be hurt by his help or his presence. If he goes, let him go—some other help will come.'

'And don't deprive him of the advantage of a good master,' said Honor.

'This wretched cure is not worth flattery,' he said, smiling.

'Nay,' said Mrs. Parsons, 'how often have I heard you rejoice that you started here.'

'Under Mr. Charlecote—yes.'

'You are the depository of his traditions,' said Honor, 'hand them on to Robert. I wish nothing better for Owen.'

Mr. Parsons wished something better for himself, and averted a reply, by speaking of Robert as accepted.

Robert's next request was to be made useful in the parish, while preparing for his ordination in the autumn Ember week; and though there were demurs as to unnecessarily anticipating the strain on health and strength, he obtained his wish in mercy to a state only to be alleviated by the realities of labour.

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So few difficulties were started by his family, that Honora suspected that Mr. Fulmort, always chiefly occupied by what was immediately before him, hardly realized that by taking an assistant curacy at St. Wulstan's, his son became one of the pastors of Whittington-streets, great and little, Richard-courts, Cicely-row, Alice-lane, Cat-alley, and Turnagain-corner. Scarcely, however, was this settled, when a despatch arrived from Dublin, headed, 'The Fast Fly Fishers; or the modern St. Kevin,' containing in Ingoldsby legend-like rhymes the entire narration of the Glendalough predicament of the 'Fast and Fair,' and concluding with a piece of prose, by the same author, assuring his Sweet Honey, that the poem, though strange, was true, that he had just seen the angelic anglers on board the steamer, and it would not be for lack of good advice on his part, if Lucy did not present herself at Woolstone-lane, to partake of the dish called humble pie, on the

derivation whereof antiquaries were divided.

Half amused, half vexed by his levity, and wholly relieved and hopeful, Honora could not help showing Owen's performance to Phoebe for the sake of its cleverness; but she found the child too young and simple to enter into it, for the whole effect was an entreaty that Robert might not see it, only hear the facts.

Rather annoyed by this want of appreciation of Owen's wit, Honora saw, nevertheless, that Phoebe had come to a right conclusion. The breach was not likely to be diminished by finding that the wilful girl had exposed herself to ridicule, and the Fulmort nature had so little sense of the ludicrous, that this good-natured brotherly satire would be taken for mere derision.

So Honor left it to Phoebe to give her own version, only wishing that the catastrophe had come to his knowledge before his arrangements had been made with Mr. Parsons.

Phoebe had some difficulty in telling her story. Robert at first silenced her peremptorily, but after ten minutes relented, and said, moodily, 'Well, let me hear!' He listened without relaxing a muscle of his rigid countenance; and when Phoebe ended by saying that Miss Charlecote had ordered Lucy's room to be prepared, thinking that she might present herself at any moment, he said, 'Take care that you warn me when she comes. I shall leave town that minute.'

'Robert, Robert, if she come home grieved and knowing better—'

'I will not see her!' he repeated. 'I made her taking this journey the test! The result is nothing to me! Phoebe, I trust to you that no intended good-nature of Miss Charlecote's should bring us together. Promise me.'

Phoebe could do nothing but promise, and not another sentence could she obtain from her brother, indeed his face looked so formidable in its sternness, that she would have been a bold maiden to have tried.

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Honora augured truly, that not only was his stern nature deeply offended, but that he was quite as much in dread of coming under the power of Lucy's fascinations, as Cilla had ever been of his strength. Such mutual aversion was really a token of the force of influence upon each, and Honor assured Phoebe that all would come right. 'Let her only come home and be good, and you will see, Phoebe! She will not be the worse for an alarm, nor even for waiting till after his two years at St. Wulstan's.'

The reception of the travellers at Castle Blanch was certainly not mortifying by creating any excitement. Charles Charteris said his worst in the words, 'One week!' and his wife was glad to have some one to write her notes.

This indifference fretted Lucy. She found herself loathing the perfumy rooms, the sleepy voice, and hardly able to sit still in her restless impatience of Lolly's platitudes and Charles's *insouciance*, while Rashe could never be liked again. Even a lecture from Honor Charlecote would have been infinitely preferable, and one grim look of Robert's would be bliss!

No one knew whether Miss Charlecote were still in town, nor whether Augusta Fulmort were to be married in England or abroad; and as to Miss Murrell, Lolly languidly wondered what it was that she had heard.

Hungering for some one whom she could trust, Lucilla took an early breakfast in her own room, and walked to Wrapworth, hoping to catch the curate lingering over his coffee and letters. From a distance, however, she espied his form disappearing in the school-porch, and approaching, heard his voice reading prayers, and the children's chanted response. Coming to the oriel, she looked in. There were the rows of shiny heads, fair, brown, and black; there were the long sable back and chopped-hay locks of the curate; but where a queen-like figure had of old been wont to preside, she beheld a tallow face, with sandy hair under the most precise of net caps, and a straight thread-paper shape in scanty gray stuff and white apron.

Dizzy with wrathful consternation, Cilla threw herself on one of the seats of the porch, shaking her foot, and biting her lip, frantic to know the truth, yet too much incensed to enter, even when the hum of united voices ceased, the rushing sound of rising was over, and measured footsteps pattered to the classes, where the manly interrogations sounded alternately with the shrill little answers.

Clump, clump, came the heavy feet of a laggard, her head bent over her book, her thick lips vainly conning the unlearned task, unaware of the presence of the young lady, till Lucilla touched her, saying, 'What, Martha, a ten o'clock scholar?'

She gave a little cry, opened her staring eyes, and dropped a curtsey.

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'Whom have you here for mistress?' asked Lucilla.

'Please, ma'am, governess is runned away.'

'What do you mean?'

'Yes, ma'am,' replied the girl, developing powers of volubility such as scholastic relations with her had left unsuspected. 'She ran away last Saturday was a week, and there was nobody to open the school when we came to it a Sunday morning; and we had holidays all last week, ma'am;

and mother was terrified [225] out of her life; and father, he said he wouldn't have me never go for to do no such thing, and that he didn't want no fine ladies, as was always spiting of me.'

'Every one will seem to spite you, if you keep no better hours,' said Lucy, little edified by Martha's virtuous indignation.

The girl had scarcely entered the school before the clergyman stood on the threshold, and was seized by both hands, with the words, 'Oh, Mr. Prendergast, what is this?'

'You here, Cilla? What's the matter? What has brought you back?'

'Had you not heard? A sprain of Ratia's, and other things. Never mind. What's all this?'

'Ah! I knew you would be sadly grieved!'

'So you did frighten her away!'

'I never meant it. I tried to act for the best. She was spoken to, by myself and others, but nobody could make any impression, and we could only give her notice to go at the harvest holidays. She took it with her usual grand air—'

'Which is really misery and despair. Oh, why did I go? Go on!'

'I wrote to the mother, advising her, if possible, to come and be with the girl till the holidays. That was on Thursday week, and the old woman promised to come on the Monday—wrote a very proper letter, allowing for the Methodistical phrases—but on the Saturday it was observed that the house was not opened, and on Sunday morning I got a note—if you'll come in I'll show it to you.'

He presently discovered it among multitudinous other papers on his chimney-piece. Within a lady-like envelope was a thick satin-paper, queen's-sized note, containing these words:

'REVEREND SIR,—It is with the deepest feelings of regret for the unsatisfactory appearance of my late conduct that I venture to address you, but time will enable me to account for all, and I can at the present moment only entreat you to pardon any inconvenience I may have occasioned by the precipitancy of my departure. Credit me, reverend and dear sir, it was only the law of necessity that could have compelled me to act in a manner that may appear questionable. Your feeling heart will excuse my reserve when you are informed of the whole. In the meantime, I am only permitted to mention that this morning I became a happy wife. With heartfelt thanks for all the kindness I have received, I remain,

'Reverend sir,
'Your obedient servant,
'EDNA.'

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'Not one message to me?' exclaimed Lucilla.

'Her not having had the impudence is the only redeeming thing!'

'I did not think she would have left no word for me,' said Lucy, who knew she had been kinder than her wont, and was really wounded. 'Happy wife! Who can it be?'

'Happy wife?' repeated the curate. 'It is miserable fool, most likely, by this time.'

'No surname signed! What's the post-mark? Only Charing-cross. Could you find out nothing, or did you not think it worth while to look?'

'What do you take me for, Cilla? I inquired at the station, but she had not been there, and on the Monday I went to London and saw the mother, who was in great distress, for she had had a letter much like mine, only more unsatisfactory, throwing out absurd hints about grandeur and prosperity—poor deluded simpleton!'

'She distinctly says she is married.'

'Yes, but she gives no name nor place. What's that worth? After such duplicity as she has been practising so long, I don't know how to take her statement. Those people are pleased to talk of a marriage in the sight of heaven, when they mean the devil's own work!'

'No, no! I will not think it!'

'Then don't, my dear. You were very young and innocent, and thought no harm.'

'I'm not young—I'm not innocent!' furiously said Cilly. 'Tell me downright all you suspect.'

'I'm not given to suspecting,' said the poor clergyman, half in deprecation, half in reproof; 'but I am afraid it is a bad business. If she had married a servant or any one in her own rank, there would have been no need of concealing the name, at least from her mother. I feared at first that it was one of your cousin Charles's friends, but there seems more reason to suppose that one of the musical people at your concert at the castle may have thought her voice a good speculation for the stage.'

'He would marry her to secure her gains.'

'If so, why the secrecy?'

'Mrs. Jenkins has taught you to make it as bad as possible,' burst out Lucy. 'O, why was not I at home? Is it too late to trace her and proclaim her innocence!'

'I was wishing for your help. I went to Mr. Charteris to ask who the performers were, but he knew nothing about them, and said you and his sister had managed it all.'

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'The director was Derval. He is fairly respectable, at least I know nothing to the contrary. I'll make Charlie write. There was an Italian, with a black beard and a bass voice, whom we have had several times. I saw him looking at her. Just tell me what sort of woman is the mother. She lets lodgings, does not she?'

'Yes, in Little Whittington-street.'

'Dear me! I trust she is no friend of Honor Charlecote's.'

'Out of her beat, I should think. She dissents.'

'What a blessing! I beg your pardon, but if anything could be an aggravation, it would be Honor Charlecote's moralities.'

'So you were not aware of the dissent?'

'And you are going to set that down as more deceit, as if it were the poor thing's business to denounce her mother. Now, to show you that I can be sure that Edna was brought up to the Church, I will tell you her antecedents. Her father was Sir Thomas Deane's butler; they lived in the village, and she was very much in the nursery with the Miss Deanes—had some lessons from the governess. There was some notion of making her a nursery governess, but Sir Thomas died, the ladies went abroad, taking her father with them; Edna was sent to a training school, and the mother went to live in the City with a relation who let lodgings, and who has since died, leaving the concern to Mrs. Murrell, whose husband was killed by an upset of the carriage on the Alps.'

'I heard all that, and plenty besides! Poor woman, she was in such distress that one could not but let her pour it all out, but I declare the din rang in my ears the whole night after. A very nice, respectable-looking body she was, with jet-black eyes like diamonds, and a rosy, countrified complexion, quite a treat to see in that grimy place, her widow's cap as white as snow, but oh, such a tongue! She would give me all her spiritual experiences—how she was converted by an awakening minister in Cat-alley, and yet had a great respect for such ministers of the Church as fed their flocks with sincere milk, mixed up with the biography of all the shopmen and clerks who ever lodged there, and to whom she acted as a mother!'

'It was not their fault that she did not act as a mother-in-law. Edna has told me of the unpleasantness of being at home on account of the young men.'

'Exactly! I was spared none of the chances she might have had, but the only thing worthy of note was about a cashier who surreptitiously brought a friend from the "hopera," to overhear her singing hymns on the Sunday evening, and thus led to an offer on his part to have her brought out on the stage.'

'Ha! could that have come to anything?'

'No. Mrs. Murrell's suspicions took that direction, and we hunted down the cashier and the friend, but they were quite exonerated. It only proves that her voice has an unfortunate value.'

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'If she be gone off with the Italian bass, I can't say I think it a fatal sign that she was slow to present him to her domestic Mause Headrigg, who no doubt would deliberately prefer the boards of her coffin to the boards of the theatre. Well, come along—we will get a letter from Charles, and rescue her—I mean, clear her.'

'Won't you look into school, and see how we go on? The women complained so much of having their children on their hands, though I am sure they had sent them to school seldom enough of late, that I got this young woman from Mrs. Stuart's asylum till the holidays. I think we shall let her stay on, she has a good deal of method, and all seem pleased with the change.'

'You have your wish of a fright. No, I thank you! I'm not so glad as the rest of you to get rid of refinement and superiority.'

There was no answer, and more touched by silence than reply, she hastily said, 'Never mind! I dare say she may do better for the children, but you know, I, who am hard of caring for any one, did care for poor Edna, and I can't stand pæans over your new broom.'

Mr. Prendergast gave a smile such as was only evoked by his late rector's little daughter, and answered, 'No one can be more concerned than I. She was not in her place here, that was certain, and I ought to have minded that she was not thrust into temptation. I shall remember it with shame to my dying day.'

'Which means to say that so should I.'

'No, you did not know so much of the evils of the world.'

'I told you before, Mr. Pandy, that I am twenty times more sophisticated than you are. You talk of knowing the world! I wish I didn't. I'm tired of everybody.'

And on the way home she described her expedition, and had the pleasure of the curate's sympathy, if not his entire approval. Perhaps there was no other being whom she so thoroughly treated as a friend, actually like a woman friend, chiefly because he thoroughly believed in her, and was very blind to her faults. Robert would have given worlds to have found her *once* what Mr. Prendergast found her *always*.

She left him to wait in the drawing-room, while she went on her mission, but presently rushed back in a fury. Nobody cared a straw for the catastrophe. Lolly begged her not to be so excited about a trifle, it made her quite nervous; and the others laughed at her; Rashe pretended to think it a fine chance to have changed 'the life of an early Christian' for the triumphs of the stage; and Charles scouted the idea of writing to the man's employer. 'He call Derval to account for all the tricks of his fiddlers and singers? Much obliged!'

Mr. Prendergast decided on going to town by the next train, to make inquiries of Derval himself, without further loss of time, and Cilly declared that she would go with him and force the conceited professor to attend; but the curate, who had never found any difficulty in enforcing his own dignity, and thought it no business for a young lady, declined her company, unless, he said, she were to spend the day with Miss Charlecote.

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'I've a great mind to go to her for good and all. Let her fall upon me for all and sundry. It will do me good to hear a decent woman speak again! besides, poor old soul, she will be so highly gratified, that she will be quite meek' (and so will some one else, quoth the perverse little heart); 'I'll put up a few things, and not delay you.'

'This is very sudden!' said the curate, wishing to keep the peace between her and her friends, and not willing that his sunbeam should fleet 'so like the Borealis race!' 'Will it not annoy your cousins?'

'They ought to be annoyed!'

'And are you certain that you would find Miss Charlecote in town? I thought her stay was to be short.'

'I'm certain of nothing, but that every place is detestable.'

'What would you do if you did not find her?'

'Go on to Euston-square. Do you think I don't know my way to Hiltonbury, or that I should not get welcome enough—ay, and too much—there?'

'Then if you are so uncertain of her movements, do you not think you had better let me learn them before you start? She might not even be gone home, and you would not like to come back here again; if—'

'Like a dog that has been out hunting,' said Lucilla, who could bear opposition from this quarter as from no other. 'You won't take the responsibility, that's the fact. Well, you may go and reconnoitre, if you will; but mind, if you say one word of what brings you to town, I shall never go near the Holt at all. To hear—whenever the Raymonds, or any other of the godly school-keeping sort come to dinner—of the direful effects of certificated schoolmistresses, would drive me to such distraction that I cannot answer for the consequences.'

'I am sure it is not a fact to proclaim.'

'Ah! but if you run against Mr. Parsons, you'll never abstain from telling him of his stray lamb, nor from condoling with him upon the wolf in Cat-alley. Now there's a fair hope of his having more on his hands than to get his fingers scratched by meddling with the cats, and so that this may remain unknown. So consider yourself sworn to secrecy.'

Mr. Prendergast promised. The good man was a bit of a gossip, so perhaps her precaution was not thrown away, for he could hardly have helped seeking the sympathy of a brother pastor, especially of him to whose fold the wanderer primarily belonged. Nor did Lucy feel certain of not telling the whole herself in some unguarded moment of confidence. All she cared for was, that the story should not transpire through some other source, and be brandished over her head as an illustration of all the maxims that she had so often spurned. She ran after Mr. Prendergast after he had taken leave, to warn him against calling in Woolstone-lane, and desired him instead to go to Masters's shop, where it was sure to be known whether Miss Charlecote were in town or not.

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Mr. Prendergast secretly did grateful honour to the consideration that would not let him plod all the weary way into the City. Little did he guess that it was one part mistrust of his silence, and three parts reviving pride, which forbade that Honora should know that he had received any such commission.

The day was spent in pleasant anticipations of the gratitude and satisfaction that would be excited by her magnanimous return, and her pardon to Honor and to Robert for having been in the right. She knew she could own it so graciously that Robert would be overpowered with compunction, and for ever beholden to her; and now that the Charterises were so unmitigatedly hateful, it was time to lay herself out for goodness, and fling him the rein, with only now and then a jerk to remind him that she was a free agent.

A long-talked-of journey on the Continent was to come to pass as soon as Horatia's strain was well. In spite of wealth and splendour, Eloisa had found herself disappointed in the step that she

had hoped her marriage would give her into the most *élite* circles. Languid and indolent as her mind was, she could not but perceive that where Ratia was intimate and at ease, she continued on terms of form and ceremony, and her husband felt more keenly that the society in his house was not what it had been in his mother's time. They both became restless, and Lolly, who had already lived much abroad, dreaded the dulness of an English winter in the country; while Charles knew that he had already spent more than he liked to recollect, and that the only means of keeping her contented at Castle Blanch, would be to continue most ruinous expenses.

With all these secret motives, the tour was projected as a scheme of amusement, and the details were discussed between Charles and Rashe with great animation, making the soberness of Hiltonbury appear both tedious and sombre, though all the time Lucy felt that there she should again meet that which her heart both feared and yearned for, and without which these pleasures would be but shadows of enjoyment. Yet that they were not including her in their party, gave her a sense of angry neglect and impatience. She wanted to reject their invitation indignantly, and make a merit of the sacrifice.

The after-dinner discussion was in full progress when she was called out to speak to Mr. Prendergast. Heated, wearied, and choking with dust, he would not come beyond the hall, but before going home he had walked all this distance to tell her the result of his expedition. Derval had not been uncivil, but evidently thought the suspicion an affront to his *corps*, which at present was dispersed by the end of the season. The Italian bass was a married man, and had returned to his own country. The clue had failed. The poor leaf must be left to drift upon unknown winds.

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'But,' said the curate, by way of compensation, 'at Masters's I found Miss Charlecote herself, and gave your message.'

'I gave no message.'

'No, no, because you would not send me up into the City; but I told her all you would have had me say, and how nearly you had come up with me, only I would not let you, for fear she should have left town.'

Cilla's face did not conceal her annoyance, but not understanding her in the least, he continued, 'I'm sure no one could speak more kindly or considerately than she did. Her eyes filled with tears, and she must be heartily fond of you at the bottom, though maybe rather injudicious and strict; but after what I told her, you need have no fears.'

'Did you ever know me have any?'

'Ah well! you don't like the word; but at any rate she thinks you behaved with great spirit and discretion under the circumstances, and quite overlooks any little imprudence. She hopes to see you the day after to-morrow, and will write and tell you so.'

Perhaps no intentional slander ever gave the object greater annoyance than Cilly experienced on learning that the good curate had, in the innocence of his heart, represented her as in a state of proper feeling, and interceded for her; and it was all the worse because it was impossible to her to damp his kind satisfaction, otherwise than by a brief 'Thank you,' the tone of which he did not comprehend.

'Was she alone?' she asked.

'Didn't I tell you the young lady was with her, and the brother?'

'Robert Fulmort!' and Cilla's heart sank at finding that it could not have been he who had been with Owen.

'Ay, the young fellow that slept at my house. He has taken a curacy at St. Wulstan's.'

'Did he tell you so?' with an ill-concealed start of consternation.

'Not he; lads have strange manners. I should have thought after the terms we were upon here, he need not have been quite so much absorbed in his book as never to speak!'

'He has plenty in him instead of manners,' said Lucilla; 'but I'll take him in hand for it.'

Though Lucilla's instinct of defence had spoken up for Robert, she felt hurt at his treatment of her old friend, and could only excuse it by a strong fit of conscious moodiness. His taking the curacy was only explicable, she thought, as a mode of showing his displeasure with herself, since he could not ask her to marry into Whittingtonia; but 'That must be all nonsense,' thought she; 'I will soon have him down off his high horse, and Mr. Parsons will never keep him to his engagement—silly fellow to have made it—or if he does, I shall only have the longer to plague him. It will do him good. Let me see! he will come down to-morrow with Honora's note. I'll put on my lilac muslin with the innocent little frill, and do my hair under his favourite net, and look like such a horrid little meek ringdove that he will be perfectly disgusted with himself for having ever taken me for a fishing eagle. He will be abject, and I'll be generous, and not give another peck till it has grown intolerably stupid to go on being good, or till he presumes.'

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For the first time for many days, Lucilla awoke with the impression that something pleasant was about to befall her, and her wild heart was in a state of glad flutter as she donned the quiet dress, and found that the subdued colouring and graver style rendered her more softly lovely than she had ever seen herself.

The letters were on the breakfast-table when she came down, the earliest as usual, and one was from Honor Charlecote, the first sight striking her with vexation, as discomfiting her hopes that it would come by a welcome bearer. Yet that might be no reason why he should not yet run down.

She tore it open.

'MY DEAREST LUCY,—Until I met Mr. Prendergast yesterday, I was not sure that you had actually returned, or I would not have delayed an hour in assuring you, if you could doubt it, that my pardon is ever ready for you.'

('Many thanks,' was the muttered comment. 'Oh that poor, dear, stupid man! would that I had stopped his mouth!')

'I never doubted that your refinement and sense of propriety would be revolted at the consequences of what I always saw to be mere thoughtlessness—'

('Dearly beloved of an old maid is, I told you so!')

'—but I am delighted to hear that my dear child showed so much true delicacy and dignity in her trying predicament—'

('Delighted to find her dear child not absolutely lost to decorum! Thanks again.')

'—and I console myself for the pain it has given by the trust that experience has proved a better teacher than precept.'

('Where did she find that grand sentence?')

'So that good may result from past evil and present suffering, and that you may have learnt to distrust those who would lead you to disregard the dictates of your own better sense.'

('Meaning her own self!')

'I have said all this by letter that we may cast aside all that is painful when we meet, and only to feel that I am welcoming my child, doubly dear, because she comes owning her error.'

('I dare say! We like to be magnanimous, don't we? Oh, Mr. Prendergast, I could beat you!')

'Our first kiss shall seal your pardon, dearest, and not a word shall pass to remind you of this distressing page in your history.'

('Distressing! Excellent fun it was. I shall make her hear my diary, if I persuade myself to encounter this intolerable kiss of peace. It will be a mercy if I don't serve her as the thief in the fable did his mother when he was going to be hanged.')

'I will meet you at the station by any train on Saturday that you like to appoint, and early next week we will go down to what I am sure you have felt is your only true home.'

('Have I? Oh! she has heard of their journey, and thinks this my only alternative. As if I could not go with them if I chose—I wish they would ask me, though. They shall! I'll not be driven up to the Holt as my last resource, and live there under a system of mild browbeating, because I can't help it. No, no! Robin shall find it takes a vast deal of persuasion to bend me to swallow so much pardon in milk and water. I wonder if there's time to change the spoonery simplicity, and come out in something spicy, with a dash of the Bloomer. But, maybe, there's some news of him in the other sheet, now she has delivered her conscience of her rigmarole. Oh! here it is—')

'Phœbe will go home with us, as she is, according to the family system, not summoned to her sister's wedding. Robert leaves London on Saturday morning, to fetch his books, &c., from Oxford, Mr. Parsons having consented to give him a title for Holy Orders, and to let him assist in the parish until the next Ember week. I think, dear girl, that it should not be concealed from you that this step was taken as soon as he heard that you had actually sailed for Ireland, and that he does not intend to return until we are in the country.'

('Does he not? Another act of coercion! I suppose you put him up to this, madam, as a pleasing course of discipline. You think you have the whip-hand of me, do you? Pooh! See if he'll stay at Oxford!')

'I feel for the grief I'm inflicting—'

('Oh, so you complacently think, "now I have made her sorry!"')

'—but I believe uncertainty, waiting, and heart sickness would cost you far more. Trust me, as one who has felt it, that it is far better to feel oneself unworthy than to learn to doubt or distrust the worthiness or constancy of another.'

('My father to wit! A pretty thing to say to his daughter! What right has she to be pining and complaining after him? He, the unworthy one? I'll never forgive that

conceited inference! Just because he could not stand sentiment! Master Robert gone! Won't I soon have him repenting of his outbreak?')

'I have no doubt that his feelings are unchanged, and that he is solely influenced by principle. He is evidently exceedingly unhappy under all his reserve—'

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(He shall be more so, till he behaves himself, and comes back humble! I've no notion of his flying out in this way.)

'—and though I have not exchanged a word with him on the subject, I am certain that his good opinion will be retrieved, with infinite joy to himself, as soon as you make it possible for his judgment to be satisfied with your conduct and sentiments. Grieved as I am, it is with a hopeful sorrow, for I am sure that nothing is wanting on your part but that consistency and sobriety of behaviour of which you have newly learnt the necessity on other grounds. The Parsonses have gone to their own house, so you will not find any one here but two who will feel for you in silence, and we shall soon be in the quiet of the Holt, where you shall have all that can give you peace or comfort from your ever-loving old H. C.'

'Feel for me! Never! Don't you wish you may get it? Teach the catechism and feed caterpillars till such time as it pleases Mrs. Honor to write up and say "the specimen is tame"? How nice! No, no. I'll not be frightened into their lording it over me! I know a better way! Let Mr. Robert find out how little I care, and get himself heartily sick of St. Wulstan's, till it is "turn again Whittington indeed!" Poor fellow, I hate it, but he must be cured of his airs, and have a good fright. Why don't they ask me to go to Paris with them? Where can I go, if they don't. To Mary Cranford's? Stupid place, but I *will* show that I'm not so hard up as to have no place but the Holt to go to! If it were only possible to stay with Mr. Prendergast, it would be best of all! Can't I tell him to catch a chaperon for me? Then he would think Honor a regular dragon, which would be a shame, for it was nobody's fault but his! I shall tell him I'm like the Christian religion, for which people are always making apologies that it doesn't want! Two years! Patience! It will be very good for Robin, and four-and-twenty is quite soon enough to bite off one's wings, and found an ant-hill. As to being bullied into being kissed, pitied, pardoned, and trained by Honor, I'll never sink so low! No, at *no* price.'

Poor Mr. Prendergast! Did ever a more innocent mischief-maker exist?

Poor Honora! Little did she guess that the letter written in such love, such sympathy, such longing hope, would only excite fierce rebellion.

Yet it was at the words of Moses that the king's heart was hardened; and what was the end? He was taken at his word. 'Thou shalt see my face no more.'

To be asked to join the party on their tour had become Lucilla's prime desire, if only that she might not feel neglected, or driven back to Hiltonbury by absolute necessity; and when the husband and wife came down, the wish was uppermost in her mind.

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Eloïsa remarked on her quiet style of dress, and observed that it would be quite the thing in Paris, where people were so much less *outré* than here.

'I have nothing to do with Paris.'

'Oh! surely you go with us!' said Eloïsa; 'I like to take you out, because you are in so different a style of beauty, and you talk and save one trouble! Will not she go, Charles?'

'You see, Lolly wants you for effect!' he said, sneeringly. 'But you are always welcome, Cilly; we are woefully slow when you ain't there to keep us going, and I should like to show you a thing or two. I only did not ask you, because I thought you had not hit it off with Rashe, or have you made it up?'

'Oh! Rashe and I understand each other,' said Cilly, secure that though she would never treat Rashe with her former confidence, yet as long as they travelled *en grand seigneur*, there was no fear of collisions of temper.

'Rashe is a good creature,' said Lolly, 'but she is so fast and so eccentric that I like to have you, Cilly; you look so much younger, and more ladylike.'

'One thing more,' said Charles, in his character of head of the family; 'shouldn't you look up Miss Charlecote, Cilly? There's Owen straining the leash pretty hard, and you must look about you, that she does not take up with these new pets of hers and cheat you.'

'The Fulmorts? Stuff! They have more already than they know what to do with.'

'The very reason she will leave them the more. I declare, Cilly,' he added, half in jest, half in earnest, 'the only security for you and Owen is in a double marriage. Perhaps she projects it. You fire up as if she had!'

'If she had, do you think that I should go back?' said Cilly, trying to answer lightly, though her cheeks were in a flame. 'No, no, I am not going to let slip a chance of Paris.'

She stopped short, dismayed at having committed herself, and Horatia coming down, was told by acclamation that Cilly was going.

'Of course she is,' said forgiving and forgetting Rashe. 'Little Cilly left behind, to serve for food to the Rouge Dragon? No, no! I should have no fun in life without her.'

Rashe forgot the past far more easily than Cilla could ever do. There was a certain guilty delight in writing—

'MY DEAR HONOR,—Many thanks for your letter, and intended kindnesses. The scene must, however, be deferred, as my cousins mean to winter at Paris, and I can't resist the chance of hooking a Marshal, or a Prince or two. Rashe's strain was a great sell but we had capital fun, and shall hope for more success another season. I would send you my diary if it were written out fair. We go so soon that I can't run up to London, so I hope no one will be disturbed on my account.

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'Your affectionate CILLY.'

No need to say how often Lucilla would have liked to have recalled that note for addition or diminution, how many misgivings she suffered on her peculiar mode of catching Robins, how frequent were her disgusts with her cousin, and how often she felt like a captive—the captive of her own self-will.

'That's right!' said Horatia to Lolly. 'I was mortally afraid she would stay at home to fall a prey to the incipient parson, but now he is choked off, and Calthorp is really in earnest, we shall have the dear little morsel doing well yet.'

CHAPTER X

O ye, who never knew the joys
Of friendship, satisfied with noise,
Fandango, ball, and rout,
Blush, when I tell you how a bird
A prison, with a friend, preferred,
To liberty without.—COWPER

Had Lucilla Sandbrook realized the effect of her note, she would never have dashed it off; but, like all heedless people, pain out of her immediate ken was nothing to her.

After the loving hopes raised by the curate's report, and after her own tender and forgiving letter, Honor was pierced to the quick by the scornful levity of those few lines. Of the ingratitude to herself she thought but little in comparison with the heartless contempt towards Robert, and the miserable light-mindedness that it manifested.

'My poor, poor child!' was all she said, as she saw Phœbe looking with terror at her countenance; 'yes, there is an end of it. Let Robert never vex himself about her again.'

Phœbe took up the note, read it over and over again, and then said low and gravely, 'It is very cruel.'

'Poor child, she was born to the Charteris nature, and cannot help it! Like seeks like, and with Paris before her, she can see and feel nothing else.'

Phœbe vaguely suspected that there might be a shadow of injustice in this conclusion. She knew that Miss Charlecote imagined Lucilla to be more frivolous than was the case, and surmised that there was more offended pride than mere levity in the letter. Insight into character is a natural, not an acquired endowment; and many of poor Honor's troubles had been caused by her deficiency in that which was intuitive to Phœbe, though far from consciously. That perception made her stand thoughtful, wondering whether what the letter betrayed were folly or temper, and whether, like Miss Charlecote, she ought altogether to quench her indignation in contemptuous pity.

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'There, my dear,' said Honor, recovering herself, after having sat with ashy face and clasped hands for many moments. 'It will not bear to be spoken or thought of. Let us go to something else. Only, Phœbe, my child, do not leave her out of your prayers.'

Phœbe clung about her neck, kissed and fondled her, and felt her cheeks wet with tears, in the passionate tenderness of the returning caress.

The resolve was kept of not going back to the subject, but Honora went about all day with a soft, tardy step, and subdued voice, like one who has stood beside a death-bed.

When Phœbe heard those stricken tones striving to be cheerful, she could not find pardon for the wrong that had not been done to herself. She dreaded telling Robert that no one was coming whom he need avoid, though without dwelling on the tone of the refusal. To her surprise, he heard her short, matter-of-fact communication without any token of anger or of grief, made no remark, and if he changed countenance at all, it was to put on an air of gloomy satisfaction, as though another weight even in the most undesirable scale were preferable to any remnant of balancing, and compunction for possible injustice were removed.

Could Lucilla but have seen that face, she would have doubted of her means of reducing him to obedience.

The course he had adopted might indeed be the more excellent way in the end, but at present even his self-devotion was not in such a spirit as to afford much consolation to Honor. If good were to arise out of sorrow, the painful seed-time was not yet over. His looks were stern even to harshness, and his unhappiness seemed disposed to vent itself in doing his work after his own fashion, brooking no interference.

He had taken a lodging over a baker's shop at Turnagain Corner. Honor thought it fair for the locality, and knew something of the people, but to Phœbe it was horror and dismay. The two small rooms, the painted cupboard, the cut paper in the grate, the pictures in yellow gauze, with the flies walking about on them, the round mirror, the pattern of the carpet, and the close, narrow street, struck her as absolutely shocking, and she came to Miss Charlecote with tears in her eyes, to entreat her to remonstrate, and tell Robin it was his duty to live like a gentleman.

'My dear,' said Honor, rather shocked at a speech so like the ordinary Fulmort mind, 'I have no fears of Robert not living like a gentleman.'

'I know—not in the real sense,' said Phœbe, blushing; 'but surely he ought not to live in this dismal poky place, with such mean furniture, when he can afford better.'

'I am afraid the parish affords few better lodgings, Phœbe, and it is his duty to live where his work lies. You appreciated his self-denial, I thought? Do you not like him to make a sacrifice?'

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'I ought,' said Phœbe, her mind taking little pleasure in those acts of self-devotion that were the delight of her friend. 'If it be his duty, it cannot be helped, but I cannot be happy at leaving him to be uncomfortable—perhaps ill.'

Coming down from the romance of martyrdom which had made her expect Phœbe to be as willing to see her brother bear hardships in the London streets, as she had herself been to dismiss Owen the first to his wigwam, Honor took the more homely view of arguing on the health and quietness of Turnagain Corner, the excellence of the landlady, and the fact that her own cockney eyes had far less unreasonable expectations than those trained to the luxuries of Beauchamp. But by far the most efficient solace was an expedition for the purchase of various amenities of life, on which Phœbe expended the last of her father's gift. The next morning was spent in great secrecy at the lodgings, where Phœbe was so notable and joyous in her labours, that Honor drew the conclusion that housewifery was her true element; and science, art, and literature only acquired, because they had been made her duties, reckoning all the more on the charming order that would rule in Owen Sandbrook's parsonage.

All troubles and disappointments had faded from the young girl's mind, as she gazed round exulting on the sacred prints on the walls, the delicate statuettes, and well-filled spill-holder and match-box on the mantelshelf, the solid inkstand and appurtenances upon the handsome table-cover, the comfortable easy-chair, and the book-cases, whose contents had been reduced to order due, and knew that the bedroom bore equal testimony to her skill; while the good landlady gazed in admiration, acknowledging that she hardly knew her own rooms, and promising with all her heart to take care of her lodger.

Alas! when, on the way to the station, Honor and Phœbe made an unexpected raid to bring some last improvements, Robert was detected in the act of undoing their work, and denuding his room of even its original luxuries. Phœbe spoke not, but her face showed her discomfiture, and Honora attacked him openly.

'I never meant you to know it,' he said, looking rather foolish.

'Then to ingratitude you added treachery.'

'It is not that I do not feel your kindness—'

'But you are determined not to feel it!'

'No, no! only, this is no position for mere luxuries. My fellow-curates—'

'Will use such conveniences of life as come to them naturally,' said Honor, who had lived long enough to be afraid of the freaks of asceticism. 'Hear me, Robert. You are not wise in thrusting aside all that brings home to you your little sister's love. You think it cannot be forgotten, but it is not well to cast away these daily memorials. I know you have much to make you severe—nay, morose—but if you become so, you will never do your work efficiently. You may repel, but never invite; frighten, but not soothe.'

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'You want me to think my efficiency dependent on arm-chairs and table-covers.'

'I know you will be harder to all for living in needless discomfort, and that you will be gentler to all for constantly meeting tokens of your sister's affection. Had you sought these comforts for yourself, the case would be different; but, Robert, candidly, which of you is the self-pleasing, which the mortified one, at this moment?'

Robert could not but look convicted as his eyes fell on the innocent face, with the tears just kept back by strong effort, and the struggling smile of pardon.

'Never mind, Robin,' said Phœbe, as she saw his air of vexation; 'I know you never meant unkindness. Do as you think right, only pray think of what Miss Charlecote says.'

'She has one thing more to say,' added Honor. 'Do you think that throwing aside Phœbe's little

services will make you fitter to go among the little children?’

There was no answer, but a reluctant approach to a smile gave Phœbe courage to effect her restorations, and her whispered ‘You will not disturb them?’ met with an affirmative satisfactory to herself.

Perhaps he felt as of old, when the lady of the Holt had struck him for his cruelty to the mouse, or expelled him for his bad language. The same temper remained, although self-revenge had become the only outlet. He knew what it was that he had taken for devoted self-denial.

‘Yes, Robin,’ were Miss Charlecote’s parting words, as she went back to days of her own long past. ‘Wilful doing right seldom tends to good, above all when it begins by exaggeration of duty.’

And Robert was left with thoughts such as perchance might render him a more tractable subordinate for Mr. Parsons, instead of getting into training for the Order of St. Dominic.

Phœbe had to return less joyfully than she had gone forth. Her first bright star of anticipation had faded, and she had partaken deeply of the griefs of the two whom she loved so well. Not only had she to leave the one to his gloomy lodgings in the City, and the toil that was to deaden suffering, but the other must be parted with at the station, to return to the lonely house, where not even old Ponto would meet her—his last hour having, to every one’s grief, come in her absence.

Phœbe could not bear the thought of that solitary return, and even at the peril of great disappointment to her sisters, begged to sleep that first night at the Holt, but Honor thanked her, and laughed it off: ‘No, no! my dear, I am used to be alone, and depend upon it, there will be such an arrear of farm business for me, that I should hardly have time to speak to you. You need not be uneasy for me, dear one, there is always relief in having a great deal to do, and I shall know you are near, to come if I want you. There’s a great deal in that knowledge, Phœbe.’

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‘If I were of any use—’

‘Yes, Phœbe, this visit has made you my friend instead of my playfellow.’

Phœbe’s deepening colour showed her intense gratification. ‘And there are the Sundays,’ added Honor. ‘I trust Miss Fennimore will let you come to luncheon, and to the second service with me.’

‘I will try very hard!’

For Phœbe could not help feeling like the canary, who sees his owner’s hand held out to catch him after his flight, or the pony who marks his groom at the gate of the paddock. Cage and rein were not grievous, but liberty was over, and free-will began to sink into submission, as the chimneys of home came nearer, even though the anticipation of her sister’s happiness grew more and more on her, and compensated for all.

Shrieks of ecstasy greeted her; she was held as fast as though her sisters feared to lose her again, and Miss Fennimore showed absolute warmth of welcome. Foreign tongues were dispensed with, and it was a festival evening of chatter, and display of purchases, presents, and commissions. The evidences of Phœbe’s industry were approved. Her abstracts of her reading, her notes of museums and exhibitions, her drawing, needlework, and new pieces of music, exceeded Miss Fennimore’s hopes, and appalled her sisters.

‘You did all that,’ cried Bertha, profiting by Miss Fennimore’s absence; ‘I hope to goodness she won’t make it a precedent.’

‘Wasn’t it very tiresome?’ asked Maria.

‘Sometimes; but it made me comfortable, as if I had a backbone for my day.’

‘But didn’t you want to feel like a lady?’

‘I don’t think I felt otherwise, Maria.’

‘Like a grown-up lady, like mamma and my sisters?’

‘O examples!’ cried Bertha. ‘No wonder Maria thinks doing nothing the great thing to grow up for. But, Phœbe, how could you be so stupid as to go and do all this heap? You might as well have stayed at home.’

‘Miss Fennimore desired me!’

‘The very reason why I’d have read stories, and made pictures out of them, just to feel myself beyond her talons.’

‘Talents, not talons,’ said Maria. ‘Cats have talons, people have talents.’

‘Sometimes both, sometimes neither,’ observed Bertha. ‘No explanation, Phœbe; what’s the use? I want to know if Owen Sandbrook didn’t call you little Miss Precision?’

‘Something like it.’

‘And you went on when he was there?’

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'Generally.'

'Oh! what opportunities are wasted on some people. Wouldn't I have had fun! But of course he saw you were a poor little not-come-out thing, and never spoke to you. Oh! if Miss Charlecote would ask me to London!'

'And me!' chimed in Maria.

'Well, what would you do?'

'Not act like a goose, and bring home dry abstracts. I'd make Miss Charlecote take me everywhere, and quite forget all my science, unless I wanted to amaze some wonderful genius. Oh dear! won't I make Augusta look foolish some of these days! She really thinks that steel attracts lightning! Do you think Miss Charlecote's society will appreciate me, Phœbe?'

'And me?' again asked Maria.

Phœbe laughed heartily, but did not like Bertha's scoffing mirth at Maria's question. Glad as she was to be at home, her glimpse of the outer world had so enlarged her perceptions, she could not help remarking the unchildlike acuteness of the younger girl, and the obtuse comprehension of the elder; and she feared that she had become discontented and fault-finding after her visit. Moreover, when Bertha spoke much English, a certain hesitation occurred in her speech which was apt to pass unnoticed in her foreign tongues, but which jarred unpleasantly on her sister's ear, and only increased when noticed.

At nine, when Phœbe rose as usual to wish good night, Miss Fennimore told her that she need not for the future retire before ten, the hour to which she had of late become accustomed. It was a great boon, especially as she was assured that the additional hour should be at her own disposal.

'You have shown that you can be trusted with your time, my dear. But not to-night,' as Phœbe was turning to her desk; 'remember how long I have suffered a famine of conversation. What! were you not sensible of your own value in that respect?'

'I thought you instructed me; I did not know you conversed with me.'

'There's a difference between one susceptible of instruction, and anything so flippant and volatile as Bertha,' said Miss Fennimore, smiling. 'And poor Maria!'

'She is so good and kind! If she could only see a few things, and people, and learn to talk!'

'Silence and unobtrusiveness are the only useful lessons for her, poor girl!' then observing Phœbe's bewildered looks, 'My dear, I was forced to speak to Bertha because she was growing jealous of Maria's exemptions; but you, who have been constantly shielding and supplying her deficiencies, you do not tell me that you were not aware of them?'

'I always knew she was not clever,' said Phœbe, her looks of alarmed surprise puzzling Miss Fennimore, who in all her philosophy had never dreamt of the unconscious instinct of affection.

'I could not have thought it,' she said.

'Thought what? Pray tell me! O what is the matter with poor Maria?'

'Then, my dear, you really had never perceived that poor Maria is not—has not the usual amount of capacity—that she cannot be treated as otherwise than deficient.'

'Does mamma know it?' faintly asked Phœbe, tears slowly filling her eyes.

Miss Fennimore paused, inwardly rating Mrs. Fulmort's powers little above those of her daughter. 'I am not sure,' she said; 'your sister Juliana certainly does, and in spite of the present pain, I believe it best that your eyes should be opened.'

'That I may take care of her.'

'Yes, you can do much in developing her faculties, as well as in sheltering her from being thrust into positions to which she would be unequal. You do so already. Though her weakness was apparent to me the first week I was in the house, yet, owing to your kind guardianship, I never perceived its extent till you were absent. I could not have imagined so much tact and vigilance could have been unconscious. Nay, dear child, it is no cause for tears. Her life may perhaps be happier than that of many of more complete intellect.'

'I ought not to cry,' owned Phœbe, the tears quietly flowing all the time. 'Such people cannot do wrong in the same way as we can.'

'Ah! Phœbe, till we come to the infinite, how shall the finite pronounce what is wrong?'

Phœbe did not understand, but felt that she was not in Miss Charlecote's atmosphere, and from the heavenly, 'from him to whom little is given, little will be required,' came to the earthly, and said, imploring, 'And you will never be hard on her again!'

'I trust I have not been hard on her. I shall task her less, and only endeavour to give her habits of quiet occupation, and make her manners retiring. It was this relaxation of discipline, together with Bertha's sad habit of teasing, which was intolerable in your absence, that induced me to

explain to her the state of the case.'

'How shocked she must have been.'

'Not quite as you were. Her first remark was that it was as if she were next in age to you.'

'She is not old enough to understand.'

The governess shook her head. 'Nay, when I found her teasing again, she told me it was a psychological experiment. Little monkey, she laid hold of some books of mine, and will never rest till she has come to some conclusion as to what is wanting in Maria.'

'Too young to feel what it means,' repeated Phœbe.

She was no great acquisition as a companion, for she neither spoke nor stirred, so that the governess would have thought her drowsy, but for the uprightness of the straight back, and the steady fold of the fingers on the knee. Much as Miss Fennimore detested the sight of inaction, she respected the reverie consequent on the blow she had given. It was a refreshing contrast with Bertha's levity; and she meditated why her system had made the one sister only accurate and methodical, while the other seemed to be losing heart in mind, and becoming hard and shrewd.

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There was a fresh element in Phœbe's life. The native respect for 'the innocent' had sprung up within her, and her spirit seemed to expand into protecting wings with which to hover over her sister as a charge peculiarly her own. Here was the new impulse needed to help her when subsiding into the monotony and task-work of the schoolroom, and to occupy her in the stead of the more exciting hopes and fears that she had partaken in London.

Miss Fennimore wisely relaxed her rule over Phœbe, since she had shown that liberty was regarded as no motive for idleness; so though the maiden still scrupulously accomplished a considerable amount of study, she was allowed to portion it out as suited her inclination, and was no longer forbidden to interrupt herself for the sake of her sisters. It was infinite comfort to be no longer obliged to deafen her ears to the piteous whine of fretful incapacity, and to witness the sullen heaviness of faculties overtasked, and temper goaded into torpor. The fact once faced, the result was relief; Maria was spared and considered, and Phœbe found the governess much kinder, not only to her sister but to herself. Absence had taught the value of the elder pupil, and friendly terms of equality were beginning to be established.

Phœbe's freedom did not include solitary walks, and on weekdays she seldom saw Miss Charlecote, and then only to hear natural history, the only moderately safe ground between the two elder ladies. What was natural science with the one, was natural history with the other. One went deep in systems and classifications, and thrust Linnæus into the dark ages; the other had observed, collected, and drawn specimens with the enthusiasm of a Londoner for the country, till she had a valuable little museum of her own gathering, and was a handbook for the county curiosities. Star, bird, flower, and insect, were more than resources, they were the friends of her lonely life, and awoke many a keen feeling of interest, many an aspiration of admiring adoration that carried her through her dreary hours. And though Miss Fennimore thought her science puerile, her credulity extensive, and her observations inaccurate, yet she deemed even this ladylike dabbling worthy of respect as an element of rational pleasure and self-training, and tried to make Bertha respect it, and abstain from inundating Miss Charlecote with sesquipedalian names for systems and families, and, above all, from her principal delight, setting the two ladies together by the ears, by appealing to her governess to support her abuse of Linnæus as an old 'dictionary-maker,' or for some bold geological theory that poor Honor was utterly unprepared to swallow.

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Bertha was somewhat like the wren, who, rising on the eagle's head, thought itself the monarch of the birds, but Honor was by no means convinced that she was not merely blindfolded on the back of Clavileno Aligero. There was neither love nor admiration wasted between Honor and Miss Fennimore, and Phœbe preferred their being apart. She enjoyed her Sunday afternoons, short enough, for school must not be neglected, but Honor shyly acceded to Phœbe's entreaty to be allowed to sit by her class and learn by her teaching.

It was an effort. Honor shrank from exposing her own misty metaphors, hesitating repetitions, and trivial queries to so clear a head, trained in distinct reasoning, but it was the very teaching that the scientific young lady most desired, and she treasured up every hint, afterwards pursuing the subject with the resolution to complete the chain of evidence, and asking questions sometimes rather perplexing to Honor, accustomed as she was to take everything for granted. Out came authorities, and Honor found herself examining into the grounds of her own half-knowledge, gaining fresh ideas, correcting old ones, and obtaining subjects of interest for many an hour after her young friend had left her.

While, at home, Phœbe, after running the gauntlet of Bertha's diversion at her putting herself to school, when Scripture lessons were long ago done with, would delight Maria with long murmuring discourses, often stories about the scholars, but always conveying some point of religious instruction. It was a subject to which Maria was less impervious than to any other; she readily learned to croon over the simple hymns that Phœbe brought home, and when once a Scripture story had found entrance to her mind, would beg to have it marked in her Bible, and recur to it frequently.

Miss Fennimore left her entirely to Phœbe at these times, keeping Bertha from molesting her by sarcastic queries, or by remarks on the sing-song hymns, such as made Phœbe sometimes suspect that Maria's love for these topics rendered them the more distasteful to the younger girl. She tried to keep them as much sheltered as possible, but was still sometimes disconcerted by Bertha's mischievous laugh, or by finding Miss Fennimore's eyes fixed in attention.

Phœbe's last hour on these evenings was spent in laying up her new lore in her diligently kept note-book, weighing it and endeavouring to range it in logical sequence, which she had been duly trained to consider the test of reasoning. If she sometimes became bewildered, and detected insufficient premises for true conclusions, if she could not think allegory or analogy the evidence it was made at the Sunday-school, and which Miss Charlecote esteemed as absolute proof, her sound heart and loving faith always decided her that she should discover the link in time; and the doctrine had too strong a hold on her convictions and affections for her to doubt that the chain of argument existed, though she had not yet found it. It was not the work for which so young a head was intended, and perhaps it was well that she was interrupted by the arrival at home of the heads of the family.

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Augusta and her husband were to spend the winter abroad; Juliana had met some friends, whom she had accompanied to their home, and though she had exacted that Phœbe should not come out, yet the eldest daughter at home was necessarily brought somewhat forward. Phœbe was summoned to the family meals, and went out driving with her mother, or riding with her father, but was at other times in the schoolroom, where indeed she was the most happy.

The life down-stairs was new to her, and she had not been trained to the talk there expected of her. The one event of her life, her visit to London, gave evident dissatisfaction. There were growls whenever Robert was mentioned, and Phœbe found that though permission had been given for his taking the curacy, it had been without understanding his true intentions with regard to Whittingtonia. Something had evidently passed between him and his father and brother, while on their way through London, which had caused them to regard him as likely to be a thorn in their side; and Phœbe could not but fear that he would meet them in no spirit of conciliation, would rather prefer a little persecution, and would lean to the side of pastoral rather than filial duty, whenever they might clash. Even if he should refrain from speaking his full mind to his father, he was likely to use no precautions with his brother, and Phœbe was uneasy whenever either went up for their weekly visit of inspection at the office.

Her mother gently complained. 'Honora Charlecote's doing, I suppose. He should have considered more! Such a wretched place, no genteel family near! Your papa would never let me go near it. But he must buy an excellent living soon, where no one will know his connection with the trade.'

The only sympathy Phœbe met with at home on Robert's ordination, was in an unexpected quarter. 'Then your brother has kept his resolution,' said Miss Fennimore. 'Under his reserve there is the temper that formed the active ascetics of the middle ages. His doctrine has a strong mediæval tinge, and with sufficient strength of purpose, may lead to like results.'

When Phœbe proudly told Miss Charlecote of this remark, they agreed that it was a valuable testimony, both to the doctrines and the results. Honor had had a letter from Robert, that made her feel by force of contrast that Owen was more than three years from a like conception of clerical duty.

The storm came at last. By order of the Court of Chancery, there was put up for sale a dreary section of Whittingtonia, in dire decay, and remote from civilization. The firm of Fulmort and Son had long had their eyes on it, as an eligible spot for a palace for the supply of their commodity; and what was their rage when their agent was out-bidden, and the tenements knocked down to an unknown customer for a fancy price! After much alarm lest a rival distiller should be invading their territory, their wrath came to a height when it finally appeared that the new owner of the six ruinous houses in Cicely Row was no other than the Reverend Robert Mervyn Fulmort, with the purpose of building a church and schools for Whittingtonia at his own expense.

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Mervyn came home furious. High words had passed between the brothers, and his report of them so inflamed Mr. Fulmort, that he inveighed violently against the malice and treachery that scrupled not to undermine a father. Never speaking to Robert again, casting him off, and exposing the vicar for upholding filial insolence and undutifulness, were the mildest of his threats. They seemed to imagine that Robert was making this outlay, supposing that he would yet be made equal in fortune by his father to the others, and there was constant repetition that he was to expect not a farthing—he had had his share and should have no more. There was only a scoff at Phœbe's innocence, when she expressed her certainty that he looked for no compensation, knowing that he had been provided for, and was to have nothing from his father; and Phœbe trembled under such abuse of her favourite brother, till she could bear it no longer, and seizing the moment of Mervyn's absence, she came up to her father, and said, in as coaxing a tone as she could, 'Papa, should not every one work to the utmost in his trade?'

'What of that, little one?'

'Then pray don't be angry with Robert for acting up to his,' said Phœbe, clasping her hands, and resting them fondly on his shoulder.

'Act up to a fool's head! Parsons should mind their business and not fly in their fathers' faces.'

'Isn't it their work to make people more good?' continued Phœbe, with an unconscious wiliness, looking more simple than her wont.

'Let him begin with himself then! Learn his duty to his father! A jackanapes; trying to damage my business under my very nose.'

'If those poor people are in such need of having good done to them—'

'Scum of the earth! Much use trying to do good to them!'

'Ah! but if it be his work to try? and if he wanted a place to build a school—'

'You're in league with him, I suppose.'

'No, papa! It surprised me very much. Even Mr. Parsons knew nothing of his plans, Robert only wrote to me when it was done, that now he hoped to save a few of the children that are turned out in the streets to steal.'

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'Steal! They'll steal all his property! A proper fool your uncle was to leave it all to a lad like that. The sure way to spoil him! I could have trebled all your fortunes if that capital had been in my hands, and now to see him throw it to the dogs! Phœbe, I can't stand it. Conscience? I hate such coxcombs! As if men would not make beasts of themselves whether his worship were in the business or not.'

'Yes!' ventured Phœbe, 'but at least he has no part in their doing so.'

'Much you know about it,' said her father, again shielding himself with his newspaper, but so much less angrily than she had dared to expect, that even while flushed and trembling, she felt grateful to him as more placable than Mervyn. She knew not the power of her own sweet face and gently honest manner, nor of the novelty of an attentive daughter.

When the neighbours remarked on Mrs. Fulmort's improved looks and spirits, and wondered whether they were the effect of the Rhine or of 'getting off' her eldest daughter, they knew not how many fewer dull hours she had to spend. Phœbe visited her in her bedroom, talked at luncheon, amused her drives, coaxed her into the garden, read to her when she rested before dinner, and sang to her afterwards. Phœbe likewise brought her sister's attainments more into notice, though at the expense of Bertha's contempt for mamma's preference for Maria's staring fuchsias and feeble singing, above her own bold chalks from models and scientific music, and indignation at Phœbe's constantly bringing Maria forward rather than her own clever self.

Droning narrative, long drawn out, had as much charm for Mrs. Fulmort as for Maria. If she did not always listen, she liked the voice, and she sometimes awoke into descriptions of the dresses, parties, and acquaintance of her youth, before trifling had sunk into dreary insipidity under the weight of too much wealth, too little health, and 'nothing to do.'

'My dear,' she said, 'I am glad you are not out. Quiet evenings are so good for my nerves; but you are a fine girl, and will soon want society.'

'Not at all, mamma; I like being at home with you.'

'No, my dear! I shall like to take you out and see you dressed. You must have advantages, or how are you to marry?'

'There's no hurry,' said Phœbe, smiling.

'Yes, my dear, girls always get soured if they do not marry!'

'Not Miss Charlecote, mamma.'

'Ah! but Honor Charlecote was an heiress, and could have had plenty of offers. Don't talk of not marrying, Phœbe, I beg.'

'No,' said Phœbe, gravely. 'I should like to marry some one very good and wise, who could help me out of all my difficulties.'

'Bless me, Phœbe! I hope you did not meet any poor curate at that place of Honor Charlecote's. Your papa would never consent.'

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'I never met anybody, mamma,' said Phœbe, smiling. 'I was only thinking what he should be like.'

'Well, what?' said Mrs. Fulmort, with girlish curiosity. 'Not that it's any use settling. I always thought I would marry a marquis's younger son, because it is such a pretty title, and that he should play on the guitar. But he must not be an officer, Phœbe; we have had trouble enough about that.'

'I don't know what he is to be, mamma,' said Phœbe, earnestly, 'except that he should be as sensible as Miss Fennimore, and as good as Miss Charlecote. Perhaps a man could put both into one, and then he could lead me, and always show me the reason of what is right.'

'Phœbe, Phœbe! you will never get married if you wait for a philosopher. Your papa would never like a very clever genius or an author.'

'I don't want him to be a genius, but he must be wise.'

'Oh, my dear! That comes of the way young ladies are brought up. What would the Miss Berrilees have said, where I was at school at Bath, if one of their young ladies had talked of wanting to marry a wise man?'

Phœbe gave a faint smile, and said, 'What was Mr. Charlecote like, mamma, whose brass was put up the day Robert was locked into the church?'

'Humfrey Charlecote, my dear? The dearest, most good-hearted man that ever lived. Everybody liked him. There was no one that did not feel as if they had lost a brother when he was taken off in that sudden way.'

'And was not he very wise, mamma?'

'Bless me, Phœbe, what could have put that into your head? Humfrey Charlecote a wise man? He was just a common, old-fashioned, hearty country squire. It was only that he was so friendly and kind-hearted that made every one trust him, and ask his advice.'

'I should like to have known him,' said Phœbe, with a sigh.

'Ah, if you married any one like that! But there's no use waiting! There's nobody left like him, and I won't have you an old maid! You are prettier than either of your sisters—more like me when I came away from Miss Berrilees, and had a gold-sprigged muslin for the Assize Ball, and Humfrey Charlecote danced with me.'

Phœbe fell into speculations on the wisdom whose counsel all asked, and which had left such an impression of affectionate honour. She would gladly lean on such an one, but if no one of the like mould remained, she thought she could never bear the responsibilities of marriage.

Meantime she erected Humfrey Charlecote's image into a species of judge, laying before this vision of a wise man all her perplexities between Miss Charlecote's religion and Miss Fennimore's reason, and all her practical doubts between Robert's conflicting duties. Strangely enough, the question, 'What would Mr. Charlecote have thought?' often aided her to cast the balance. Though it was still Phœbe who decided, it was Phœbe drawn out of herself, and strengthened by her mask.

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With vivid interest, such as for a living man would have amounted to love, she seized and hoarded each particle of intelligence that she could gain respecting the object of her admiration. Honora herself, though far more naturally enthusiastic, had, with her dreamy nature and diffused raptures, never been capable of thus reverencing him, nor of the intensity of feeling of one whose restrained imagination and unromantic education gave force to all her sensations. Yet this deep individual regard was a more wholesome tribute than Honor had ever paid to him, or to her other idol, for to Phœbe it was a step, lifting her to things above and beyond, a guide on the road, never a vision obscuring the true object.

Six weeks had quietly passed, when, like a domestic thunderbolt, came Juliana's notification of her intention to return home at the end of a week. Mrs. Fulmort, clinging to her single thread of comfort, hoped that Phœbe might still be allowed to come to her boudoir, but the gentlemen more boldly declared that they wanted Phœbe, and would not have her driven back into the schoolroom; to which the mother only replied with fears that Juliana would be in a dreadful temper, whereon Mervyn responded, 'Let her! Never mind her, Phœbe. Stick up for yourself, and we'll put her down.'

Except for knowing that she was useful to her mother, Phœbe would have thankfully retired into the west wing, rather than have given umbrage. Mervyn's partisanship was particularly alarming, and, endeavour as she might to hope that Juliana would be amiable enough to be disarmed by her own humility and unobtrusiveness, she lived under the impression of disagreeables impending.

One morning at breakfast, Mr. Fulmort, after grumbling out his wonder at Juliana's writing to him, suddenly changed his tone into, 'Hollo! what's this? "My engagement—"'

'By Jove!' shouted Mervyn; 'too good to be true. So she's done it. I didn't think he'd been such an ass, having had one escape.'

'Who?' continued Mr. Fulmort, puzzling, as he held the letter far off—'engagement to dear—dear Devil, does she say?'

'The only fit match,' muttered Mervyn, laughing. 'No, no, sir! Bevil—Sir Bevil Acton.'

'What! not the fellow that gave us so much trouble! He had not a sixpence; but she must please herself now.'

'You don't mean that you didn't know what she went with the Merivales for?—five thousand a year and a baronetcy, eh?'

'The deuce! If I had known that, he might have had her long ago.'

'It's quite recent,' said Mervyn. 'A mere chance; and he has been knocking about in the colonies these ten years—might have cut his wisdom teeth.'

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'Ten years—not half-a-dozen!' said Mr. Fulmort.

'Ten!' reiterated Mervyn. 'It was just before I went to old Raymond's. Acton took me to dine at the mess. He was a nice fellow then, and deserved better luck.'

'Ten years' constancy!' said Phœbe, who had been looking from one to the other in wonder, trying to collect intelligence. 'Do tell me.'

'Whew!' whistled Mervyn. 'Juliana hadn't her sharp nose nor her sharp tongue when first she came out. Acton was quartered at Elverslope, and got smitten. She flirted with him all the winter; but I fancy she didn't give you much trouble when he came to the point, eh, sir?'

'I thought him an impudent young dog for thinking of a girl of her prospects; but if he had this to look to!—I was sorry for him, too! Ten years ago,' mused Mr. Fulmort.

'And she has liked no one since?'

'Or no one has liked her, which comes to the same,' said Mervyn. 'The regiment went to the Cape, and there was an end of it, till we fell in with the Merivales on board the steamer; and they mentioned their neighbour, Sir Bevil Acton, come into his property, and been settled near them a year or two. Fine sport it was, to see Juliana angling for an invitation, brushing up her friendship with Minnie Merivale—amiable to the last degree! My stars! what work she must have had to play good temper all these six weeks, and how we shall have to pay for it!'

'Or Acton will,' said Mr. Fulmort, with a hearty chuckle of triumphant good-humour.

Was it a misfortune to Phœbe to have been so much refined by education as to be grated on by the vulgar tone of those nearest to her? It was well for her that she could still put it aside as their way, even while following her own instinct. Mervyn and Juliana had been on cat and dog terms all their lives; he was certain to sneer at all that concerned her, and Phœbe reserved her belief that an attachment, nipped in the bud, was ready to blossom in sunshine. She ran up with the news to her mother.

'Juliana going to be married! Well, my dear, you may be introduced at once! How comfortable you and I shall be in the little brougham.'

Phœbe begged to be told what the intended was like.

'Let me see—was he the one that won the steeple-chase? No; that was the one that Augusta liked. We knew so many young men, that I could never tell which was which; and your sisters were always talking about them till it quite ran through my poor head, such merry girls as they were!'

'And poor Juliana never was so merry after he was gone.'

'I don't remember,' replied this careful mother; 'but you know she never could have meant anything, for he had nothing, and you with your fortunes are a match for anybody! Phœbe, my dear, we must go to London next spring, and you shall marry a nobleman. I must see you a titled lady as well as your sisters.'

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'I've no objection, provided he is my wise man,' said Phœbe.

Juliana had found the means of making herself welcome, and her marriage a cause of unmixed jubilation in her family. Prosperity made her affable, and instead of suppressing Phœbe, she made her useful, and treated her as a confidante, telling her of all the previous intimacy, and all the secret sufferings in dear Bevil's absence, but passing lightly over the last happy meeting, which Phœbe respected as too sacred to be talked of.

The little maiden's hopes of a perfect brother in the constant knight rose high, and his appearance and demeanour did not disappoint them. He had a fine soldierly figure, and that air of a thorough gentleman which Phœbe's Holt experience had taught her to appreciate; his manners were peculiarly gentle and kind, especially to Mrs. Fulmort; and Phœbe did not like him the less for showing traces of the effects of wounds and climate, and a grave, subdued air, almost amounting to melancholy. But before he had been three days at Beauchamp, Juliana made a virulent attack on the privileges of her younger sisters. Perhaps it was the consequence of poor Maria's volunteer to Sir Bevil—'I am glad Juliana is going with you, for now no one will be cross to me;' but it seemed to verify the poor girl's words, that she should be hunted like a strange cat if she were found beyond her own precincts, and that the other two should be treated much in the same manner. Bertha stood up for her rights, declaring that what mamma and Miss Fennimore allowed, she would not give up for Juliana; but the only result was an admonition to the governess, and a fierce remonstrance to the poor meek mother. Phœbe, who only wished to retire from the stage in peace, had a more difficult part to play.

'What's the matter now?' demanded Mervyn, making his way up to her as she sat in a remote corner of the drawing-room, in the evening. 'Why were you not at dinner?'

'There was no room, I believe.'

'Nonsense! our table dines eight-and-twenty, and there were not twenty.'

'That was a large party, and you know I am not out.'

'You don't look like it in that long-sleeved white affair, and nothing on your head either. Where are those ivy-leaves you had yesterday—real, weren't they?'

'They were not liked.'

'Not liked! they were the prettiest things I have seen for a long time. Acton said they made you look like a nymph—the green suits that shiny light hair of yours, and makes you like a picture.'

'Yes, they made me look forward and affected.'

'Now who told you that? Has the Fennimore got to her old tricks?'

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'Oh no, no!'

'I see! a jealous toad! I heard him telling her that you reminded him of her in old times. The spiteful vixen! Well, Phœbe, if you cut her out, I bargain for board and lodging at Acton Manor. This will be no place for a quiet, meek soul like me!'

Phœbe tried to laugh, but looked distressed, uncomprehending, and far from wishing to comprehend. She could not escape, for Mervyn had penned her up, and went on: 'You don't pretend that you don't see how it is! That unlucky fellow is heartily sick of his bargain, but you see he was too soft to withstand her throwing herself right at his head, and doing the "worm in the bud," and the cruel father, green and yellow melancholy, &c., ever since they were inhumanly parted.'

'For shame, Mervyn. You don't really believe it is all out of honour.'

'I should never have believed a man of his years could be so green; but some men get crotchets about honour in the army, especially if they get elderly there.'

'It is very noble, if it be right, and he can take those vows from his heart,' moralized Phœbe. 'But no, Mervyn, she cannot think so. No woman could take any one on such terms.'

'Wouldn't she, though?' sneered her brother. 'She'd have him if grim death were hanging on to his other hand. People aren't particular, when they are nigh upon their third ten.'

'Don't tell me such things! I don't believe them; but they ought never to be suggested.'

'You ought to thank me for teaching you knowledge of the world.'

He was called off, but heavy at her heart lay the text, 'The knowledge of wickedness is not wisdom.'

Mervyn's confidences were serious troubles to Phœbe. Gratifying as it was to be singled out by his favour, it was distressing to be the repository of what she knew ought never to have been spoken, prompted by a coarse tone of mind, and couched in language that, though he meant it to be restrained, sometimes seemed to her like the hobgoblins' whispers to Christian. Oh! how unlike her other brother! Robert had troubles, Mervyn grievances, and she saw which were the worst to bear. It was a pleasing novelty to find a patient listener, and he used it to the utmost, while she often doubted whether to hear without remonstrance were not undutiful, yet found opposition rather increased the evil by the storm of ill-temper that it provoked.

This last communication was dreadful to her, yet she could not but feel that it might be a wholesome warning to avoid giving offence to the jealousy which, when once pointed out to her, she could not prevent herself from tracing in Juliana's petulance towards herself, and resolve to force her into the background. Even Bertha was more often brought forward, for in spite of a tongue and temper cast somewhat in a similar mould, she was rather a favourite with Juliana, whom she was not unlikely to resemble, except that her much more elaborate and accurate training might give her both more power and more self-control.

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As Mervyn insinuated, Juliana was prudent in not lengthening out the engagement, and the marriage was fixed for Christmas week, but it was not to take place at Hiltonbury. Sir Bevil was bashful, and dreaded county festivities, and Juliana wished to escape from Maria as a bridesmaid, so they preferred the privacy of an hotel and a London church. Phœbe could not decently be excluded, and her heart leapt with the hope of seeing Robert, though so unwelcome was his name in the family that she could not make out on what terms he stood, whether proscribed, or only disapproved, and while sure that he would strive to be with her, she foresaw that the pleasure would be at the cost of much pain. Owen Sandbrook was spending his vacation at the Holt, and Miss Charlecote looked so bright as she walked to church leaning on his arm, that Phœbe had no regrets in leaving her. Indeed, the damsel greatly preferred the Holt in his absence. She did not understand his discursive comments on all things in art or nature, and he was in a mood of flighty fitful spirits, which perplexed her alike by their wild, satirical mirth, and their mournful sentiment. She thought Miss Charlecote was worried and perplexed at times by his tone; but there was no doubt of his affection and attention for his 'Sweet Honey,' and Phœbe rejoiced that her own absence should be at so opportune a moment.

Sir Bevil went to make his preparations at home, whence he was to come and join the Fulmorts the day after their arrival in town. Mrs. Fulmort was dragged out in the morning, and deposited at Farrance's in time for luncheon, a few minutes before a compact little brougham set down Lady Bannerman, jollier than ever in velvet and sable, and more scientific in cutlets and pale ale. Her good-nature was full blown. She was ready to chaperon her sisters anywhere, invited the party to the Christmas dinner, and undertook the grand *soirée* after the wedding. She proposed to take Juliana at once out shopping, only lamenting that there was no room for Phœbe, and was so universally benevolent, that in the absence of the bride elect, Phœbe ventured to ask whether

she saw anything of Robert.

'Robert? Yes, he called when we first came to town, and we asked him to dinner; but he said it was a fast day; and you know Sir Nicholas would never encourage that sort of thing.'

'How was he?'

'He looked odder than ever, and so ill and cadaverous. No wonder! poking himself up in such a horrid place, where one can't notice him.'

'Did he seem in tolerable spirits?'

'I don't know. He always was silent and glum; and now he seems wrapped up in nothing but ragged schools and those disgusting City missions; I'm sure we can't subscribe, so expensive as it is living in town. Imagine, mamma, what we are giving our cook!'

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Juliana returned, and the two sisters went out, leaving Phœbe to extract entertainment for her mother from the scenes passing in the street.

Presently a gentleman's handsome cabriolet and distinguished-looking horse were affording food for their descriptions, when, to her surprise, Sir Bevil emerged from it, and presently entered the room. He had come intending to take out his betrothed, and in her absence transferred the offer to her sister. Phœbe demurred, on more accounts than she could mention, but her mother remembering what a drive in a stylish equipage with a military baronet would once have been to herself, overruled her objections, and hurried her away to prepare. She quickly returned, a cheery spectacle in her russet dress and brown straw bonnet, and her scarlet neck-tie, the robin redbreast's livery which she loved.

'Your cheeks should be a refreshing sight to the Londoners, Phœbe,' said Sir Bevil, with his rare, but most pleasant smile. 'Where shall we go? You don't seem much to care for the Park. I'm at your service wherever you like to go.' And as Phœbe hesitated, with cheeks trebly beneficial to the Londoners, he kindly added, 'Well, what is it? Never mind what! I'm open to anything—even Madame Tussaud's.'

'If I might go to see Robert. Augusta said he was looking ill.'

'My dear!' interposed her mother, 'you can't think of it. Such a dreadful place, and such a distance.'

'It is only a little way beyond St. Paul's, and there are no bad streets, dear mamma. I have been there with Miss Charlecote. But if it be too far, or you don't like driving into the City, never mind,' she continued, turning to Sir Bevil; 'I ought to have said nothing about it.'

But Sir Bevil, reading the ardour of the wish in the honest face, pronounced the expedition an excellent idea, and carried her off with her eyes as round and sparkling as those of the children going to Christmas parties. He stole glances at her as if her fresh innocent looks were an absolute treat to him, and when he talked, it was of Robert in his boyhood. 'I remember him at twelve years old, a sturdy young ruffian, with an excellent notion of standing up for himself.'

Phœbe listened with delight to some characteristic anecdotes of Robert's youth, and wondered whether he would be appreciated now. She did not think Sir Bevil held the same opinions as Robert or Miss Charlecote; he was an upright, high-minded soldier, with honour and subordination his chief religion, and not likely to enter into Robert's peculiarities. She was in some difficulty when she was asked whether her brother were not under some cloud, or had not been taking a line of his own—a gentler form of inquiry, which she could answer with the simple truth.

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'Yes, he would not take a share in the business, because he thought it promoted evil, and he felt it right to do parish work at St. Wulstan's, because our profits chiefly come from thence. It does not please at home, because they think he could have done better for himself, and he sometimes is obliged to interfere with Mervyn's plans.'

Sir Bevil made the less answer because they were in the full current of London traffic, and his proud chestnut was snuffing the hat of an omnibus conductor. Careful driving was needed, and Phœbe was praised for never even looking frightened, then again for her organ of locality and the skilful pilotage with which she unerringly and unhesitatingly found the way through the Whittingtonian labyrinths; and as the disgusted tiger pealed at the knocker of Turnagain Corner, she was told she would be a useful guide in the South African bush. 'At home,' was the welcome reply, and in another second her arms were round Robert's neck. There was a thorough brotherly greeting between him and Sir Bevil; each saw in the other a man to be respected, and Robert could not but be grateful to the man who brought him Phœbe.

Her eyes were on the alert to judge how he had been using himself in the last half-year. He looked thin, yet that might be owing to his highly clerical coat, and some of his rural ruddiness was gone, but there was no want of health of form or face, only the spareness and vigour of thorough working condition. His expression was still grave even to sadness, and sternness seemed gathering round his thin lips. Heavy of heart he doubtless was still, but she was struck by the absence of the undefined restlessness that had for years been habitual to both brothers, and which had lately so increased on Mervyn, that there was a relief in watching a face free from it, and telling not indeed of happiness, but of a mind made up to do without it.

She supposed that his room ought to satisfy her, for though untidy in female eyes, it did not betray ultra self-neglect. The fire was brisk, there was a respectable luncheon on the table, and he had even treated himself to the *Guardian*, some new books, and a beautiful photograph of a foreign cathedral. The room was littered with half-unrolled plans, which had to be cleared before the guests could find seats, and he had evidently been beguiling his luncheon with the perusal of some large MS. sheets, red-taped together at the upper corner.

'That's handsome,' said Sir Bevil. 'What is it for? A school or almshouses.'

'Something of both,' said Robert, his colour rising. 'We want a place for disposing of the destitute children that swarm in this district.'

'Oh, show me!' cried Phœbe. 'Is it to be at that place in Cicely Row?'

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'I hope so.'

The stiff sheets were unrolled, the designs explained. There was to be a range of buildings round a court, consisting of day-schools, a home for orphans, a *crèche* for infants, a reading-room for adults, and apartments for the clergy of the Church which was to form one side of the quadrangle. Sir Bevil was much interested, and made useful criticisms. 'But,' he objected, 'what is the use of building new churches in the City, when there is no filling those you have?'

'St. Wulstan's is better filled than formerly,' said Robert. 'The pew system is the chief enemy there; but even without that, it would not hold a tenth part of the Whittingtonian population, would they come to it, which they will not. The Church must come to them, and with special services at their own times. They need an absolute mission, on entirely different terms from the Woolstone quarter.'

'And are you about to head the mission?'

'To endeavour to take a share in it.'

'And who is to be at the cost of this?' pursued Sir Bevil. 'Have you a subscription list?'

Robert coloured again as he answered, 'Why, no; we can do without that so far.'

Phœbe understood, and her face must have revealed the truth to Sir Bevil, for laying his hand on Robert's arm, he said, 'My good fellow, you don't mean that you are answerable for all this?'

'You know I have something of my own.'

'You will not leave much of it at this rate. How about the endowment?'

'I shall live upon the endowment.'

'Have you considered? You will be tied to this place for ever.'

'That is one of my objects,' replied Robert, and in reply to a look of astonished interrogation, 'myself and all that is mine would be far too little to atone for a fraction of the evil that our house is every day perpetrating here.'

'I should hate the business myself,' said the baronet; 'but don't you see it in a strong light?'

'Every hour I spend here shows me that I do not see it strongly enough.'

And there followed some appalling instances of the effects of the multiplicity of gin-palaces, things that it well-nigh broke Robert's heart to witness, absorbed as he was in the novelty of his work, fresh in feeling, and never able to divest himself of a sense of being a sharer in the guilt and ruin.

Sir Bevil listened at first with interest, then tried to lead away from the subject; but it was Robert's single idea, and he kept them to it till their departure, when Phœbe's first words were, as they drove from the door, 'Oh, thank you, you do not know how much happier you have made me.'

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Her companion smiled, saying, 'I need not ask which is the favourite brother.'

'Mervyn is very kind to me,' quickly answered Phœbe.

'But Robert is the oracle! eh?' he said, kindly and merrily.

'Robert has been everything to us younger ones,' she answered. 'I am still more glad that you like him.'

His grave face not responding as she expected, she feared that he had been bored, that he thought Robert righteous over much, or disapproved his opinions; but his answer was worth having when it came. 'I know nothing about his views; I never looked into the subject; but when I see a young man giving up a lucrative prospect for conscience sake, and devoting himself to work in that sink of iniquity, I see there must be something in him. I can't judge if he goes about it in a wrong-headed way, but I should be proud of such a fellow instead of discarding him.'

'Oh, thank you!' cried Phœbe, with ecstasy that made him laugh, and quite differently from the made-up laughter she had been used to hear from him.

'What are you thanking me for?' he said. 'I do not imagine that I shall be able to serve him. I'll

talk to your father about him, but he must be the best judge of the discipline of his own family.'

'I was not thinking of your doing anything,' said Phœbe; 'but a kind word about Robert does make me very grateful.'

There was a long silence, only diversified by an astonished nod from Mervyn driving back from the office. Just before setting her down, Sir Bevil said, 'I wonder whether your brother would let us give something to his church. Will you find out what it shall be, and let me know? As a gift from Juliana and myself—you understand.'

It was lucky for Phœbe that she had brought home a good stock of satisfaction to support her, for she found herself in the direst disgrace, and her mother too much cowed to venture on more than a feeble self-defensive murmur that she had told Phœbe it would never do. Convinced in her own conscience that she had done nothing blameworthy, Phœbe knew that it was the shortest way not to defend herself, and the storm was blowing over when Mervyn came in, charmed to mortify Juliana by compliments to Phœbe on 'doing it stylishly, careering in Acton's turn-out,' but when the elder sister explained where she had been, Mervyn, too, deserted her, and turned away with a fierce imprecation on his brother, such as was misery to Phœbe's ears. He was sourly ill-humoured all the evening; Juliana wreaked her displeasure on Sir Bevil in ungraciousness, till such silence and gloom descended on him, that he was like another man from him who had smiled on Phœbe in the afternoon. Yet, though dismayed at the offence she had given, and grieved at these evidences of Robert's ill-odour with his family, Phœbe could not regret having seized her single chance of seeing Robert's dwelling for herself, nor the having made him known to Sir Bevil. The one had made her satisfied, the other hopeful, even while she recollected, with foreboding, that truth sometimes comes not with peace, but with a sword, to set at variance parent and child, and make foes of them of the same household.

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Juliana never forgave that drive. She continued bitter towards Phœbe, and kept such a watch over her and Sir Bevil, that the jealous surveillance became palpable to both. Sir Bevil really wanted to tell Phœbe the unsatisfactory result of his pleading for Robert; she wanted to tell him of Robert's gratitude for his offered gift; but the exchange of any words in private was out of their power, and each silently felt that it was best to make no move towards one another till the unworthy jealousy should have died away.

Though Sir Bevil had elicited nothing but abuse of 'pigheaded folly,' his espousal of the young clergyman's cause was not without effect. Robert was not treated with more open disfavour than he had often previously endured, and was free to visit the party at Farrance's, if he chose to run the risk of encountering his father's blunt coldness, Mervyn's sulky dislike, and Juliana's sharp satire, but as he generally came so as to find his mother and Phœbe alone, some precious moments compensated for the various disagreeables. Nor did these affect him nearly as much as they did his sister. It was, in fact, one of his remaining unwholesome symptoms that he rather enjoyed persecution, and took no pains to avoid giving offence. If he meant to be uncompromising, he sometimes was simply provoking, and Phœbe feared that Sir Bevil thought him an unpromising *protégé*.

He was asked to the Christmas dinner at the Bannermans', and did not fulfil Augusta's prediction that he would say it was a fast day, and refuse. That evening gave Phœbe her best *tête-à-tête* with him, but she observed that all was about Whittingtonia, not one word of the past summer, not so much as an inquiry for Miss Charlecote. Evidently that page in his history was closed for ever, and if he should carry out his designs in their present form, a wife at the intended institution would be an impossibility. How near the dearest may be to one another, and yet how little can they guess at what they would most desire to know.

Sir Bevil had insisted on his being asked to perform the ceremony, and she longed to understand whether his refusal were really on the score of his being a deacon, or if he had any further motive. His own family were affronted, though glad to be left free to request the services of the greatest dignitary of their acquaintance, and Sir Bevil's blunt 'No, no, poor fellow! say no more about it,' made her suppose that he suspected that Robert's vehemence in his parish was meant to work off a disappointment.

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It was a dreary wedding, in spite of London grandeur. In all her success, Juliana could not help looking pinched and ill at ease, her wreath and veil hardening instead of softening her features, and her bridegroom's studious cheerfulness and forced laughs became him less than his usual silent dejection. The Admiral was useful in getting up stock wedding-wit, but Phœbe wondered how any one could laugh at it; and her fellow-bridesmaids, all her seniors, seemed to her, as perhaps she might to them, like thoughtless children, playing with the surface of things. She pitied Sir Bevil, and saw little chance of happiness for either, yet heard only congratulations, and had to be bright, busy, and helpful, under a broad, stiff, white watered silk scarf, beneath which Juliana had endeavoured to extinguish her, but in which her tall rounded shape looked to great advantage. Indeed, that young rosy face, and the innocently pensive wondering eyes were so sweet, that the bride had to endure hearing admiration of her sister from all quarters, and the Acton bridesmaids whispered rather like those at Netherby Hall.

It was over, and Phœbe was the reigning Miss Fulmort. Her friends were delighted for her and for themselves, and her mother entered on the full enjoyment of the little brougham.

CHAPTER XI

When some dear scheme
Of our life doth seem
Shivered at once like a broken dream
And our hearts to reel
Like ships that feel
A sharp rock grating against their keel.—C. F. A.

It was high summer; and in spite of cholera-averting thunderstorms, the close streets and the odour of the Thames were becoming insufferable. Mr. Parsons arranged a series of breathing times for his clerical staff, but could make Robert Fulmort accept none. He was strong and healthy, ravenous of work, impervious to disgusts, and rejected holidays as burdensome and hateful. Where should he go? What could he do? What would become of his wild scholars without him, and who would superintend his buildings?

Mr. Parsons was fain to let him have his own way, as had happened in some previous instances, specially the edifice in Cicely Row, where the incumbent would have paused, but the curate rushed on with resolute zeal and impetuosity, taking measures so decidedly ere his intentions were revealed, that neither remonstrance nor prevention were easy, and a species of annoyed, doubtful admiration alone was possible. It was sometimes a gratifying reflection to the vicar, that when the buildings were finished, Whittingtonia would become a district, and its busy curate be no longer under his jurisdiction. p. 260

Meantime Robert was left with a companion in priest's orders, but newer to the parish than himself, to conduct the services at St. Wulstan's, while the other curates were taking holiday, and the vicar at his son's country-house. To see how contentedly, nay, pleasurably, 'Fulmort' endured perpetual broiling, passing from frying school to grilling pavement, and seething human hive, was constant edification to his colleague, who, fresh from the calm university, felt such a life to be a slow martyrdom, and wished his liking for the deacon were in better proportion to his esteem.

'A child to be baptized at 8, Little Whittington-street,' he said, with resigned despair, as at the vestry door he received a message from a small maid, one afternoon, when the air looked lucid yellow with sultry fire.

'I'll go,' replied Robert, with the alacrity that sometimes almost irritated his fellows; and off he sped, with alert steps, at which his friend gazed with the sensation of watching a salamander.

Little Whittington-street, where it was not warehouses, was chiefly occupied by small tradesfolk, or by lodging-houses for the numerous 'young men' employed in the City. It was one of the most respectable parts of that quarter, but being much given to dissent, was little frequented by the clergy, who had too much immorality to contend with, to have leisure to speak against schism.

When he rang at No. 8, the little maid ushered him down a narrow, dark staircase, and announcing, 'Please, ma'am, here's the minister,' admitted him into a small room, feeling like a cellar, the window opening into an area. It was crowded with gay and substantial furniture, and contained two women, one lying on a couch, partially hidden by a screen, the other an elderly person, in a widow's cap, with an infant in her arms.

'Good morning, sir; we were sorry to trouble you, but I felt certain, as I told my daughter, that a minister of the Gospel would not tarry in time of need. Not that I put my trust in ordinances, sir; I have been blest with the enlightenment of the new birth, but my daughter, sir, she follows the Church. Yes, sir, the poor little lamb is a sad sufferer in this vale of tears. So wasted away, you see; you would not think he was nine weeks old. We would have brought him to church before, sir, only my daughter's illness, and her 'usband's absence. It was always her wish, sir, and I was not against it, for many true Christians have found grace in the Church, sir.'

Robert considered whether to address himself to the young mother, whose averted face and uneasy movements seemed to show that this stream of words was distressing to her. He thought silence would be best procured by his assumption of his office, and quietly made his preparations, opened his book, and took his place. p. 261

The young woman, raising herself with difficulty, said in a low, sweet voice, 'The gentleman is ready, mother.'

As there was no pressing danger, he read the previous collects, the elder female responding with devout groans, the younger sinking on her knees, her face hidden in her wasted hands. He took the little feeble being in his arms, and demanded the name.

'Hoeing Charterhouse,' replied the grandmother.

He looked interrogative, and Hoeing Charterhouse was repeated.

'Owen Charteris,' said the low, sweet voice.

A thrill shot over his whole frame, as his look met a large, full, liquid pair of dark eyes, such as once seen could never be forgotten, though dropped again instantly, while a burning blush arose, instantly veiled by the hands, which hid all up to the dark hair.

Recalling himself by an effort, he repeated the too familiar name, and baptized the child, bending his head over it afterwards in deep compassion and mental entreaty both for its welfare, and his

own guidance in the tissue of wrongdoing thus disclosed. A hasty, stealthy glance at the hands covering the mother's face, showed him the ring on her fourth finger, and as they rose from their knees, he said, 'I am to register this child as Owen Charteris Sandbrook.'

With a look of deadly terror, she faintly exclaimed, 'I have done it! You know him, sir; you will not betray him!'

'I know you, too,' said Robert, sternly. 'You were the schoolmistress at Wrapworth!'

'I was, sir. It was all my fault. Oh! promise me, sir, never to betray him; it would be the ruin of his prospects for ever!' And she came towards him, her hands clasped in entreaty, her large eyes shining with feverish lustre, her face wasted but still lovely, a piteous contrast to the queenly being of a year ago in her pretty schoolroom.

'Compose yourself,' said Robert, gravely; 'I hope never to betray any one. I confess that I am shocked, but I will endeavour to act rightly.'

'I am sure, sir,' broke in Mrs. Murrell, with double volume, after her interval of quiescence, 'it is not to be expected but what a gentleman's friends would be offended. It was none of my wish, sir, being that I never knew a word of it till she was married, and it was too late, or I would have warned her against broken cisterns. But as for her, sir, she is as innocent as a miserable sinner can be in a fallen world. It was the young gentleman as sought her out. I always misdoubted the ladies noticing her, and making her take part with men-singers and women-singers, and such vanities as is pleasing to the unregenerate heart. Ah! sir, without grace, where are we? Not that he was ever other than most honourable with her, or she would never have listened to him not for a moment, but she was over-persuaded, sir, and folks said what they hadn't no right to say, and the minister, he was 'ard on her, and so, you see, sir, she took fright and married him out of 'and, trusting to a harm of flesh, and went to Hireland with him. She just writ me a note, which filled my 'art with fear and trembling, a 'nonymous note, with only Hedna signed to it; and I waited, with failing eyes and sorrow of heart, till one day in autumn he brings her back to me, and here she has been ever since, dwining away in a nervous fever, as the doctors call it, as it's a misery to see her, and he never coming nigh her.'

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'Once,' murmured Edna, who had several times tried to interrupt.

'Once, ay, for one hour at Christmas.'

'He is known here; he can't venture often,' interposed the wife; and there was a further whisper, 'he couldn't stay, he couldn't bear it.'

But the dejected accents were lost in the old woman's voice,—'Now, sir, if you know him or his family, I wouldn't be wishing to do him no hinjury, nor to ruinate his prospects, being, as he says, that the rich lady will make him her hare; but, sir, if you have any power with him as a godly minister or the friend of his youth maybe—'

'He is only waiting till he has a curacy—a house of his own—mother!'

'No, Edna, hold your peace. It is not fit that I should see my only child cut down as the grass of the field, and left a burthen upon me, a lone woman, while he is eating of the fat of the land. I say it is scandalous that he should leave her here, and take no notice; not coming near her since one hour at Christmas, and only just sending her a few pounds now and then; not once coming to see his own child!'

'He could not; he is abroad!' pleaded Edna.

'He tells you he is abroad!' exclaimed Robert.

'He went to Paris at Easter. He promised to come when he comes home.'

'You poor thing!' burst out Robert. 'He is deceiving you! He came back at the end of three weeks. I heard from my sister that she saw him on Sunday.'

Robert heartily rued his abruptness, as the poor young wife sank back in a deadly swoon. The grandmother hurried to apply remedies, insisting that the gentleman should not go, and continuing all the time her version of her daughter's wrongs. Her last remnant of patience had vanished on learning this deception, and she only wanted to publish her daughter's claims, proceeding to establish them by hastening in search of the marriage certificate as soon as Edna had begun to revive, but sooner than Robert was satisfied to be left alone with the inanimate, helpless form on the couch.

He was startled when Edna raised her hand, and strove to speak,—'Sir, do not tell—do not tell my mother where he is. She must not fret him—she must not tell his friends—he would be angry.'

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She ceased as her mother returned with the certificate of the marriage, contracted last July before the registrar of the huge suburban Union to which Wrapworth belonged, the centre of which was so remote, that the pseudo-banns of Owen Charteris Sandbrook and Edna Murrell had attracted no attention.

'It was very wrong,' feebly said Edna; 'I drew him into it! I loved him so much; and they all talked so after I went in the boat with him, that I thought my character was gone, and I begged him to save me from them. It was my fault, sir; and I've the punishment. You'll not betray him, sir; only don't let that young lady, your sister, trust to him. Not yet. My baby and I shall soon be

out of her way.'

The calm languor of her tone was almost fearful, and even as she spoke a shuddering seized her, making her tremble convulsively, her teeth knocking together, and the couch shaking under her.

'You must have instant advice,' cried Robert. 'I will fetch some one.'

'You won't betray him,' almost shrieked Edna. 'A little while—stay a little while—he will be free of me.'

There was delirium in look and voice, and he was compelled to pause and assure her that he was only going for the doctor, and would come again before taking any other step.

It was not till the medical man had been summoned that his mind recurred to the words about his sister. He might have dismissed them as merely the jealous suspicion of the deserted wife, but that he remembered Lucilla's hint as to an attachment between Owen and Phœbe, and he knew that such would have been most welcome to Miss Charlecote.

'My Phœbe, my one bright spot!' was his inward cry, 'must your guileless happiness be quenched! O, I would rather have it all over again myself than that one pang should come near you, in your sweetness and innocence, the blessing of us all! And I not near to guard nor warn! What may not be passing even now? Unprincipled, hard-hearted deceiver, walking at large among those gentle, unsuspecting women—trading on their innocent trust! Would that I had disclosed the villainy I knew of!'

His hand clenched, his brow lowered, and his mouth was set so savagely, that the passing policeman looked in wonder from the dangerous face to the clerical dress.

Early next morning he was at No. 8, and learnt that Mrs. Brook, as the maid called her, had been very ill all night, and that the doctor was still with her. Begging to see the doctor, Robert found that high fever had set in, an aggravation of the low nervous fever that had been consuming her strength all the spring, and her condition was already such that there was little hope of her surviving the present attack. She had been raving all night about the young lady with whom Mr. Sandbrook had been walking by moonlight, and when the door of the little adjoining bedroom was open, her moans and broken words were plainly audible.

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Robert asked whether he should fetch her husband, and Mrs. Murrell caught at the offer. Owen's presence was the single hope of restoring her, and at least he ought to behold the wreck that he had wrought. Mrs. Murrell gave a terrible thrust by saying, 'that the young lady at least ought to be let know, that she might not be trusting to him.'

'Do not fear, Mrs. Murrell,' he said, almost under his breath. 'My only doubt is, whether I can meet Owen Sandbrook as a Christian should.'

Cutting off her counsels on the unconverted nature, he strode off to find his colleague, whom he perplexed by a few rapid words on the necessity of going into the country for the day. His impatient condition required vehement action; and with a sense of hurrying to rescue Phœbe, he could scarcely brook the slightest delay till he was on his way to Hiltonbury, nor till the train spared him all action could he pause to collect his strength, guard his resentment, or adjust his measures for warning, but not betraying. He could think of no honourable mode of dealing, save carrying off Owen to London with him at once, sacrificing the sight of his sister for the present, and either writing or going to her afterwards, when the mode of dealing the blow should be more evident. It cost him keen suffering to believe that this was the sole right course, but he had bound himself to it by his promise to the poor suffering wife, blaming himself for continually putting his sister before her in his plans.

At Elverslope, on his demand for a fly for Hiltonbury, he was answered that all were engaged for the Horticultural Show in the Forest; but the people at the station, knowing him well, made willing exertions to procure a vehicle for him, and a taxed cart soon making its appearance, he desired to be taken, not to the Holt, but to the Forest, where he had no doubt that he should find the object of his search.

This Horticultural Show was the great gaiety of the year. The society had originated with Humfrey Charlecote, for the benefit of the poor as well as the rich; and the summer exhibition always took place under the trees of a fragment of the old Forest, which still survived at about five miles from Hiltonbury. The day was a county holiday. The delicate orchid and the crowned pine were there, with the hairy gooseberry, the cabbage and potato, and the homely cottage-garden nosegay from many a woodland hamlet. The young ladies competed in collections of dried flowers for a prize botany book; and the subscriptions were so arranged that on this festival each poorer member might, with two companions, be provided with a hearty meal; while grandees and farmers had a luncheon-tent of their own, and regarded the day as a county picnic.

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It was a favourite affair with all, intensely enjoyed, and full of good neighbourhood. Humfrey Charlecote's spirit never seemed to have deserted it; it was a gathering of distant friends, a delight of children as of the full grown; and while the young were frantic for its gipsying fun, their elders seldom failed to attend, if only in remembrance of poor Mr. Charlecote, 'who had begged one and all not to let it drop.'

Above all, Honora felt it due to Humfrey to have prize-roots and fruits from the Holt, and would have thought herself fallen, indeed, had the hardest rain kept her from the rendezvous, with one

wagon carrying the cottagers' articles, and another a troop of school-children. No doubt the Forest would be the place to find Owen Sandbrook, but for the rest—

From the very extremity of his perplexity, Robert's mind sought relief in external objects. So joyous were the associations with the Forest road on a horticultural day, that the familiar spots could not but revive them. Those green glades, where the graceful beeches retreated, making cool green galleries with their slender gleaming stems, reminded him of his putting his new pony to speed to come up with the Holt carriage; that scathed oak had a tradition of lightning connected with it; yonder was the spot where he had shown Lucilla a herd of deer; here the rising ground whence the whole scene could be viewed, and from force of habit he felt exhilarated as he gazed down the slope of heather, where the fine old oaks and beeches, receding, had left an open space, now covered with the well-known tents; there the large one, broadly striped with green, containing the show; there the white marquees for the eaters; the Union Jack's gay colours floating lazily from a pole in the Outlaw's Knoll; the dark, full foliage of the forest, and purple tints of the heather setting off the bright female groups in their delicate summer gaieties. Vehicles of all degrees—smart barouche, lengthy britzschka, light gig, dashing pony-carriage, rattling shanderadan, and gorgeous wagon—were drawn up in treble file, minus their steeds; the sounds of well-known tunes from the band were wafted on the wind, and such an air of jocund peace and festivity pervaded the whole, that for a moment he had a sense of holiday-making ere he sighed at the shade that he was bringing on that scene of merriment.

Reaching the barrier, he paid his entrance-money, and desiring the carriage to wait, walked rapidly down the hill. On one side of the road was the gradual sweep of open heath, on the other was a rapid slope, shaded by trees, and covered with fern, growing tall and grand as it approached the moist ground in the hollow below. Voices made him turn his head in that direction. Aloof from the rest of the throng he beheld two figures half-way down the bank, so nearly hidden among the luxuriant, wing-like fronds of the Osmond royal which they were gathering, that at first only their hats were discernible—a broad gray one, with drooping feather, and a light Oxford boating straw hat. The merry ring of the clear girlish voice, the deep-toned replies, told him more than his first glance did; and with one inward ejaculation for self-command, he turned aside to the descent.

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The rustling among the copsewood caught the ear of Phœbe, who was the highest up, and, springing up like a fawn in the covert, she cried,—‘Robin! dear Robin! how delicious!’ but ere she had made three bounds towards him, his face brought her to a pause, and, in an awe-struck voice, she asked, ‘Robert, what is it?’

‘It does not concern you, dearest; at least, I hope not. I want Owen Sandbrook.’

‘Then it is *she*. O Robin, can you bear it?’ she whispered, clinging to him, terrified by the agitated fondness of his embrace.

‘I know nothing of *her*,’ was his answer, interrupted by Owen, who, raising his handsome, ruddy face from beneath, shouted mirthfully—

‘Ha! Phœbe, what interloper have you caught? What, Fulmort, not quite grilled in the Wulstonian oven?’

‘I was in search of you. Wait there, Phœbe,’ said Robert, advancing to meet Owen, with a gravity of countenance that provoked an impatient gesture, and the question—

‘Come, have it out! Do you mean that you have been ferreting out some old scrape of mine?’

‘I mean,’ said Robert, looking steadily at him, ‘that I have been called in to baptize your sick child. Your wife is dying, and you must hasten if you would see her alive.’

‘That won't do. You know better than that,’ returned Owen, with ill-concealed agitation, partaking of anger. ‘She was quite recovered when last I heard, but she is a famous hand at getting up a scene; and that mother of hers would drive Job out of his senses. They have worked on your weak mind. I was an ass to trust to the old woman's dissent for hindering them from finding you out, and getting up a scene.’

‘They did not. It was by accident that I was the person who answered the summons. They knew neither me nor my name, so you may acquit them of any preparation. I recognized your name, which I was desired to give to the child; and then, in spite of wasting, terror, and deadly sickness, I knew the mother. She has been pining under low nervous fever, still believing you on the Continent; and the discovery that she had been deceived, was such a shock as to bring on a violent attack, which she is not likely to have strength to survive.’

‘I never told her I was still abroad,’ said Owen, in a fretful tone of self-defence. ‘I only had my letters forwarded through my scout; for I knew I should have no peace nor safety if the old woman knew where to find me, and preach me crazy; and I could not be going to see after her, for, thanks to Honor Charlecote and her schools, every child in Whittingtonia knows me by sight. I told her to be patient till I had a curacy, and was independent; but it seems she could not be. I'll run up as soon as I can get some plea for getting away from the Holt.’

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‘Death will leave no time for your excuses,’ said Robert. ‘By setting off at once, you may catch the five o'clock express at W---’

‘Well, it is your object to have a grand explosion! When I am cut out, you and Cilly may make a

good thing of it. I wish you joy! Ha! by Jove!' he muttered, as he saw Phœbe waiting out of earshot. And then, turning from Robert, who was dumb in the effort to control a passionate reply, he called out, 'Good-bye, Phœbe; I beg your pardon, but you see I am summoned. Family claims are imperative!'

'What is the matter?' said the maiden, terrified not only at his tone, but at the gestures of her brother of fierce, suppressed menace towards him, despairing protection towards her.

'Why, he has told you! Matter enough, isn't it? I'm a married man. I ask your compassion!' with a bitter laugh.

'It is you who have told her,' said Robert, who, after a desperate effort, had forced all violence from his voice and language. 'Traitor as you consider me, your secret had not crossed my lips. But no—there is no time to waste on disputes. Your wife is sinking under neglect; and her seeing you once more may depend on your not loitering away these moments.'

'I don't believe it. Canting and tragedy queening. Taking him in! I know better!' muttered Owen, sullenly, as he moved up the bank.

'O Robin, how can he be so hard?' whispered Phœbe, as she met her brother's eyes wistfully fixed on her face.

'He is altogether selfish and heartless,' returned Robert, in the same inaudible voice. 'My Phœbe, give me this one comfort. You never listened to him?'

'There was nothing to listen to,' said Phœbe, turning her clear, surprised eyes on him. 'You couldn't think him so bad as that. O Robin, how silly!'

'What were you doing here?' he asked, holding her arm tight.

'Only Miss Fennimore wanted some Osmunda, and Miss Charlecote sent him to show me where it grew; because she was talking to Lady Raymond.'

The free simplicity of her look made Robert breathe freely. Charity was coming back to him.

At the same moment Owen turned, his face flushed, and full of emotion, but the obduracy gone.

'I may take a long leave! When you see Honor Charlecote, Fulmort—'

'I shall not see her. I am going back with you,' said Robert, instantly deciding, now that he felt that he could both leave Phœbe, and trust himself with the offender.

'You think I want to escape!'

'No; but I have duties to return to. Besides, you will find a scene for which you are little prepared; and which will cost you the more for your present mood. I may be of use there. Your secret is safe with Phœbe and me. I promised your wife to keep it, and we will not rob you of the benefit of free confession.'

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'And what is to explain my absence? No, no, the secret is one no longer, and it has been intolerable enough already,' said Owen, recklessly. 'Poor Honor, it will be a grievous business, and little Phœbe will be a kind messenger. Won't you, Phœbe? I leave my cause in your hands.'

'But,' faltered Phœbe, 'she should hear who—'

'Simple child, you can't draw inferences. Cilla wouldn't have asked. Don't you remember her darling at Wrapworth? People shouldn't throw such splendid women in one's way, especially when they are made of such inflammable materials, and take fire at a civil word. So ill, poor thing! Now, Robert, on your honour, has not the mother been working on you?'

'I tell you not what the mother told me, but what the medical man said. Low nervous fever set in long ago, and she has never recovered her confinement. Heat and closeness were already destroying her, when my disclosure that you were not abroad, as she had been led to believe, brought on fainting, and almost immediate delirium. This was last evening, she was worse this morning.'

'Poor girl, poor girl!' muttered Owen, his face almost convulsed with emotion. 'There was no helping it. She would have drowned herself if I had not taken her with me—quite capable of it! after those intolerable women at Wrapworth had opened fire. I wish women's tongues were cut out by act of parliament. So, Phœbe, tell poor Honor that I know I am unpardonable, but I am sincerely sorry for her. I fell into it, there's no knowing how, and she would pity me, and so would you, if you knew what I have gone through. Good-bye, Phœbe. Most likely I shall never see you again. Won't you shake hands, and tell me you are sorry for me?'

'I should be, if you seemed more sorry for your wife than yourself,' she said, holding out her hand, but by no means prepared for his not only pressing it with fervour, but carrying it to his lips.

Then, as Robert started forward with an impulse of snatching her from him, he almost threw it from his grasp, and with a long sigh very like bitter regret, and a murmur that resembled 'That's a little angel,' he mounted the bank. Robert only tarried to say, 'May I be able to bear with him! Phœbe, do your best for poor Miss Charlecote. I will write.'

Phœbe sat down at the foot of a tree, veiled by the waving ferns, to take breath and understand what had passed. Her first act was to strike one hand across the other, as though to obliterate the kiss, then to draw off her glove, and drop it in the deepest of the fern, never to be worn again. Hateful! With that poor neglected wife pining to death in those stifling city streets, to be making sport in those forest glades. Shame! shame! But oh! worst of all was his patronizing pity for Miss Charlecote! Phœbe's own mission to Miss Charlecote was dreadful enough, and she could have sat for hours deliberating on the mode of carrying grief and dismay to her friend, who had looked so joyous and exulting with her boy by her side as she drove upon the ground; but there was no time to be lost, and rousing herself into action with strong effort, Phœbe left the fern brake, walking like one in a dream, and exchanging civilities with various persons who wondered to see her alone, made her way to the principal marquee, where luncheon had taken place, and which always served as the rendezvous. Here sat mammas, keeping up talk enough for civility, and peeping out restlessly to cluck their broods together; here gentlemen stood in knots, talking county business; servants congregated in the rear, to call the carriages; stragglers gradually streamed together, and 'Oh! here you are,' was the staple exclamation.

It was uttered by Mrs. Fulmort as Phœbe appeared, and was followed by plaintive inquiries for her sisters, and assurances that it would have been better to have stayed in the cool tent, and gone home at once. Phœbe consoled her by ordering the carriage, and explaining that her sisters were at hand with some other girls, then begged leave to go home with Miss Charlecote for the night.

'My dear, what shall I do with the others without you? Maria has such odd tricks, and Bertha is so teasing without you! You promised they should not tire me!'

'I will beg them to be good, dear mamma; I am very sorry, but it is only this once. She will be alone. Owen Sandbrook is obliged to go away.'

'I can't think what she should want of you,' moaned her mother, 'so used as she is to be alone. Did she ask you?'

'No, she does not know yet. I am to tell her, and that is why I want you to be so kind as to spare me, dear mamma.'

'My dear, it will not do for you to be carrying young men's secrets, at least not Owen Sandbrook's. Your papa would not like it, my dear, until she had acknowledged him for her heir. You have lost your glove, too, Phœbe, and you look so heated, you had better come back with me,' said Mrs. Fulmort, who would not have withstood for a moment a decree from either of her other daughters.

'Indeed,' said Phœbe, 'you need not fear, mamma. It is nothing of that sort, quite the contrary.'

'Quite the contrary! You don't tell me that he has formed another attachment, just when I made sure of your settling at last at the Holt, and you such a favourite with Honor Charlecote. Not one of those plain Miss Raymonds, I hope.'

'I must not tell, till she has heard,' said Phœbe, 'so please say nothing about it. It will vex poor Miss Charlecote sadly, so pray let no one suspect, and I will come back and tell you to-morrow, by the time you are dressed.'

Mrs. Fulmort was so much uplifted by the promise of the grand secret that she made no more opposition, and Maria and Bertha hurried in with Phœbe's glove, which, with the peculiar fidelity of property wilfully lost, had fallen into their hands while searching for Robert. Both declared they had seen him on the hill, and clamorously demanded him of Phœbe. Her answer, 'he is not in the forest, you will not find him,' was too conscious fully to have satisfied the shrewd Bertha, but for the pleasure of discoursing to the other girls upon double gangers, of whom she had stealthily read in some prohibited German literature of her governess's.

Leaving her to astonish them, Phœbe took up a position near Miss Charlecote, who was talking to the good matronly-looking Lady Raymond, and on the first opportunity offered herself as a companion. On the way home, Honor, much pleased, was proposing to find Owen, and walk through a beautiful and less frequented forest path, when she saw her own carriage coming up with that from Beauchamp, and lamented the mistake which must take her away as soon as Owen could be found.

'I ventured to order it,' said Phœbe; 'I thought you might prefer it. Owen is gone. He left a message with me for you.'

Experience of former blows taught Honora to ask no questions, and to go through the offices of politeness as usual. But Lady Raymond, long a friend of hers, though barely acquainted with Mrs. Fulmort, and never having seen Phœbe before, living as she did on the opposite side of the county, took a moment for turning round to the young girl, and saying with a friendly motherly warmth, far from mere curiosity, 'I am sure you have bad news for Miss Charlecote. I see you cannot speak of it now, but you must promise me to send to Moorcroft, if Sir John or I can be of any use.'

Phœbe could only give a thankful grasp of the kind hand. The Raymonds were rather despised at home for plain habits, strong religious opinions, and scanty fortunes, but she knew they were Miss Charlecote's great friends and advisers.

Not till the gay crowd had been left behind did Honor turn to Phœbe, and say gently, 'My dear, if he is gone off in any foolish way, you had better tell me at once, that something may be done.'

'He is gone with Robert,' said Phœbe. 'Bertha did really see Robert. He had made a sad discovery, and came for Owen. Do you remember that pretty schoolmistress at Wrapworth!'

Never had Phœbe seen such a blanched face and dilated eyes as were turned on her, with the gasping words, 'Impossible! they would not have told you.'

'They were obliged,' said Phœbe; 'they had to hurry for the train, for she is very ill indeed.'

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Honor leant back with folded hands and closed eyes, so that Phœbe almost felt as if she had killed her. 'I suppose Robert was right to fetch him,' she said; 'but their telling you!'

'Owen told me he fancied Robert had done so,' said Phœbe, 'and called out to me something about family claims, and a married man.'

'Married!' cried Honora, starting forward. 'You are sure!'

'Quite sure,' repeated Phœbe; 'he desired me to tell you I was to say he knew he was unpardonable, but he had suffered a great deal, and he was grieved at the sorrow you would feel.'

Having faithfully discharged her message, Phœbe could not help being vexed at the relenting 'Poor fellow!'

Honor was no longer confounded, as at the first sentences, and though still cast down, was more relieved than her young friend could understand, asking all that had passed between the young men, and when all had been told, leaning back in silence until, when almost at home, she laid her hand on Phœbe's arm, and said, 'My child, never think yourself safe from idols.'

She then sought her own room, and Phœbe feared that her presence was intrusive, for she saw her hostess no more till teatime, when the wan face and placid smile almost made her weep at first, then wonder at the calm unconstrained manner in which her amusement was provided for, and feel ready to beg not to be treated like a child or a stranger. When parting for the night, however, Honor tenderly said, 'Thanks, my dear, for giving up the evening to me.'

'I have only been an oppression to you.'

'You did me the greatest good. I did not want discussion; I only wanted kindness. I wish I had you always, but it is better not. Their uncle was right. I spoil every one.'

'Pray do not say so. You have been our great blessing. If you knew how we wish to comfort you.'

'You do comfort me. I can watch Robert realizing my visions for others, and you, my twilight moon, my autumn flower. But I must not love you too much, Phœbe. They all suffer for my inordinate affection. But it is too late to talk. Good night, sweet one.'

'Shall you sleep?' said Phœbe, wistfully lingering.

'Yes; I don't enter into it enough to be haunted. Ah! you have never learnt what it is to feel heavy with trouble. I believe I shall not dwell on it till I know more. There may be much excuse; she may have been artful, and at least Owen dealt fairly by her in one respect. I can better suppose her unworthy than him cruelly neglectful.'

In that hope Honor slept, and was not more depressed than Phœbe had seen her under Lucilla's desertion. She put off her judgment till she should hear more, went about her usual occupations, and sent Phœbe home till letters should come, when they would meet again.

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Both heard from Robert by the next post, and his letter to Miss Charlecote related all that he had been able to collect from Mrs. Murrell, or from Owen himself. The narrative is here given more fully than he was able to make it. Edna Murrell, born with the susceptible organization of a musical temperament, had in her earliest childhood been so treated as to foster refined tastes and aspirations, such as disgusted her with the respectable vulgarity of her home. The pet of the nursery and school-room looked down on the lodge kitchen and parlour, and her discontent was a matter of vanity with her parents, as a sign of her superiority, while plausibility and caution were continually enjoined on her rather by example than by precept, and she was often aware of her mother's indulgence of erratic propensities in religion, unknown either to her father or his employers.

Unexceptionable as had been her training-school education, the high cultivation and soundness of doctrine had so acted on her as to keep her farther aloof from her mother, whose far more heartfelt religion appeared to her both distasteful and contemptible, and whose advice was thus cast aside as prejudiced and sectarian.

Such was the preparation for the unprotected life of a schoolmistress in a house by herself. Servants and small tradesfolk were no companions to her, and were offended by her ladylike demeanour; and her refuge was in books that served but to increase the perils of sham romance, and in enthusiastic adoration of the young lady, whose manners apparently placed her on an equality, although her beauty and musical talents were in truth only serving as a toy.

Her face and voice had already been thrust on Owen's notice before the adventure with the

bargeman had constituted the young gentleman the hero of her grateful imagination, and commenced an intercourse for which his sister's inconsiderate patronage gave ample opportunities. His head was full of the theory of fusion of classes, and of the innate refinement, freshness of intellect, and vigour of perception of the unsophisticated, at least so he thought, and when he lent her books, commenting on favourite passages, and talked poetry or popular science to her, he imagined himself walking in the steps of those who were asserting the claims of intelligence to cultivation, and sowing broadcast the seeds of art, literature, and emancipation. Perhaps he knew not how often he was betrayed into tokens of admiration, sufficient to inflame such a disposition as he had to deal with, and if he were aware of his influence, and her adoration, it idly flattered and amused him, without thought of the consequences.

On the night when she had fainted at the sight of his attention to Phœbe, she was left on his hands in a state when all caution and reserve gave way, and her violent agitation fully awakened him to the perception of the expectations he had caused, the force of the feelings he had aroused. A mixture of pity, vanity, and affection towards the beautiful creature before him had led to a response such as did not disappoint her, and there matters might have rested for the present, but that their interview had been observed. Edna, terror-stricken, believing herself irretrievably disgraced, had thrown herself on his mercy in a frantic condition, such as made him dread exposure for himself, as well as suspense for her tempestuous nature.

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With all his faults, the pure atmosphere in which he had grown up, together with the tone of his associates, comparatively free from the grosser and more hard-hearted forms of vice, had concurred with poor Edna's real modesty and principle in obtaining the sanction of marriage, for her flight with him from the censure of Wrapworth, and the rebukes of her mother. Throughout, his feeling had been chiefly stirred up by the actual sight of her beauty, and excited by her fervent passion. When absent from her, there had been always regrets and hesitations, such as would have prevailed, save for his compassion, and dread of the effects of her desperation, both for her and for himself. The unpardonable manner in which he knew himself to have acted, made it needful to plunge deeper for the very sake of concealment.

Yet, once married, he would have been far safer if he had confessed the fact to his only true friend, since it must surely come to light some time or other, but he had bred himself up in the habit of schoolboy shuffling, hiding everything to the last moment, and he could not bear to be cast off by the Charterises, be pitied and laughed at by his Oxford friends, nor to risk Honor Charlecote's favour, perhaps her inheritance. Return to Oxford the victim of an attachment to a village schoolmistress! Better never return thither at all, as would be but too probably the case! No! the secret must be kept till his first start in life should be secure; and he talked to Edna of his future curacy, while she fed her fancy with visions of lovely parsonages and 'clergymen's ladies' in a world of pensive bliss, and after the honeymoon in Ireland, promised to wait patiently, provided her mother might know all.

Owen had not realized the home to which he was obliged to resign his wife, nor his mother-in-law's powers of tongue. There were real difficulties in the way of his visiting her. It was the one neighbourhood in London where his person might be known, and if he avoided daylight, he became the object of especial disapproval to the disappointed lodgers, who would have been delighted to identify the 'Mr. Brook' who had monopolized the object of their admiration. These perils, the various disagreeables, and especially Mrs. Murrell's complaints and demands for money, had so much annoyed Owen, who felt himself the injured party in the connection, that he had not only avoided the place, but endeavoured to dismiss the whole humiliating affair from his mind, trying to hinder himself from being harassed by letters, and when forced to attend to the representations of the women, sending a few kind words and promises, with such money as he could spare, always backed, however, by threats of the consequences of a disclosure, which he vaguely intimated would ruin his prospects for life.

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Little did the thoughtless boy comprehend the cruelty of his neglect. In the underground rooms of the City lodging-house, the voluntary prison of the shame-faced, half-owned wife, the overwrought headache, incidental to her former profession, made her its prey; nervous fever came on as the suspense became more trying, and morbid excitement alternated with torpor and depression. Medical advice was long deferred, and that which was at last sought was not equal to her needs. It remained for the physician, summoned by Robert, in his horror at her delirium, to discover that her brain had long been in a state of irritation, which had become aggravated to such a degree that death was even to be desired. Could she yet survive, it could hardly be to the use of her intellect.

Robert described poor Owen's impetuous misery, and the cares which he lavished on the unconscious sufferer, mentioning him with warmth and tenderness that amazed Honor, from one so stern of judgment. Nay, Robert was more alive to the palliations of Owen's conduct than she was herself. She grieved over the complicated deceit, and resented the cruelty to the wife with the keen severity of secluded womanhood, unable to realize the temptations of young-manhood.

'Why could he not have told me?' she said. 'I could so easily have forgiven him for generous love, if I alone had been offended, and there had been no falsehood; but after the way he has used us all, and chiefly that poor young thing, I can never feel that he is the same.'

And, though the heart that knew no guile had been saved from suffering, the thought of the intimacy that she had encouraged, and the wishes she had entertained for Phœbe, filled her with such dismay, that it required the sight of the innocent, serene face, and the sound of the happy, unembarrassed voice, to reassure her that her darling's peace had not been wrecked. For,

though Owen had never overpassed the bounds of the familiar intercourse of childhood, there had been an implication of preference in his look and tone; nor had there been error in the intuition of poor Edna's jealous passion. Something there was of involuntary reverence that had never been commanded by the far more beautiful and gifted girl who had taken him captive.

So great was the shock that Honora moved about mechanically, hardly able to think. She knew that in time she should pardon her boy; but she could not yearn to do so till she had seen him repent. He had sinned too deeply against others to be taken home at once to her heart, even though she grieved over him with deep, loving pity, and sought to find the original germs of error rather in herself than in him.

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Had she encouraged deceit by credulous trust? Alas! alas! that should but have taught him generosity. It was the old story. Fond affection had led her to put herself into a position to which Providence did not call her, and to which she was, therefore, unequal. Fond affection had blinded her eyes, and fostered in its object the very faults most hateful to her. She could only humble herself before her Maker for the recurring sin, and entreat for her own pardon, and for that of the offender with whose sins she charged herself.

And to man she humbled herself by her confession to Captain Charteris, and by throwing herself unreservedly on the advice of Mr. Saville and Sir John Raymond, for her future conduct towards the culprit. If he were suffering now for her rejection of the counsel of manhood and experience, it was right that they should deal with him now, and she would try to bear it. And she also tried as much as possible to soften the blow to Lucilla, who was still abroad with her cousins.

CHAPTER XII

A little grain of conscience made him sour.

TENNYSON

'A penny for your thoughts, Cilly,' said Horatia, sliding in on the slippery boards of a great bare room of a lodging-house at the celebrated Spa of Spitzwasserfitzung.

'My thoughts? I was trying to recollect the third line of

"Sated at home, of wife and children tired,
Sated abroad, all seen and naught admired."

'Bless me, how grand! Worth twopence. So good how Shakspeare, as the Princess Otilie would say!'

'Twopence for its sincerity! It is not for your sake that I am not in Old England.'

'Nor for that of the three flaxen-haired princesses, with religious opinions to be accommodated to those of the crowned heads they may marry?'

'I'm sick of the three, and their raptures. I wish I was as ignorant as you, and that Shakspeare had never been read at the Holt.'

'This is a sudden change. I thought Spitzwasserfitzung and its princesses had brought halcyon days.'

'Halcyon days will never come till we get home.'

'Which Lolly will never do. She passes for somebody here, and will never endure Castle Blanch again.'

'I'll make Owen come and take me home.'

'No,' said Rashe, seriously, 'don't bring Owen here. If Lolly likes to keep Charles where gaming is man's sole resource, don't run Owen into that scrape.'

'What a despicable set you are!' sighed Lucilla. 'I wonder why I stay with you.'

'You might almost as well be gone,' said Ratia. 'You aren't half so useful in keeping things going as you were once; and you won't be ornamental long, if you let your spirits be so uncertain.'

'And pray how is that to be helped? No, don't come out with that stupid thing.'

'Commonplace because it is reasonable. You would have plenty of excitement in the engagement, and then no end of change, and settle down into a blooming little matron, with all the business of the world on your hands. You have got him into excellent training by keeping him dangling so long; and it is the only chance of keeping your looks or your temper. By the time I come and stay with you, you'll be so agreeable you won't know yourself—'

'Blessings on that hideous post-horn for stopping your mouth!' cried Lucilla, springing up. 'Not that letters ever come to me.'

Letters and Mr. and Mrs. Charteris all entered together, and Rashe was busy with her own share, when Lucilla came forward with a determined face, unlike her recent listless look, and said, 'I am wanted at home. I shall start by the diligence to-night.'

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'How now?' said Charles. 'The old lady wanting you to make her will?'

'No,' said Lucilla, with dignity. 'My brother's wife is very ill. I must go to her.'

'Is she demented?' asked Charles, looking at his sister.

'Raving,' was the answer. 'She has been so the whole morning. I shall cut off her hair, and get ice for her head.'

'I tell simple truth,' returned Cilla. 'Here is a letter from Honor Charlecote, solving the two mysteries of last summer. Owen's companion, who Rashe would have it was Jack Hastings—'

'Ha! married, then! The cool hand! And verily, but that Cilly takes it so easily, I should imagine it was her singing prodigy—eh? It was, then?'

'Absurd idiot!' exclaimed Charles. 'There, he is done for now!'

'Yes,' drawled Eloïsa; 'one never could notice a low person like that.'

'She is my sister, remember!' cried Lucilla, with stamping foot and flashing eye.

'Cunning rogue!' continued Horatia. 'How did he manage to give no suspicion? Oh! what fun! No wonder she looked green and yellow when he was flirting with the little Fulmort! Let's hear all, Cilly—how, when, and where?'

'At the Registrar's, at R---, July 14th, 1854,' returned Lucilla, with defiant gravity.

'Last July!' said Charles. 'Ha! the young donkey was under age—hadn't consent of guardian. I don't believe the marriage will hold water. I'll write to Stevens this minute.'

'Well, that would be luck!' exclaimed Rashe.

'Much better than he deserves,' added Charles, 'to be such a fool as to run into the noose and marry the girl.'

Lucilla was trembling from head to foot, and a light gleamed in her eyes; but she spoke so quietly that her cousins did not apprehend her intention in the question—

'You mean what you say?'

'Of course I do,' said Charles. 'I'm not sure of the law, and some of the big-wigs are very cantankerous about declaring an affair of this sort null; but I imagine there is a fair chance of his getting quit for some annual allowance to her; and I'll do my best, even if I had to go to London about it. A man is never ruined till he is married.'

'Thank you,' returned Lucilla, her lips trembling with bitter irony. 'Now I know what you all are made of. We are obliged for your offered exertion, but we are not inclined to become traitors.'

'Cilly! I thought you had more sense! You are no child!'

'I am a woman—I feel for womanhood. I am a sister—I feel for my brother's honour.'

Charles burst into a laugh. Eloïsa remonstrated—'My dear, consider the disgrace to the whole family—a village schoolmistress!'

'Our ideas differ as to disgrace,' said Lucilla. 'Let me go, Ratia; I must pack for the diligence.'

The brother and sister threw themselves between her and the door. 'Are you insane, Cilly? What do you mean should become of you? Are you going to join the *ménage*, and teach the A B C?'

'I am going to own my sister while yet there is time,' said Lucilla. 'While you are meditating how to make her a deserted outcast, death is more merciful. Pining under the miseries of an unowned marriage, she is fast dying of pressure on the brain. I am going in the hope of hearing her call me sister. I am going to take charge of her child, and stand by my brother.'

'Dying, poor thing! Why did you not tell us before?' said Horatia, sobered.

'I did not know it was to save Charles so much *kind trouble*,' said Lucilla. 'Let me go, Rashe; you cannot detain me.'

'I do believe she is delighted,' said Horatia, releasing her.

In truth, she was inspirited by perceiving any door of escape. Any vivid sensation was welcome in the irksome vacancy that pursued her in the absence of immediate excitement. Devoid of the interest of opposition, and of the bracing changes to the Holt, her intercourse with the Charterises had become a weariness and vexation of spirit. Idle foreign life deteriorated them, and her principle and delicacy suffered frequent offences; but like all living wilfully in temptation, she seemed under a spell, only to be broken by an act of self-humiliation to which she would not bend. Longing for the wholesome atmosphere of Hiltonbury, she could not brook to purchase her entrance there by permitting herself to be pardoned. There was one whom she fully intended should come and entreat her return, and the terms of her capitulation had many a time been arranged with herself; but when he came not, though her heart ached after him, pride still forbade one homeward step, lest it should seem to be in quest of him, or in compliance with his wishes.

Here, then, was a summons to England—nay, into his very parish—without compromising her pride or forcing her to show deference to rejected counsel. Nay, in contrast with her cousins, she felt her sentiments so lofty and generous that she was filled with the gladness of conscious goodness, so like the days of her early childhood, that a happy dew suffused her eyes, and she seemed to hear the voice of old Thames. Her loathing for the views of her cousins had borne down all resentment at her brother's folly and Edna's presumption; and relieved that it was not worse, and full of pity for the girl she had really loved, Honor's grieved displeasure and Charles's kind project together made her the ardent partisan of the young wife. Because Honor intimated that the girl had been artful, and had forced herself on Owen, Lucilla was resolved that her favourite had been the most perfect of heroines; and that circumstance alone should bear such blame as could not be thrown on Honor herself and the Wrapworth gossipry. Poor circumstances!

The journey gave her no concern. The way was direct to Ostend, and Spitzwasserfirtung contained a '*pension*,' which was a great resort of incipient English governesses, so that there were no difficulties such as to give her enterprising spirit the least concern. She refused the escort that Rashe would have pressed upon her, and made her farewells with quiet resolution. No further remonstrance was offered; and though each party knew that what had passed would be a barrier for ever, good breeding preferred an indifferent parting. There were light, cheery words, but under the full consciousness that the friendship begun in perverseness had ended in contempt.

Horatia turned aside with a good-natured 'Poor child! she will soon wish herself back.' Lucilla, taking her last glance, sighed as she thought, 'My father did not like them. But for Honor, I would never have taken up with them.'

Without misadventure, Lucilla arrived at London Bridge, and took a cab for Woolstone-lane, where she must seek more exact intelligence of the locality of those she sought. So long had her eye been weary of novelty, while her mind was ill at ease, that even Holborn in the August sun was refreshingly homelike; and begrimed Queen Anne, 'sitting in the sun' before St. Paul's, wore a benignant aspect to glances full of hope and self-approval. An effort was necessary to recall how melancholy was the occasion of her journey, and all mournful anticipation was lost in the spirit of partisanship and patronage—yes, and in that pervading consciousness that each moment brought her nearer to Whittingtonia.

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Great was the amaze of good Mrs. Jones, the housekeeper, at the arrival of Miss Lucy, and equal disappointment that she would neither eat nor rest, nor accept a convoy to No. 8, Little Whittington-street. She tripped off thither the instant she had ascertained the number of the house, and heard that her brother was there, and his wife still living.

She had formed to herself no image of the scenes before her, and was entirely unprepared by reflection when she rang at the door. As soon as she mentioned her name, the little maid conducted her down-stairs, and she found herself in the sitting-room, face to face with Robert Fulmort.

Without showing surprise or emotion, or relaxing his grave, listening air, he merely bowed his head, and held out his hand. There was an atmosphere of awe about the room, as though she had interrupted a religious office; and she stood still in the solemn hush, her lips parted, her bosom heaving. The opposite door was ajar, and from within came a kind of sobbing moan, and a low, feeble, faltering voice faintly singing—

'For men must work, and women must weep,
And the sooner 'tis over, the sooner to sleep.'

The choking thrill of unwonted tears rushed over Lucilla, and she shuddered. Robert looked disappointed as he caught the notes; then placing a seat for Lucilla, said, very low, 'We hoped she would waken sensible. Her mother begged me to be at hand.'

'Has she never been sensible?'

'They hoped so, at one time, last night. She seemed to know him.'

'Is he there?'

Robert only sighed assent, for again the voice was heard—'I must get up. Miss Sandbrook wants me. She says I shan't be afraid when the time comes; but oh!—so many, many faces—all their eyes looking; and where is he?—why doesn't he look? Oh! Miss Sandbrook, don't bring that young lady here—I know—I know it is why he never comes—keep her away—'

The voice turned to shrieking sobs. There were sounds of feet and hurried movements, and Owen came out, gasping for breath, and his face flushed. 'I can't bear it,' he said, with his hands over his face.

'Can I be of use?' asked Robert.

'No; the nurse can hold her;' and he leant his arms on the mantelpiece, his frame shaken with long-drawn sobs. He had never even seen his sister, and she was too much appalled to speak or move.

When the sounds ceased, Owen looked up to listen, and Robert said, 'Still no consciousness?'

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'No, better not. What would she gain by it?'

'It must be better not, if so ordained,' said Robert.

'Pshaw! what are last feelings and words? As if a blighted life and such suffering were not sure of compensation. There's more justice in Heaven than in your system!'

He was gone; and Robert with a deep sigh said, 'I am not judging. I trust there were tokens of repentance and forgiveness; but it is painful, as her mother feels it, to hear how her mind runs on light songs and poetry.'

'Mechanically!'

'True; and delirium is no criterion of the state of mind. But it is very mournful. In her occupation, one would have thought habit alone would have made her ear catch other chimes.'

Lucilla remembered with a pang that she had sympathized with Edna's weariness of the monotony of hymn and catechism. Thinking poetry rather dull and tiresome, she had little guessed at the effect of sentimental songs and volumes of L. E. L. and the like, on an inflammable mind, when once taught to slake her thirsty imagination beyond the S.P.C.K. She did not marvel at the set look of pain with which Robert heard passionate verses of Shelley and Byron fall from those dying lips. They must have been conned by heart, and have been the favourite study, or they could hardly thus recur.

'I must go,' said Robert, after a time; 'I am doing no good here. You will take care of your brother, if it is over before I return. Where are you?'

'My things are in Woolstone-lane.'

'I meant to get him there. I will come back by seven o'clock; but I must go to the school.'

'May I go in there?'

'You had better not. It is a fearful sight, and you cannot be of use. I wish you could be out of hearing; but the house is full.'

'One moment, Robert—the child?'

'Sent to a nurse, when every sound was agony.'

He stepped into the sick room, and brought out Mrs. Murrell, who began with a curtsy, but eagerly pressed Lucilla's offered hand. Subdued by sorrow and watching, she was touchingly meek and resigned, enduring with the patience of real faith, and only speaking to entreat that Mr. Fulmort would pray with her for her poor child. Never had Lucilla so prayed; and ere she had suppressed her tears, ere rising from her knees, Robert was gone.

She spent the ensuing hours of that summer evening, seated in the arm-chair, barely moving, listening to the ticking of the clock, and the thunder of the streets, and at times hearkening to the sounds in the inner chamber, the wanderings feebler and more rare, but the fearful convulsions more frequent, seeming, as it were, to be tearing away the last remnant of life. These moments of horror-struck suspense were the only breaks, save when Owen rushed out unable to bear the sight, and stood, with hidden face, in such absorption of distress as to be unconscious of her awe-struck attempts to obtain his attention, or when Mrs. Murrell came to fetch something, order her maid, or relieve herself by a few sad words to her guest. Gratified by the eager sisterly acknowledgment of poor Edna, she touched Lucilla deeply by speaking of her daughter's fondness for Miss Sandbrook, grief at having given cause for being thought ungrateful, and assurances that the secret never could have been kept had they met the day after the *soirée*. Many had been the poor thing's speculations how Miss Sandbrook would receive her marriage, but always with confidence in her final mercy and justice: and when Lucilla heard of the prolonged wretchedness, the hope deferred, the evil reports and suspicions of neighbours and lodgers, the failing health, and cruel disappointment, and looked round at the dismal little stifling dungeon where this fair and gifted being had pined and sunk beneath slander and desertion, hot tears of indignation filled her eyes, and with fingers clenching together, she said, 'Oh that I had known it sooner! Edna was right. I will be the person to see justice done to her!'

And when left alone she cast about for the most open mode of proclaiming Edna Murrell her brother's honoured wife, and her own beloved sister. The more it mortified the Charterises the better!

By the time Robert came back, the sole change was in the failing strength, and he insisted on conducting Lucilla to Woolstone-lane, Mrs. Murrell enforcing his advice so decidedly that there was no choice. She would not be denied one look at the sufferer, but what she saw was so miserably unlike the beautiful creature whom she remembered, that she recoiled, feeling the kindness that had forbidden her the spectacle, and passively left the house, still under the chill influence of the shock. She had tasted nothing since breakfasting on board the steamer, and on coming into the street the comparative coolness seemed to strike her through; she shivered, felt her knees give way, and grasped Robert's arm for support. He treated her with watchful, considerate solicitude, though with few words, and did not leave her till he had seen her safe under the charge of the housekeeper; when, in return for his assurance that he would watch over her brother, she promised to take food, and go at once to rest.

Too weary at first to undress, and still thinking that Owen might be brought to her, she lay back on the couch in her own familiar little cedar room, feeling as if she recalled the day through the hazy medium of a dream, and as if she had not been in contact with Edna, nor Owen, nor Robert, but only with pale phantoms called by those names.

Robert especially! Engrossed and awe-stricken as she had been, still it came on her that something was gone that to her had constituted Robert Fulmort. Neither the change of dress, nor even the older and more settled expression of countenance, made the difference; but the want of that nameless, hesitating deference which in each word or action formerly seemed to implore her favour, or even when he dared to censure, did so under appeal to her mercy. Had he avoided her, she could have understood it; but his calm, authoritative self-possession was beyond her, though as yet she was not alarmed, for her mind was too much confused to perceive that her influence was lost; but it was uncomfortable, and part of this strange, unnatural world, as though the wax which she had been used to mould had suddenly lost its yielding nature and become marble.

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Tired out, she at last went to bed, and slept soundly, but awoke early, and on coming down, found from the housekeeper that her brother had been brought home at two o'clock by Mr. Fulmort, and had gone to his room at once. All was over. Lucilla, longing to hear more, set out to see Mrs. Murrell, before he should come down-stairs.

While the good woman was forced to bestir herself for her lodgers' breakfasts, Lucilla could steal a solitary moment to gaze on the pallid face to which death had restored much of its beauty. She pressed her lips on the regal brow, and spoke half aloud, 'Edna, Edna Sandbrook, sister Edna, you should have trusted me. You knew I would see justice done to you, and I will. You shall lie by my mother's side in our own churchyard, and Wrapworth shall know that she, whom they envied and maligned, was Owen Sandbrook's wife and my cherished sister.'

Poor Mrs. Murrell, with her swimming eyes and stock phrases, brought far more Christian sentiments to the bed of death. 'Poor, dear love, her father and I little thought it would end in this, when we used to be so proud of her. We should have minded that pride is not made for sinners. "Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain;" and the Lord saw it well that we should be cast down and slanderous lips opened against us, that so we might feel our trust is in Him alone! Oh, it is good that even thus she was brought to turn to Him! But I thank—oh, I thank Him that her father never lived to see this day!'

She wept such tears of true thankfulness and resignation, that Lucilla, almost abashed by the sight of piety beyond her comprehension, stood silent, till, with a change to the practical, Mrs. Murrell recovered herself, saying, 'If you please, ma'am, when had I best come and speak to the young gentleman? I ought to know what would be pleasing to him about the funeral.'

'We will arrange,' said Lucilla; 'she shall be buried with my mother and sister in Wrapworth churchyard.'

Though gratified, Mrs. Murrell demurred, lest it might be taken ill by the 'family' and by that godly minister whose kindness and sympathy at the time of Edna's evasion had made a deep impression; but Lucilla boldly undertook that the family *must* like it, and she would take care of the minister. Nor was the good woman insensible to the posthumous triumph over calumny, although still with a certain hankering after Kensal Green as a sweet place, with pious monuments, where she should herself be laid, and the Company that did things so reasonable and so handsome.

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Lucilla hurried back to fulfil the mission of Nemesis to the Charterises, which she called justice to Edna, and by the nine o'clock post despatched three notes. One containing the notice for the *Times*—'On the 17th instant, at 8, Little Whittington-street, St. Wulstan's, Edna, the beloved wife of Owen Charteris Sandbrook, Esq.;" another was to order a complete array of mourning from her dressmaker; and the third was to the Reverend Peter Prendergast, in the most simple manner requesting him to arrange for the burial of her sister-in-law, at 5 P.M. on the ensuing Saturday, indicating the labourers who should act as bearers, and ending with, 'You will be relieved by hearing that she was no other than our dear Edna, married on the 14th of July, last year.'

She then beguiled the time with designs for gravestones, until she became uneasy at Owen's non-appearance, and longed to go and see after him; but she fancied he might have spent nights of watching, and thought sleep would be the best means of getting through the interval which appalled her mind, unused to contact with grief. Still his delay began to wear her spirits and expectation, so long wrought up to the meeting; and she was at least equally restless for the appearance of Robert, wanting to hear more from him, and above all certain that all her dreary cravings and vacancy would be appeased by one dialogue with him, on whatever topic it might be. She wished that she had obeyed that morning bell at St. Wulstan's. It would have disposed of half-an-hour, and she would have met him. 'For shame,' quoth the haughty spirit, 'now that has come into my head, I can't go at all.'

Her solitude continued till half-past ten, when she heard the welcome sound of Robert's voice, and flew to meet him, but was again checked by his irresponsive manner as he asked for Owen.

'I have not seen him. I do not know whether to knock, lest he should be asleep.'

'I hope he is. He has not been in bed for three nights. I will go and see.'

He was moving to the door without lingering for a word more. She stopped him by saying, 'Pray hear first what I have settled with Mrs. Murrell.'

'She told me,' said Robert. 'Is it Owen's wish?'

'It ought to be. It must. Every public justice must be paid now.'

'Is it quite well judged, unless it were his strong desire? Have you considered the feelings of Mr. Prendergast or your relations?'

'There is nothing I consider more. If Charles thinks it more disgraceful to marry a Christian for love than a Jewess for money, he shall see that we are not of the same opinion.'

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'I never pretend to judge of your motives.'

'Mercy, what have I gone and said?' ejaculated Lucilla, as the door closed after him. 'Why did I let it out, and make him think me a vixen? Better than a hypocrite though! I always professed to show my worst. What's come to me, that I can't go on so contentedly? He must hear the Charteris' sentiments, though, that he may not think mine a gratuitous affront.'

Her explanation was at her tongue's end, but Robert only reappeared with her brother, whom he had found dressing. Owen just greeted his sister, but asked no questions, only dropping heavily into a chair, and let her bring him his breakfast. So young was he, still wanting six weeks to years of discretion; so youthful his appearance in spite of his size and strength, that it was almost absurd to regard him as a widower, and expect him to act as a man of mature age and feeling. There was much of the boy in his excessive and freely-indulged lassitude, and his half-sullen, half-shy reserve towards his sister. Knowing he had been in conversation with Robert, she felt it hard that before her he only leant his elbows on the table, yawned, and talked of his stiffness, until his friend rising to leave them, he exerted himself to say, 'Don't go, Fulmort.'

'I am afraid I must. I leave you to your sister.' (She noted that it was not 'Lucy.')

'But, I say, Fulmort, there are things to settle—funeral, and all that,' he said in a helpless voice, like a sulky schoolboy.

'Your sister has been arranging with Mrs. Murrell.'

'Yes, Owen,' said Lucilla, tears glistening in her eyes, and her voice thrilling with emotion; 'it is right and just that she should be with our mother and little Mary at home; so I have written to Mr. Prendergast.'

'Very well,' he languidly answered. 'Settle it as you will; only deliver me from the old woman!'

He was in no state for reproaches; but Lucilla was obliged to bite her lip to restrain a torrent of angry weeping.

At his urgent instance, Robert engaged to return to dinner, and went, leaving Lucilla with nothing to do but to watch those heavy slumberings on the sofa and proffer attentions that were received with the surliness of one too miserable to know what to do with himself. She yearned over him with a new awakening of tenderness, longing, yet unable, to console or soothe. The light surface-intercourse of the brother and sister, each selfishly refraining from stirring the depths of the other's mind, rendered them mere strangers in the time of trouble; and vainly did Lucy gaze wistfully at the swollen eyelids and flushed cheeks, watch every peevish gesture, and tend each sullen wish, with pitying sweetness; she could not reach the inner man, nor touch the aching wound.

Towards evening, Mrs. Murrell's name was brought in, provoking a fretful injunction from Owen not to let him be molested with her cant. Lucilla sighed compliance, though vexed at his egotism, and went to the study, where she found that Mrs. Murrell had brought her grandson, her own most precious comforter, whom she feared she must resign 'to be bred up as a gentleman as he was, and despise his poor old granny; and she would say not a word, only if his papa would let her keep him till he had cut his first teeth, for he had always been tender, and she could not be easy to think that any one else had the charge of him.' She devoured him with kisses as she spoke, taking every precaution to keep her profuse tears from falling on him; and Lucilla, much moved, answered, 'Oh! for the present, no one could wish to part him from you. Poor little fellow! May I take him for a little while to my brother? It may do him good.'

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Cilly had rather have ridden a kicking horse than handled an infant. She did not think this a prepossessing specimen, but it was passive. She had always understood from books that this was the sure means of 'opening the sealed fountains of grief.' She remembered what little Mary had been to her father, and in hopes that parental instinct would make Owen know better what to do with her burden than she did, she entered the drawing-room, where a little murmuring sound caused Owen to start up on his elbow, exclaiming, 'What are you at? Don't bring *that* here!'

'I thought you might wish to see him.'

'What should I do with him?' asked Owen, in the same glum, childish tone, turning his face inwards as he lay down. 'Take it away. Ain't I wretched enough already to please you?'

She gave up the point, much grieved and strongly drawn to the little helpless one, rejected by his father, misused and cast off like his mother. Would no one stand up for him? Yes, it must be her part. She was his champion! She would set him forth in the world, by her own toil if need were!

Sealing the promise with a kiss, she returned him to his grandmother, and talked of him as so entirely her personal concern, that the good woman went home to report to her inquiring friends that the young lady was ready to 'hact very feeling, and very 'andsome.' Probably desirous to avoid further reference to his unwelcome son and heir, Owen had betaken himself to the solace of his pipe, and was pacing the garden with steps now sauntering with depression, now impetuous with impatience, always moving too much like a caged wild beast to invite approach. She was disconsolately watching him from the window, when Mr. Fulmort was admitted. A year ago, what would he not have given for that unfeigned, simple welcome, as she looked up with eyes full of tears, saying, 'Oh, Robert, it is so grievous to see him!'

'Very sad,' was the mournful answer.

'You may be able to help him. He asks for you, but turns from me.'

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'He has been obliged to rely on me, since we came to town,' said Robert.

'You must have been very kind!' she warmly exclaimed.

But he drew back from the effusion, saying, 'I did no more than was absolutely necessary. He does not lay himself open to true comfort.'

'Death never seemed half so miserable before!' cried Lucilla. 'Yet this poor thing had little to live for! Was it all poor Honor's tender softening that took off the edge to our imaginations?'

'It is not always so mournful!' shortly said Robert.

'No; even the mother bears it better, and not for want of heart.'

'She *is* a Christian,' said Robert.

'Poor Owen! It makes me remorseful. I wonder if I made too light of the line he took; yet what difference could I have made? Sisters go for so little; and as to influence, Honor overdid it.' Then, as he made no reply, 'Tell me, do you think my acquiescence did harm?'

'I cannot say. Your conscience must decide. It is not a case for me. I must go to him.'

It was deep mortification. Used to have the least hint of dawning seriousness thankfully cherished and fostered, it was a rude shock, when most in need of *épanchement du cœur* after her dreary day, to be thrown back on that incomprehensible process of self-examination; and by Robert, too!

She absolutely did not feel as if she were the same Lucilla. It was the sensation of doubt on her personal identity awakened in the good woman of the ballad when her little dog began to bark and wail at her.

She strove to enliven the dinner by talking of Hiltonbury, and of Juliana's marriage, thus awakening Owen into life and talkativeness so much in his light ordinary humour, as to startle them both. Lucilla would have encouraged it as preferable to his gloom, but it was decidedly repressed by Robert.

She had to repair to solitary restlessness in the drawing-room, and was left alone there till so late that Robert departed after a single cup of tea, cutting short a captious argument of Owen's about impossibility of proof, and truth being only true in a sense.

Owen's temper was, however, less morose; and when his sister was lighting his candle for him at night, kindly said, 'What a bore I've been all day, Lucy.'

'I am glad to be with you, dear Owen; I have no one else.'

'Eh? What's become of Rashe?'

'Never mention her again!'

'What? They've cut you?'

'I have cut them.'

She related what had passed.

Owen set his face into a frown. 'Even so, Charlie; doltishness less pardonable than villainy! You were right to cut the connection, Lucy; it has been our curse. So now you will back to poor Honor, and try to make it up to her.'

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'I'm not going near Honor till she forgives you, and receives your child.'

'Then you will be very ridiculous,' said Owen, impatiently. 'She has no such rancour against me as you have against her, poor dear; but it is not in the nature of things that she should pass over this unlucky performance.'

'If it had been such a performance as Charles desired, I should have said so.'

'Pshaw! I hadn't the chance; and gloss it as you will, Lucy, there's no disguising it, she *would* have it, and I could not help it, but she was neglected, and it killed her!' He brought his hand down on the table with a heavy thump, which together with the words made his sister recoil. 'Could Honor treat me the same after that? And she not my mother, either! Why had not my

father the sense to have married her? Then I could go to her and get rid of this intolerable weight!' and he groaned aloud.

'A mother could hardly love you more,' said Lucy, to her own surprise. 'If you will but go to here, —when she sees you so unhappy.'

'Out of the question,' broke in Owen; 'I can't stay here! I would have gone this very night, but I can't be off till that poor thing—'

'Off!'

'Ay, to the diggings, somewhere, anywhere, to get away from it all!'

'Oh, Owen, do nothing mad!'

'I'm not going to do anything just now, I tell you. Don't be in a fright. I shan't take French leave of you. You'll find me to-morrow morning, worse luck. Good night.'

Lucilla was doubly glad to have come. Her pride approved his proposal, though her sisterly love would suffer, and she was anxious about the child; but dawning confidence was at the least a relief.

Next morning, he was better, and talked much too like his ordinary self, but relapsed afterwards for want of employment; and when a letter was brought to him, left by his wife to be read after her death, he broke down, and fell into a paroxysm of grief and despair, which still prevailed when a message came in to ask admission for Mr. Prendergast. Relieved to be out of sight of depression that her consolations only aggravated, and hoping for sympathy and counsel, Lucy hastened to the study with outstretched hands, and was met with the warmth for which she had longed.

Still there was disappointment. In participation with Owen's grief, she had lost sight of his offences, and was not prepared for any commencement. 'Well, Cilla, I came up to talk to you. A terrible business this of Master Owen's.'

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'It breaks one's heart to see him so wretched.'

'I hope he is. He ought to be.'

'Now, Mr. Prendergast.'

The curate held up both his hands, deprecating her coaxing piteous look, and used his voice rather loudly to overpower hers, and say what he had prepared as a duty.

'Yes, yes, he is your brother, and all that. You may feel for him what you like. But I must say this: it was a shameful thing, and a betrayal of confidence, such as it grieves me to think of in his father's son. I am sorry for her, poor thing! whom I should have looked after better; and I am very sorry indeed for you, Cilla; but I must tell you that to bury the poor girl next to Mrs. Sandbrook, as your brother's wife, would be a scandal.'

'Don't speak so loud; he will hear.'

His mild face was unwontedly impatient as he said, 'I can see how you gave in to the wish; I don't blame you, but if you consider the example to the parish.'

'After what I told you in my letter, I don't see the evil of the example; unless it be your *esprit de corps* about the registrar, and they could not well have requested you to officiate.'

'Cilla, you were always saucy, but this is no time for nonsense. You can't defend them.'

'Perhaps you are of your Squire's opinion—that the bad example was in the marrying her at all.'

Mr. Prendergast looked so much shocked that Lucilla felt a blush rising, conscious that the tone of the society she had of late lived with had rendered her tongue less guarded, her cheek less shamefaced than erst, but she galloped on to hide her confusion. 'You were their great cause. If you had not gone and frightened her, they might have philandered on all this time, till the whole affair died of its own silliness.'

'Yes, no one was so much to blame as I. I will trust no living creature again. My carelessness opened the way to temptation, and Heaven knows, Lucilla, I have been infinitely more displeased with myself than with them.'

'Well, so am I with myself, for putting her in his way. Don't let us torment ourselves with playing the game backwards again—I hate it. Let's see to the next.'

'That is what I came for. Now, Cilla, though I would gladly do what I could for poor Owen, just think what work it will make with the girls at Wrapworth, who are nonsensical enough already, to have this poor runaway brought back to be buried as the wife of a fine young gentleman.'

'Poor Edna's history is no encouragement to look out for fine young gentlemen.'

'They will know the fact, and sink the circumstances.'

'So you are so innocent as to think they don't know! Depend upon it, every house in Wrapworth rings with it; and won't it be more improving to have the poor thing's grave to point the moral?'

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'Cilla, you are a little witch. You always have your way, but I don't like it. It is not the right one.'

'Not right for Owen to make full compensation? Mind, it is not Edna Murrell, the eloped schoolmistress, but Mrs. Sandbrook, whom her husband wishes to bury among his family.'

'Poor lad, is he much cut up?'

'So much that I should hardly dare tell him if you had refused. He could not bear another indignity heaped on her, and a wound from you would cut deeper than from any one else. You should remember in judging him that he had no parent to disobey, and there was generosity in taking on him the risk rather than leave her to a broken heart and your tender mercy.'

'I fear his tender mercy has turned out worse than mine; but I am sorry for all he has brought on himself, poor lad!'

'Shall I try whether he can see you?'

'No, no; I had rather not. You say young Fulmort attends to him, and I could not speak to him with patience. Five o'clock, Saturday?'

'Yes; but that is not all. That poor child—Robert Fulmort, you, and I must be sponsors.'

'Cilla, Cilla, how can I answer how it will be brought up?'

'Some one must. Its father talks of leaving England, and it will be my charge. Will you not help me? you who always have helped me. My father's grandson; you cannot refuse him, Mr. Penty,' said she, using their old childish name for him.

He yielded to the united influence of his rector's daughter and the memory of his rector. Though no weak man, those two appeals always swayed him; and Lucilla's air, spirited when she defended, soft when she grieved, was quite irresistible; so she gained her point, and felt restored to herself by the exercise of power, and by making her wonted impression. Since one little dog had wagged his little tail, she no longer doubted 'If I be I;' yet this only rendered her more nervously desirous of obtaining the like recognition from the other, and she positively wearied after one of Robert's old wistful looks.

A *tête-à-tête* with him was necessary on many accounts, and she lay in wait to obtain a few moments alone with him in the study. He complied neither eagerly nor reluctantly, bowed his head without remark when she told him about the funeral, and took the sponsorship as a matter of course. 'Very well; I suppose there is no one else to be found. Is it your brother's thought?'

'I told him.'

'So I feared.'

'Oh! Robert, we must take double care for the poor little thing.'

'I will do my best,' he answered.

'Do you know what Owen intends?' said Lucilla, in low, alarmed accents.

'He has told you? It is a wild purpose; but I doubt whether to dissuade him, except for your sake,' he added, with his first softening towards her, like balm to the sore spot in her heart.

'Never mind me, I can take care of myself,' she said, while the muscles of her throat ached and quivered with emotion. 'I would not detain him to be pitied and forgiven.'

'Do not send him away in pride,' said Robert, sadly.

'Am I not humbled enough?' she said; and her drooping head and eye seemed to thrill him with their wonted power.

One step he made towards her, but checked himself, and said in a matter-of-fact tone, 'Currie, the architect, has a brother, a civil engineer, just going out to Canada to lay out a railway. It might be an opening for Owen to go as his assistant—unless you thought it beneath him.'

These last words were caused by an uncontrollable look of disappointment. But it was not the proposal: no; but the change of manner that struck her. The quiet indifferent voice was like water quenching a struggling spark, but in a moment she recovered her powers. 'Beneath him! Oh, no. I told you we were humbled. I always longed for his independence, and I am glad that he should not go alone.'

'The work would suit his mathematical and scientific turn. Then, since you do not object, I will see whether he would like it, or if it be practicable in case Miss Charlecote should approve.'

Robert seized this opportunity of concluding the interview. Lucy ran up-stairs for the fierce quarter-deck walking that served her instead of tears, as an ebullition that tired down her feelings by exhaustion.

Some of her misery was for Owen, but would the sting have been so acute had Robert Fulmort been more than the true friend?

Phoebe's warning, given in that very room, seemed engraven on each panel. 'If you go on as you are doing now, he does not think it would be right for a clergyman.'

Could Lucilla have looked through the floor, she would have seen Robert with elbows on the window-sill, and hands locked over his knitted brows; and could she have interpreted his short-drawn sighs, she would have heard, 'Poor child! poor child! It is not coquetry. That was injustice. She loves me. She loves me still! Why do I believe it only too late? Why is this trial sent me, since I am bound to the scheme that precludes my marriage? What use is it to see her as undisciplined—as unfit as ever? I know it! I always knew it. But I feel still a traitor to her! She had warning! She trusted the power of my attachment in spite of my judgment! Fickle to her, or a falterer to my higher pledge? Never! I must let her see the position—crush any hope—otherwise I cannot trust myself, nor deal fairly by her. Heaven help us both!'

When they next met, Robert had propounded his Canadian project, and Owen had caught at it. Idleness had never been his fault, and he wanted severe engrossing labour to stun pain and expel thought. He was urgent to know what standard of attainments would be needful, and finding Robert ignorant on this head, seized his hat, and dashed out in the gaslight to the nearest bookseller's for a treatise on surveying.

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Robert was taken by surprise, or he might have gone too. He looked as if he meditated a move, but paused as Lucy said, 'Poor fellow, how glad he is of an object!'

'May it not be to his better feelings like sunshine to morning dew?' said Robert, sighing. 'I hear a very high character of Mr. Currie, and a right-minded, practical, scientific man may tell more on a disposition like his—'

'Than parsons and women,' said Lucilla, with a gleam of her old archness.

'Exactly so. He must see religion in the world, not out of it.'

'After all, I have not heard who is this Mr. Currie, and how you know him.'

'I know him through his brother, who is building the church in Cecily Row.'

'A church in Cecily Row! St. Cecilia's? Who is doing it? Honor Charlecote?'

'No; I am.'

'You! Tell me all about it,' said Lucilla, leaning forward to listen with the eager air of interest which, when not half so earnest, had been always bewitching.

Poor Robert looked away, and tried to think himself explaining his scheme to the Archdeacon. 'The place is in frightful disorder, filled with indescribable vice and misery, but there is a shadow of hope that a few may be worked on if something like a mission can be organized. Circumstances seemed to mark me out as the person to be at the cost of setting it on foot, my father's connection with the parish giving it a claim on me. So I purchased the first site that was in the market, and the buildings are in progress, chapel, schools, orphanage, and rooms for myself and two other clergy. When all the rest is provided for, there will remain about two hundred and fifty pounds a year—just enough for three of us, living together.'

He durst not glance towards her, or he would have seen her cheek white as wax, and her eye seeking his in dismayed inquiry. There was a pause; then she forced herself to falter—'Yes. I suppose it is very right—very grand. It is settled?'

'The Archdeacon has seen the plans, the Bishop has consented.'

Long and deep was the silence that fell on both.

Lucilla knew her fate as well as if his long coat had been a cowl. She would not, could not feel it yet. She must keep up appearances, so she fixed her eyes steadily on the drawing her idle hands were perpetrating on the back of a letter, and appeared absorbed in shading a Turk's head.

If Robert's motives had not been unmixed, if his zeal had been alloyed by temper, or his self-devotion by undutifulness; if his haste had been self-willed, or his judgment one-sided, this was an hour of retribution. Let her have all her faults, she was still the Lucy who had flown home to him for comfort. He felt as if he had dashed away the little bird that had sought refuge in his bosom.

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Fain would he have implored her pardon, but for the stern resolution to abstain from any needless word or look, such as might serve to rivet the affection that ought to be withdrawn; and he was too manly and unselfish to indulge in discussion or regret, too late as it was to change the course to which he had offered himself and his means. To retract would have been a breach of promise—a hasty one, perhaps, but still an absolute vow publicly made; and in all his wretchedness he had at least the comfort of knowing the present duty.

Afraid of last words, he would not even take leave until Owen came in upon their silence, full of animation and eagerness to see how far his knowledge would serve him with the book that he had brought home. Robert then rose, and on Owen's pressing to know when he might see the engineer, promised to go in search of him the next day, but added that they must not expect to see himself till evening, since it would be a busy day.

Lucilla stood up, but speech was impossible. She was in no mood to affect indifference, yet she could neither be angry nor magnanimous. She seemed to have passed into a fresh stage of existence where she was not yet at home; and in the same dreamy way she went on drawing Red Indians, till by a sudden impulse she looked up and said, 'Owen, why should not I come out with

you?’

He was intent on a problem, and did not hear.

‘Owen, take me with you; I will make a home for you.’

‘Eh?’

‘Owen, let me come to Canada, and take care of you and your child.’

He burst out laughing. ‘Well done, Cilly; that beats all!’

‘Am I likely to be in play?’

‘If not, you are crazy. As if a man could go surveying in the backwoods with a woman and a brat at his heels!’

Lucy’s heart seemed to die within her. Nothing was left to her: hopes and fears were alike extinct, and life a waste before her. Still and indifferent, she laid her down at night, and awoke in the morning, wishing still to prolong the oblivion of sleep. Anger with Robert would have been a solace, but his dejection forbade this; nor could she resent his high-flown notions of duty, and deem herself their victim, since she had slighted fair warning, and repelled his attempts to address her. She saw no resource save the Holt, now more hopelessly dreary and distasteful than ever, and she shrank both from writing to Honor, or ending her tantalizing intercourse with Robert. To watch over her brother was her only comfort, and one that must soon end.

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He remained immersed in trigonometry, and she was glad he should be too much engrossed for the outbreaks of remorseful sorrow that were so terrible to witness, and carefully guarded him from all that could excite them.

Mrs. Murrell brought several letters that had been addressed to him at her house, and as Lucilla conveyed them to him, she thought their Oxford post-marks looked suspicious, especially as he thrust them aside with the back of his hand, returning without remark to A B and C D.

Presently a person asked to speak with Mr. Sandbrook; and supposing it was on business connected with the funeral, Lucilla went to him, and was surprised at recognizing the valet of one of the gentlemen who had stayed at Castle Blanch. He was urgent to see Mr. Sandbrook himself; but she, resolved to avert all annoyances, refused to admit him, offering to take a message. ‘Was it from his master?’

‘Why, no, ma’am. In fact, I have left his lordship’s service,’ he said, hesitating. ‘In point of fact I am the principal. There was a little business to be settled with the young gentleman when he came into his fortune; and understanding that such was the case, since I heard of him as settled in life, I have brought my account.’

‘You mistake the person. My brother has come into no fortune, and has no expectation of any.’

‘Indeed, ma’am!’ exclaimed the man. ‘I always understood that Mr. Owen Charteris Sandbrook was heir to a considerable property.’

‘What of that?’

‘Only this, ma’am,—that I hold a bond from that gentleman for the payment of £600 upon the death of Miss Honora Charlecote, of the Holt, Hiltonbury, whose property I understood was entailed on him.’ His tone was still respectful, but his hand shook with suppressed rage, and his eye was full of passion.

‘Miss Charlecote is not dead,’ steadily answered Lucilla. ‘She is in perfect health, not fifty years old, and her property is entirely at her own disposal.’

Either the man’s wrath was beyond control, or he thought it his interest to terrify the lady, for he broke into angry complaints of being swindled, with menaces of exposure; but Lucilla, never deficient in courage, preserved ready thought and firm demeanour.

‘You had better take care,’ she said. ‘My brother is under age, and not liable. If you should recover what you have lent him, it can only be from our sense of honesty. Leave me your address and a copy of the bond, and I give you my word that you shall receive your due.’

The valet, grown rich in the service of a careless master, and richer by money-lending transactions with his master’s friends, knew Miss Sandbrook, and was aware that a lady’s word might be safer than a spendthrift’s bond. He tried swaggering, in the hope of alarming her into a promise to fulfil his demand uninvestigated; but she was on her guard; and he, reflecting that she must probably apply to others for the means of paying, gave her the papers, and freed her from his presence.

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Freed her from his presence! Yes, but only to leave her to the consciousness of the burthen of shame he had brought her. She saw why Owen thought himself past pardon. Speculation on the death of his benefactress! Borrowing on an inheritance that he had been forbidden to expect. Double-dyed deceit and baseness! Yesterday, she had said they were humbled enough. This was not humiliation, it was degradation! It was far too intolerable for standing still and feeling it. Lucilla’s impetuous impulses always became her obstinate resolutions, and her pride rebounded to its height in the determination that Owen should leave England in debt to no man, were it at

the cost of all she possessed.

Re-entering the drawing-room, she had found that Owen had thrust the obnoxious letters into the waste-basket, each unopened envelope, with the contents, rent down the middle. She sat down on the floor, and took them out, saying, as she met his eye, 'I shall take these. I know what they are. They are my concern.'

'Folly!' he muttered. 'Don't you know I have the good luck to be a minor?'

'That is no excuse for dishonesty.'

'Look at home before you call names,' said Owen, growing enraged. 'Before you act spy on me, I should like to know who paid for your fine salmon-fly gown, and all the rest of it?'

'I never contracted debts in the trust that my age would enable me to defraud my creditors.'

'Who told you that I did? I tell you, Lucilla, I'll endure no such conduct from you. No sister has a right to say such things!' and starting up, his furious stamp shook the floor she sat upon, so close to her that it was as if the next would demolish her.

She did not move, except to look up all the length of the tall figure over her into the passion-flushed face. 'I should neither have said nor thought so, Owen,' she replied. 'I should have imputed these debts to mere heedless extravagance, like other people's—like my own, if you please—save for your own words, and for finding you capable of such treachery as borrowing on a *post-obit*.'

He walked about furiously, stammering interrogations on the mode of her discovery, and, as she explained, storming at her for having brought this down on him by the folly of putting 'that thing into the *Times*.' Why could she not have stayed away, instead of meddling where she was not wanted?

'I thought myself wanted when my brother was in trouble,' said Lucilla, mournfully, raising her face, which she had bent between her hands at the first swoop of the tempest. 'Heaven knows, I had no thought of spying. I came to stand by your wife, and comfort you. I only learnt all this in trying to shield you from intrusion. Oh, would that I knew it not! Would that I could think of you as I did an hour ago! Oh, Owen, though I have never shared your fondness for Honor Charlecote, I thought it genuine; I did not scorn it as fortune-hunting.'

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'It was not! It never was!' cried the poor boy. 'Honor! Poor Honor! Lucy, I doubt if I could have felt for my mother as I do for her. Oh, if you could guess how I long for her dear voice in my ears, her soft hand on my head—' and he sank into his chair, hiding his face and sobbing aloud.

'Am I to believe that, when—' began Lucilla, slowly.

'The last resource of desperation,' cried Owen. 'What could I do with such a drain upon me; the old woman for ever clamouring for money, and threatening exposure? My allowance? Poor Honor meant well, but she gave me just enough to promote expensive habits without supplying them. There was nothing to fall back on—except the ways of the Castle Blanch folk.'

'Betting?'

He nodded. 'So when it went against me, and people would have it that I had expectations, it was not for me to contradict them. It was their business, not mine, to look out for themselves, and pretty handsomely they have done so. It would have been a very different percentage if I had been an eldest son. As it is, my bond is—what is it for, Lucy?'

'Six hundred.'

'How much do you think I have touched of that? Not two! Of that, three-fourths went to the harpies I fell in with at Paris, under Charles's auspices—and five-and-twenty there—pointing in the direction of Whittington-street.

'Will the man be satisfied with the two hundred?'

'Don't he wish he may get it? But, Lucy, you are not to make a mess of it. I give you warning I shall go, and never be heard of more, if Honor is applied to.'

'I had rather die than do so.'

'You are not frantic enough to want to do it out of your own money? I say, give me those papers.'

He stooped and stretched out the powerful hand and arm, which when only half-grown had been giant-like in struggles with his tiny sister but she only laid her two hands on the paper, with just sufficient resistance to make it a matter of strength on his side. They were man and woman, and what availed his muscles against her will? It came to parley. 'Now, Lucy, I have a right to think for you. As your brother, I cannot permit you to throw your substance to the dogs.'

'As your sister, I cannot allow you to rest dishonoured.'

'Not a whit more than any of your chosen friends. Every man leaves debts at Oxford. The extortion is framed on a scale to be unpaid.'

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'Let it be! There shall be no stain on the name that once was my father's, if there be on the

whole world beside.'

'Then,' with some sulkiness, 'you won't be content without begging me of my trumpery twenty-five hundred as soon as I am of age?'

'Not at all. Your child must live on that. Only one person can pay your debts without dishonouring you, and that is your elder sister.'

'Elder donkey,' was the ungrateful answer. 'Why, what would become of you? You'd have to be beholden to Honor for the clothes on your back!'

'I shall not go back to Honor; I shall earn my own livelihood.'

'Lucilla, are you distracted, or is it your object to make me so?'

'Only on one condition could I return to the Holt,' said Lucilla, resolutely. 'If Honor would freely offer to receive your son, I would go to take care of him. Except for his sake, I had rather she would not. I will not go to be crushed with pardon and obligation, while you are proscribed. I will be independent, and help to support the boy.'

'Sure,' muttered Owen to himself, 'Lucifer is her patron saint. If I looked forward to anything, it was to her going home tame enough to make some amends to poor, dear Sweet Honey, but I might as well have hoped it of the panther of the wilderness! I declare I'll write to Honor this minute.'

He drew the paper before him. Lucilla started to her feet, looking more disgusted and discomfited than by any former shock. However, she managed to restrain any dissuasion, knowing that it was the only right and proper step in his power, and that she could never have looked Robert in the face again had she prevented the confession; but it was a bitter pill; above all, that it should be made for her sake. She rushed away, as usual, to fly up and down her room.



She might have spared herself that agony. Owen's resolution failed him. He could not bring himself to make the beginning, nor to couple the avowal of his offence with such presumption as an entreaty for his child's adoption, though he knew his sister's impulsive obstinacy well enough to be convinced that she would adhere pertinaciously to this condition. Faltering after the first line, he recurred to his former plan of postponing his letter till his plans should be so far matured that he could show that he would no longer be a pensioner on the bounty of his benefactress, and that he sought pardon for the sake of no material advantage. He knew that Robert had intimated his intention of writing after the funeral, and by this he would abide.

Late in the evening Robert brought the engineer's answer, that he had no objection to take out a pupil, and would provide board, lodging, and travelling expenses; but he required a considerable premium, and for three years would offer no salary. His standard of acquirements was high, but such as rather stimulated than discouraged Owen, who was delighted to find that an appointment had been made for a personal interview on the ensuing Monday.

It was evident that if these terms were accepted, the debts, if paid at all, must come out of Lucilla's fortune. Owen's own portion would barely clothe him and afford the merest pittance for his child until he should be able to earn something after his three years' apprenticeship. She trusted that he was convinced, and went up-stairs some degrees less forlorn for having a decided plan; but a farther discovery awaited her, and one that concerned herself.

On her bed lay the mourning for which she had sent, tasteful and expensive, in her usual complete style, and near it an envelope. It flashed on her that her order had been dangerously unlimited, and she opened the cover in trepidation, but what was her dismay at the double, treble, quadruple foolscap? The present articles were but a fraction to the dreadful aggregate—the sum total numbered hundreds! In a dim hope of error she looked back at the items, 'Black lace dress: Dec. 2nd, 1852.'—She understood all. It dated from the death of her aunt. Previously, her wardrobe had been replenished as though she had been a daughter of the house, and nothing had marked the difference; indeed, the amply provided Horatia had probably intended that things were to go on as usual. Lucilla had been allowed to forget the existence of accounts, in a family which habitually ignored them. Things had gone smoothly; the beautiful little Miss Sandbrook was an advertisement to her milliners, and living among wealthy people, and reported to be on the verge of marriage with a millionaire, there had been no hesitation in allowing her unlimited credit.

Probably the dressmaker had been alarmed by the long absence of the family, and might have learnt from the servants how Lucilla had quitted them, therefore thinking it expedient to remind her of her liabilities. And not only did the present spectacle make her giddy, but she knew there was worse beyond. The Frenchwoman who supplied all extra adornments, among them the ball-dress whose far bitterer price she was paying, could make more appalling demands; and there must be other debts elsewhere, such that she doubted whether her entire fortune would clear both her brother and herself. What was the use of thinking? It must be done, and the sooner she knew the worst the better. She felt very ill-used, certain that her difficulties were caused by Horatia's inattention, and yet glad to be quit of an obligation that would have galled her as soon as she had become sensible of it. It was more than ever clear that she must work for herself, instead of returning to the Holt, as a dependent instead of a guest. Was she humbled enough?

The funeral day began by her writing notes to claim her bills, and to take steps to get her capital into her own hands. Owen drowned reflection in geometry, till it was time to go by the train to Wrapworth.

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There Mr. Prendergast fancied he had secured secrecy by eluding questions and giving orders at the latest possible moment. The concourse in the church and churchyard was no welcome sight to him, since he could not hope that the tall figure of the chief mourner could remain unrecognized. Worthy man, did he think that Wrapworth needed that sight to assure them of what each tongue had wagged about for many a day?

Owen behaved very properly and with much feeling. When not driving it out by other things, the fact was palpable to him that he had brought this fair young creature to her grave; and in the very scenes where her beauty and enthusiastic affection had captivated him, association revived his earlier admiration, and swept away his futile apology that she had brought the whole upon herself. A gust of pity, love, and remorse convulsed his frame, and though too proud to give way, his restrained anguish touched every heart, and almost earned him Mr. Prendergast's forgiveness.

Before going away, Lucilla privately begged Mr. Prendergast to come to town on Monday, to help her in some business. It happened to suit him particularly well, as he was to be in London for the greater part of the week, to meet some country cousins, and the appointment was made without her committing herself by saying for what she wanted him, lest reflection should convert him into an obstacle instead of an assistant.

The intervening Sunday, with Owen on her hands, was formidable to her imagination, but it turned out better than she expected. He asked her to walk to Westminster Abbey with him, the time and distance being an object to both, and he treated her with such gentle kindness, that she began to feel that something more sweet and precious than she had yet known from him might spring up, if they were not forced to separate. Once, on rising from kneeling, she saw him stealthily brushing off his tears, and his eyes were heavy and swollen, but, softened as she felt, his tone of feelings was a riddle beyond her power, between their keenness and their petulance, their manly depth and boyish levity, their remorse and their recklessness; and when he tried to throw them off, she could not but follow his lead.

'I suppose,' he said, late in the day, 'we shall mortify Fulmort if we don't go once to his shop. Otherwise, I like the article in style.'

'I am glad you should like it at all,' said Lucy, anxiously.

'I envy those who, like poor dear Honor, or that little Phoebe, can find life in the driest form,' said Owen.

'They would say it is our fault that we cannot find it.'

'Honor would think it her duty to say so. Phoebe has a wider range, and would be more logical. Is it our fault or misfortune that our ailments can't be cured by a paring of St. Bridget's thumb-nail, or by any nostrum, sacred or profane, that really cures their votaries? I regard it as a misfortune. Those are happiest who believe the most, and are eternally in a state in which their faith is working out its effects upon them mentally and physically. Happy people!'

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'Really I think, unless you were one of those happy people, it is no more consistent in you to go to church than it would be in me to set up Rashe's globules.'

'No, don't tell me so, Lucy. There lie all my best associations. I venerate what the great, the good, the beloved receive as their blessing and inspiration. Sometimes I can assimilate myself, and catch an echo of what was happiness when I was a child at Honor's knee.'

The tears had welled into his eyes again, and he hurried away. Lucilla had faith (or rather acquiescence) without feeling. Feeling without faith was a mystery to her. How much Owen believed or disbelieved she knew not, probably he could not himself have told. It was more uncertainty than denial, rather dislike to technical dogma than positive unbelief; and yet, with his predilections all on the side of faith, she could not, womanlike, understand why they did not bring his reason with them. After all, she decided, in her off-hand fashion, that there was quite enough that was distressing and perplexing without concerning herself about them!

Style, as Owen called it, was more attended to than formerly at St. Wulstan's, but was not in perfection. Robert, whose ear was not his strong point, did not shine in intoning, and the other curate preached. The impression seemed only to have weakened that of the morning, for Owen's remarks on coming out were on the English habit of having overmuch of everything, and on the superior sense of foreigners in holiday-making, instead of making a conscience of stultifying themselves with double and triple church-going.

Cilla agreed in part, but owned that she was glad to have done with Continental Sundays that had left her feeling good for nothing all the week, just as she had felt when once, as a child, to spite Honor, she had come down without saying her prayers.

'The burthen bound on her conscience by English prejudice,' said her brother, adding 'that this was the one oppressive edict of popular theology. It was mere self-defence to say that the dulness was Puritanical, since the best Anglican had a cut-and-dried pattern for all others.'

'But surely as a fact, Sunday observance is the great safeguard. All goes to the winds when that is given up.'

'The greater error to have rendered it grievous.'

Lucilla had no reply. She had not learnt the joy of the week's Easter-day. It had an habitual awe for her, not sacred delight; and she could not see that because it was one point where religion taught the world that it had laws of its own, besides those of mere experience and morality, therefore the world complained, and would fain shake off the thralldom.

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Owen relieved her by a voluntary proposal to turn down Whittington-street, and see the child. Perhaps he had an inkling that the chapel in Cat-alley would be in full play, and that the small maid would be in charge; besides, it was gas-light, and the lodgers would be out. At any rate softening was growing on him. He looked long and sorrowfully at the babe in its cradle, and at last,—

'He will never be like her.'

'No; and I do not think him like you.'

'In fact, it is an ugly little mortal,' said Owen, after another investigation. 'Yet, it's very odd, Lucy, I should like him to live.'

'Very odd, indeed!' she said, nearly laughing.

'Well, I own, before ever I saw him, when they said he would die, I did think it was best for himself, and every one else. So, maybe, it would; but you see I shouldn't like it. He will be a horrible expense, and it will be a great bore to know what to do with him: so absurd to have a son only twenty years younger than oneself: but I think I like him, after all. It is something to work for, to make up to him for what *she* suffered. And I say, Lucy,' his eye brightened, 'perhaps Honor will take to him! What a thing it would be if he turned out all she hoped of me, poor thing! I would be banished for life, if he could be in my place, and make it up to her. He might yet have the Holt!'

'You have not proposed sending him to her?'

'No, I am not so cool,' he sadly answered; 'but she is capable of anything in an impulse of forgiveness.'

He spent the evening over his letter; and, in spite of his sitting with his back towards his sister, she saw more than one sheet spoil by large tears unperceived till they dropped, and felt a jealous pang in recognizing the force of his affection for Honor. That love and compassion seemed contemptible to her, they were so inconsistent with his deception and disobedience; and she was impatient of seeing that, so far as he felt his errors at all, it was in their aspect towards his benefactress. His ingratitude towards her touched him in a more tender part than his far greater errors towards his wife. The last was so shocking and appalling, that he only half realized it, and, boy-like, threw it from him; the other came home to the fondness that had been with him all his life, and which he missed every hour in his grief. Lucy positively dreaded his making such submission or betraying such sorrow as might bring Honora down on them full of pardon and beneficence. At least, she had the satisfaction of hearing 'I've said nothing about you, Cilla.'

'That's right!'

'Nor the child,' he continued, brushing up his hair from his brow. 'When I came to go over it, I did hate myself to such a degree that I could not say a word like asking a favour.'

Lucy was greatly relieved.

He looked like himself when he came down to breakfast exhilarated by the restoration to activity, and the opening of a new path, though there was a subdued, grave look on his young brow not unsuited to his deep mourning.

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He took up his last evening's production, looked at it with some satisfaction, and observed, 'Sweet old honey! I do hope that letter may be a little comfort to her good old heart!'

Then he told that he had been dreaming of her looking into the cradle, and he could not tell whether it were himself or the boy that he had seen sitting on a haycock at Hiltonbury.

'Who knows but it may be a good omen,' said he in his sanguine state. 'You said you would go to her, if she took the child.'

'I did not say I would not.'

'Well, don't make difficulties; pray don't, Lucilla. I want nothing for myself; but if I could see you and the child at the Holt, and hear her dear voice say one word of kindness, I could go out happy. Imagine if she should come to town!'

Lucilla had no mind to imagine any such thing.

CHAPTER XIII

An upper and a lower spring
To thee, to all are given:
They mingle not, apart they gleam,
The joys of earth, of heaven on high;
God grant thee grace to choose the spring,
Even before the nether spring is dry.—M.

'One moment, Phœbe, I'll walk a little way with you;' and Honor Charlecote, throwing on bonnet and scarf, hurried from the drawing-room where Mrs. Saville was working.

In spite of that youthful run, and girlish escape from 'company' to a confidante, the last fortnight had left deep traces. Every incipient furrow had become visible, the cheeks had fallen, the eyes sunk, the features grown prominent, and the auburn curls were streaked with silver threads never previously perceptible to a casual eye. While languid, mechanical talk was passing, Phœbe had been mourning over the change; but she found her own Miss Charlecote restored in the freer manner, the long sigh, the tender grasp of the arm, as soon as they were in the open air.

'Phœbe,' almost in a whisper, 'I have a letter from him.'

Phœbe pressed her arm, and looked her sympathy.

'Such a nice letter,' added Honor. 'Poor fellow! he has suffered so much. Should you like to see it?'

Owen had not figured to himself what eyes would peruse his letter; but Honor was in too much need of sympathy to withhold the sight from the only person who she could still hope would be touched.

'You see he asks nothing, nothing,' she wistfully pleaded. 'Only pardon! Not to come home; nor anything.'

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'Yes; surely, that is real contrition.'

'Surely, surely it is: yet they are not satisfied—Mr. Saville and Sir John. They say it is not full confession; but you see he does refer to the rest. He says he has deeply offended in other ways.'

'The rest?'

'You do not know. I thought your brother had told you. No? Ah! Robert *is* his friend. Mr. Saville went and found it out. It was very right of him, I believe. Quite right I should know; but —'

'Dear Miss Charlecote, it has pained you terribly.'

'It is what young men do; but I did not expect it of him. Expensive habits, debts, I could have borne, especially with the calls for money his poor wife must have caused; but I don't know how to believe that he gave himself out as my heir, and obtained credit on that account—a bond to be paid on my death!'

Phœbe was too much shocked to answer.

'As soon as Mr. Saville heard of these troubles,' continued Honor, 'as, indeed, I put all into his hands, he thought it right I should know all. He went to Oxford, found out all that was against poor Owen, and then proceeded to London, and saw the lawyer in whose hands Captain Charteris had left those children's affairs. He was very glad to see Mr. Saville, for he thought Miss

Sandbrook's friends ought to know what she was doing. So it came out that Lucilla had been to him, insisting on selling out nearly all her fortune, and paying off with part of it this horrible bond.'

'She is paying his debts, rather than let you hear of them.'

'And *they* are very angry with him for permitting it; as if he or anybody else had any power to stop Lucy! I know as well as possible that it is she who will not let him confess and make it all open with me. And yet, after this, what right have I to say I *know*? How little I ever knew that boy! Yes, it is right it should be taken out of my hands—my blindness has done harm enough already; but if I had not bound myself to forbear, I could not help it, when I see the Savilles so much set against him. I do not know that they are more severe in action than—than perhaps they ought to be, but they will not let me pity him.'

'They ought not to dictate to you,' said Phœbe, indignantly.

'Dictate! Oh, no, my dear. If you could only hear his compliments to my discretion, you would know he was thinking all the time there is no fool like an old fool. No, I don't complain. I have been wilful, and weak, and blind, and these are the fruits! It is right that others should judge for him, and I deserve that they should come and guard me; though, when I think of such untruth throughout, I don't feel as if there were danger of my ever being more than sorry for him.'

'It is worse than the marriage,' said Phœbe, thoughtfully.

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'There might have been generous risk in that. This was—oh, very nearly treachery! No wonder Lucy tries to hide it! I hope never to say a word to her to show that I am aware of it.'

'She is coming home, then?'

'She must, since she has broken with the Charterises; but she has never written. Has Robert mentioned her?'

'Never; he writes very little.'

'I long to know how it is with him. Now that he has signed his contract, and made all his arrangements, he cannot retract; but—but we shall see,' said Honor, with one gleam of playful hope. 'If she should come home to me ready to submit and be gentle, there might be a chance yet. I am sure he is poor Owen's only real friend. If I could only tell you half my gratitude to him for it! And I will tell you what Mr. Saville has actually consented to my doing—I may give Owen enough to cover his premium and outfit; and I hope that may set him at ease in providing for his child for the present from his own means, as he ought to do.'

'Poor little thing! what will become of it?'

'He and his sister must arrange,' said Honor, hastily, as if silencing a yearning of her own. 'I do not need the Savilles to tell me I must not take it off their hands. The responsibility may be a blessing to him, and it would be wrong to relieve him of a penalty in the natural course of Providence.'

'There, now you have put it into my head to think what a pleasure it would be to you—'

'I have done enough for my own pleasure, Phœbe. Had you only seen that boy when I had him first from his father, and thought him too much of the angel to live!'

There was a long pause, and Honor at length exclaimed, 'I see the chief reason the Savilles came here!'

'Why?'

'To hinder my seeing him before he goes.'

'I am sure it would be sad pain to you,' cried Phœbe, deprecatingly.

'I don't know. He must not come here; but since I have had this letter, I have longed to go up for one day, see him, and bring Lucy home. Mr. Saville might go with me. You don't favour it, Phœbe? Would Robert?'

'Robert would like to have Owen comforted,' said Phœbe, slowly; 'but not if it only made it worse pain for you. Dear Miss Charlecote, don't you think, if the worst had been the marriage, you would have tried everything to comfort him? but now that there is this other horrid thing, this presuming on your kindness, it seems to me as if you could not bear to see him.'

'When I think of their enmity and his sorrow, I feel drawn thither; but when this deception comes before me, I had rather not look in his face again. If he petted me I should think he was taking me in again. He has Robert, he has his sister, and I have promised to let Mr. Saville judge. I think Mr. Saville would let me go if Robert said I ought.'

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Phœbe fondled her, and left her relieved by the outpouring. Poor thing! after mistakes which she supposed egregious in proportion to the consequences, and the more so because she knew her own good intentions, and could not understand the details of her errors, it was an absolute rest to delegate her authority, even though her affections revolted against the severity of the judge to whom she had delivered herself and her boy.

One comfort was that he had been the adviser chosen for her by Humfrey. In obeying him, she put herself into Humfrey's hands; and remembering the doubtful approval with which her cousin had regarded her connection with the children, and his warnings against her besetting sin, she felt as if the whole was the continuation of the mistake of her life, her conceited disregard of his broad homely wisdom, and as if the only atonement in her power was to submit patiently to Mr. Saville's advice.

And in truth his measures were not harsh. He did not want to make the young man an outcast, only to prevent advantage being taken of indulgence which he overrated. It was rather his wife who was oppressive in her desire to make Miss Charlecote see things in a true light, and teach her, what she could never learn, to leave off loving and pitying. Even this was perhaps better for her than a solitude in which she might have preyed upon herself, and debated over every step in conscious darkness.

Before her letter was received, Owen had signed his agreement with the engineer, and was preparing to sail in a fortnight. He was disappointed and humiliated that Honor should have been made aware of what he had meant to conceal, but he could still see that he was mercifully dealt with, and was touched by, and thankful for, the warm personal forgiveness, which he had sense enough to feel, even though it brought no relaxation of the punishment.

Lucy was positively glad of the non-fulfilment of the condition that would have taken her back to the Holt; and without seeing the letter, had satisfaction in her resentment at Honor for turning on Owen vindictively, after having spoiled him all his life.

He silenced her summarily, and set out for his preparations. She had already carried out her project of clearing him of his liabilities. Mr. Prendergast had advised her strongly to content herself with the *post obit*, leaving the rest to be gradually liquidated as the means should be obtained; but her wilful determination was beyond reasoning, and by tyrannical coaxing she bent him to her will, and obliged him to do all in which she could not be prominent.

Her own debts were a sorer subject, and she grudged the vain expenses that had left her destitute, without even the power of writing grandly to Horatia to pay off her share of the foreign expenditure. She had, to Mr. Prendergast's great horror, told him of her governess plan, but had proceeded no further in the matter than studying the advertisements, until finding that Honor only invited her, and not her nephew, home to the Holt, she proceeded to exhale her feelings by composing a sentence for the *Times*. 'As Governess, a Lady—'

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'Mr. Prendergast.'

Reddening, and abruptly hasty, the curate entered, and sitting down without a word, applied himself to cutting his throat with an ivory paper-knife. Lucilla began to speak, but at her first word, as though a spell were broken, he exclaimed, 'Cilly, are you still thinking of that ridiculous nonsense?'

'Going out as a governess? Look there;' and she held up her writing.

He groaned, gave himself a slice under each ear, and viciously bit the end of the paper-knife.

'You are going to recommend me?' she said, with a coaxing look.

'You know I think it a monstrous thing.'

'But you know of a place, and will help me to it!' cried she, clapping her hands. 'Dear good Mr. Pendency, always a friend in need!'

'Well, if you will have it so. It is not so bad as strangers. There's George's wife come to town to see a governess for little Sarah, and she won't do.'

'Shall I do?' asked Lucilla, with a droll shake of her sunny hair. 'Yes. I know you would vouch for me as tutoress to all the Princesses; able to teach the physical sciences, the guitar, and Arabic in three lessons; but if Mrs. Prendergast be the woman I imagine, much she will believe you. Aren't they inordinately clever?'

'Little Sarah is—let me see—quite a child. Her father did teach her, but he has less time in his new parish, and they think she ought to have more accomplishment, polish, and such like.'

'And imagine from the specimen before them that I must be an adept at polishing Prendergasts.'

'Now, Cilla, do be serious. Tell me if all this meant nothing, and I shall be very glad. If you were in earnest, I could not be so well satisfied to see you anywhere else. You would find Mrs. Prendergast quite a mother to you.'

'Only one girl! I wanted a lot of riotous boys, but beggars must not be choosers. This is just right—people out of the way of those who knew me in my palmy days, yet not absolute strangers.'

'That was what induced me—they are so much interested about you, Cilla.'

'And you have made a fine heroic story. I should not wonder if it all broke down when the parties met. When am I to be trotted out for inspection?'

'Why, I told her if I found you really intended it, and had time, I would ask you to drive to her with me this morning, and then no one need know anything about it,' he said, almost with tears in

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his eyes.

'That's right,' cried Lucilla. 'It will be settled before Owen turns up. I'll get ready this instant. I say,' she added at the door, 'housemaids always come to be hired minus crinoline and flowers, is it the same with governesses?'

'Cilla, how can you?' said her friend, excessively distressed at the inferior position, but his depression only inspired her with a reactionary spirit of mischief.

'Crape is inoffensive, but my hair! What shall I do with it? Does Mrs. Prendergast hold the prejudice against pretty governesses?'

'She would take Venus herself if she talked no nonsense; but I don't believe you are in earnest,' growled the curate, angry at last.

'That is encouragement!' cried Lucilla, flying off laughing that she might hide from herself her own nervousness and dismay at this sudden step into the hard verity of self-dependence.

She could not stop to consider what to say or do, her refuge was always in the impromptu, and she was far more bent on forcing Mr. Prendergast to smile, and distracting herself from her one aching desire that the Irish journey had never been, than of forming any plan of action. In walking to the cabstand they met Robert, and exchanged greetings; a sick faintness came over her, but she talked it down, and her laugh sounded in his ears when they had passed on.

Yet when the lodgings were reached, the sensation recurred, her breath came short, and she could hardly conceal her trembling. No one was in the room but a lady who would have had far to seek for a governess less beautiful than herself. Insignificance was the first idea she inspired, motherliness the second, the third that she was a perfect lady, and a sensible woman. After shaking Lucilla kindly by the hand, and seating her on the sofa, she turned to her cousin, saying, 'Sarah and her papa are at the National Gallery, I wish you would look for them, or they will never be in time for luncheon.'

'Luncheon is not for an hour and a half.'

'But it is twenty minutes' walk, and they will forget food and everything else unless you keep them in order.'

'I'll go presently;' but he did not move, only looking piteous while Mrs. Prendergast began talking to Lucilla about the pictures, until she, recovering, detected the state of affairs, and exclaimed with her ready grace and abruptness, 'Now, Mr. Prendergast, don't you see how much you are in the way?'

'A plain truth, Peter,' said his cousin, laughing.

Lucy stepped forward to him, saying affectionately, 'Please go; you can't help me, and I am sure you may trust me with Mrs. Prendergast;' and she stretched out a hand to the lady with an irresistible child-like gesture of confidence.

'Don't you think you may, Peter?' asked Mrs. Prendergast, holding the hand; 'you shall find her here at luncheon. I won't do anything to her.'

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The good curate groaned himself off, and Lucy felt so much restored that she had almost forgotten that it was not an ordinary call. Indeed she had never yet heard a woman's voice that thus attracted and softened her. Mrs. Prendergast needed not to be jealous of Venus, while she had such tenderness in her manner, such winning force in her tone.

'That was well done,' she said. 'Talking would have been impossible while he sat looking on!'

'I am afraid he has given far too good an account of me,' said Lucy, in a low and trembling voice.

'His account comes from one who has known you from babyhood.'

'And spoilt me from babyhood!'

'Yes, Sarah knows what Cousin Peter can do in that line. He had little that was new to tell us, and what he had was of a kind—' She broke off, choked by tears. What she had heard of the girl's self-devotion touched her trebly at the sight of one so small, young, and soft-looking. And if she had ever been dubious of 'Peter's pet,' she was completely fascinated.

'I must not be taken on his word,' said Cilla, smiling.

'No, that would not be right by any of us.'

'Then pray be very hard with me—as a thorough stranger.'

'But I am so inexperienced, I have only had one interview with a governess.'

'And what did she do?' asked Lucilla, as both recovered from a laugh.

'She gave so voluble an account of her *acquirements* and *requirements*, that I was quite alarmed.'

'I'm sure I can't do that. I don't know what I can do.'

A pause, broken by Lucy, who began to feel that she had more of the cool readiness of the great

world. 'How old is your daughter?'

'Nearly fifteen. While we had our small parish in Sussex we taught her ourselves, and her father brought her on in Latin and Euclid. Do you know anything of those, Miss Sandbrook? not that it signifies.'

'Miss Charlecote used to teach me with my brother. I have forgotten, but I could soon get them up again.'

'They will hardly be wanted, but Sarah will respect you for them. Now, at Southminster, our time is so taken up that poor Sarah gets neglected, and it is very trying to an eager, diligent girl to prepare lessons, and have them continually put off, so we thought of indulging her with a governess, to bring her on in some of the modern languages and accomplishments that have grown rusty with us.'

'I think I could do that,' said Lucilla. 'I believe I know what other people do, and my languages are fresh from the Continent. Ought I to give you a specimen of my pronunciation?'

'Pray don't,' laughed Mrs. Prendergast. 'You know better than I what is right, and must prepare to be horrified by the sounds you will hear.'

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'I ought to have brought my sketches. I had two years of lessons from S---.'

'Sarah is burning for teaching in that line. Music? Dr. Prendergast likes the grand old pieces, and hardly cares for modern ones.'

'I hardly played anything newer than Mozart at Hiltonbury. Miss Charlecote taught me very well, I believe, and I had lessons from the organist from Elverslope, besides a good deal in the fashionable line since. I have kept that up. One wants it.'

There was another shy pause, and Lucilla growing more scrupulous and more confidential, volunteered,—'Mine has been an idle life since I came out. I am three-and-twenty now, and have been diligently forgetting for the last six years. Did you know that I had been a fast young lady?'

But things had come to such a pass, that say what she would, all passed for ingenuous candour and humility, and the answer was,—

'I know that you have led a very trying life, but to have passed through such unscathed is no disadvantage.'

'If I have,' said Lucy, sadly.

Mrs. Prendergast, who had learned all the facts of Lucilla's history through the Wrapworth medium, knew only the heroic side of her character, and admired her the more for her diffidence. So when terms were spoken of, the only fear on the one side was, that such a treasure must be beyond her means; on the other, lest what she needed for her nephew's sake might deprive her of such a home. However, seventy pounds a year proved to be in the thoughts of both, and the preliminaries ended with, 'I hope you will find my little Sarah a pleasant companion. She is a good girl, and intelligent, but you must be prepared for a few angles.'

'I like angles. I don't care for commonplace people.'

'I am afraid that you will find many such at Southminster. We cannot promise you the society you have been used to.'

'I am tired of society. I have had six years of it!' and she sighed.

'You must fix your own time,' said Mrs. Prendergast; 'and indeed we will try to make you at home.'

'My brother will be gone in a fortnight,' said Lucilla. 'After that I should like to come straight to you.'

Her tone and look made those two last words not merely *chez vous*, but to *you*, individually—to you, kind one, who will comfort me after the cruel parting. Mrs. Prendergast put her arm round her and kissed her.

'Don't,' said Lucilla, with the sweetest April face. 'I can't bear being made foolish.'

Nevertheless Mrs. Prendergast showed such warm interest in all her concerns, that she felt only that she had acquired a dear friend by the time the others came in, father and daughter complaining, the one gaily, the other dolefully, that Cousin Peter had so hunted them that they could look at nothing in peace. Indeed he was in such a state of restless misery, that Mrs. Prendergast, in compassion to him, sent her daughter to dress, called her husband away, and left the place clear for him to say, in a tone of the deepest commiseration, 'Well, my poor child?'

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'O, Mr. Penty, you have found me a true home. Be the others what they may, there must be rest in hearing *her* voice!'

'It is settled, then?'

'Yes. I only hope you have not taken them in. I did my best to let her know the worst of me, but it would make no impression. Seventy pounds a year. I hope that is not wicked.'

'O, Cilla, what would your father feel?'

'Come, we won't fight that over again. I thought I had convinced you of the dignity of labour, and I do feel as if at last I had lit on some one whom I could allow to do me good.'

She could not console him; he grieved over her changed circumstances with far more regret than she felt, and though glad for her sake that she should be with those whom he could trust, yet his connection with her employers seemed to him undutiful towards his late rector. All that she saw of them reassured her. The family manners were full of well-bred good-humour, full of fun, with high intelligence, much real refinement, and no pretension. The father was the most polished, with the scholarly courtesy of the dignified clergyman; the mother was the most simple and caressing; the daughter somewhat uncouth, readily betraying both her feelings and her cleverness and drollery in the style of the old friend whom Lucilla was amused to see treated as a youth and almost a contemporary of her pupil. What chiefly diverted her was the grotesque aspect of Dr. Prendergast and his daughter. Both were on a large scale, with immense mouths, noses turned up to display wide nostrils, great gray eyes, angularly set, yellow hair and eyebrows, red complexions, and big bones. The Doctor had the advantage of having outgrown the bloom of his ugliness; his forehead was bald and dignified, his locks softened by grizzling, and his fine expression and clerical figure would have carried off all the quaintness of his features if they had not been so comically caricatured in his daughter; yet she looked so full of life and character that Lucilla was attracted, and sure of getting on well with her. Moreover, the little elf felt the impression she was creating in this land of Brobdignag. Sarah was looking at her as a terra-cotta pitcher might regard a cup of egg-shell china, and Lucy had never been lovelier. Her mourning enhanced the purity of her white skin, and marked her slender faultless shape; her flaxen hair hung in careless wreaths of ringlet and braid; her countenance, if pale, had greater sweetness in its dejection, now and then brightened by gleams of her courageous spirit. Sarah gazed with untiring wonder, pardoning Cousin Peter for disturbing the contemplation of Domenichino's art, since here was a witness that heroines of romance were no mere myths, but that beings of ivory and rose, sapphire eyes and golden hair, might actually walk the earth.

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The Doctor was pleasant and friendly, and after luncheon the whole party started together to 'do' St. Paul's, whence Mr. Prendergast undertook to take Cilla home, but in no haste to return to the lonely house. She joined in the lionizing, and made a great impression by her familiarity with London, old and new. Little store as she had set by Honor's ecclesiology and antiquarianism, she had not failed to imbibe a tincture sufficient to go a long way by the help of ready wit, and she enchanted the Doctor by her odd bits of information on the localities, and by guiding him to out-of-the-way curiosities. She even carried the party to Woolstone-lane, displayed the Queen of Sheba, the cedar carving, the merchant's mark, and had lifted out Stow's *Survey*, where Sarah was delighted with Ranelagh, when the door opened, and Owen stood, surprised and blank. Poor fellow, the voices had filled him with hope that he should find Honor there. The visitors, startled at thus intruding on his trouble, and knowing him to be in profound disgrace, would have gone, but he, understanding them to be Mr. Prendergast's friends, and glad of variety, was eagerly courteous and hospitable, detaining them by displaying fresh curiosities, and talking with so much knowledge and brilliance, that they were too well entertained to be in haste. Lucilla, accepting Mrs. Prendergast as a friend, was rejoiced that she should have such demonstration that her brother was a thorough gentleman; and in truth Owen did and said everything so well that no one could fail to be pleased, and only as an after-thought could come the perception that his ease hardly befitted the circumstances, and that he comported himself more like the master of the house than as a *protégé* under a cloud.

No sooner had he handed them into their vehicle than he sank into a chair, and burst into one of the prolonged, vehement fits of laughter that are the reaction of early youth unwontedly depressed. Never had he seen such visages! They ought at once to be sketched—would be worth any money to Currie the architect, for gurgoyles.

'For shame,' said Lucilla, glad, however, once more to hear the merry peal; 'for shame, to laugh at my master!'

'I'm not laughing at old Pendy, his orifice is a mere crevice comparatively. The charm is in seeing it classified—the recent sloth accounted for by the ancient megatherium.'

'The megatherium is my master. Yes, I'm governess to Glumdalclitch!'

'You've done it?'

'Yes, I have. Seventy pounds a year.'

He made a gesture of angry despair, crying, 'Worse luck than I thought.'

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'Better luck than I did.'

'Old Pendy thrusting in his oar! I'd have put a stop to your absurdity at once, if I had not been sure no one would be deluded enough to engage you, and that you would be tired of looking out, and glad to go back to your proper place at the Holt before I sailed.'

'My proper place is where I can be independent.'

'Faugh! If I had known it, they should never have seen the Roman coins! There! it is a lesson that nothing is too chimerical to be worth opposing!'

'Your opposition would have made no difference.'

He looked at her silently, but with a half smile in lip and eye that showed her that the moment was coming when the man's will might be stronger than the woman's.

Indeed, he was so thoroughly displeased and annoyed that she durst not discuss the subject with him, lest she should rouse him to take some strong authoritative measures against it. He had always trusted to the improbability of her meeting with a situation before his departure, when, between entreaty and command, he had reckoned on inducing her to go home; and this engagement came as a fresh blow, making him realize what he had brought on those nearest and dearest to him. Even praise of Mrs. Prendergast provoked him, as if implying Lucilla's preference for her above the tried friend of their childhood; he was in his lowest spirits, hardly speaking to his sister all dinner-time, and hurried off afterwards to pour out his vexation to Robert Fulmort. Poor Robert! what an infliction! To hear of such a step, and be unable to interfere; to admire, yet not approve; to dread the consequences, and perceive so much alloy as to dull the glitter of the gold, as well as to believe his own stern precipitation as much the cause as Owen's errors; yet all the time to be the friend and comforter to the wounded spirit of the brother! It was a severe task; and when Owen left him, he felt spent and wearied as by bodily exertion, as he hid his face in prayer for one for whom he could do no more than pray.

Feelings softened during the fortnight that the brother and sister spent together. Childishly as Owen had undergone the relations and troubles of more advanced life, pettishly as he had striven against feeling and responsibility, the storm had taken effect. Hard as he had struggled to remain a boy, manhood had suddenly grown on him; and probably his exclusion from Hiltonbury did more to stamp the impression of his guilt than did its actual effects. He was eager for his new life, and pleased with his employer, promising himself all success, and full of enterprise. But his banishment from home and from Honor clouded everything; and, as the time drew nearer, his efforts to forget and be reckless gradually ceased. Far from shunning Lucilla, as at first, he was unwilling to lose sight of her, and they went about together wherever his preparations called him, so that she could hardly make time for stitching, marking, and arranging his purchases.

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One good sign was, that, though hitherto fastidiously expensive in dress and appointments, he now grudged himself all that was not absolutely necessary, in the endeavour to leave as large a sum as possible with Mrs. Murrell. Even in the tempting article of mathematical instruments he was provident, though the polished brass, shining steel, and pure ivory, in their perfection of exactitude, were as alluring to him as ever gem or plume had been to his sister. That busy fortnight of chasing after the 'reasonable and good,' speeding about till they were foot-sore, discussing, purchasing, packing, and contriving, united the brother and sister more than all their previous lives.

It was over but too soon. The last evening was come; the hall was full of tin cases and leathern portmanteaus, marked O. C. S., and of piles of black boxes large enough to contain the little lady whose name they bore. Southminster lay in the Trent Valley, so the travellers would start together, and Lucilla would be dropped on the way. In the cedar parlour, Owen's black knapsack lay open on the floor, and Lucilla was doing the last office in her power for him, and that a sad one, furnishing the Russia-leather housewife with the needles, silk, thread, and worsted for his own mendings when he should be beyond the reach of the womankind who cared for him.

He sat resting his head on his hand, watching her in silence, till she was concluding her work. Then he said, 'Give me a bit of silk,' turned his back on her, and stood up, doing something by the light of the lamp. She was kneeling over the knapsack, and did not see what he was about, till she found his hand on her head, and heard the scissors close, when she perceived that he had cut off one of her pale, bright ringlets, and saw his pocket-book open, and within it a thick, jet-black tress, and one scanty, downy tuft of baby hair. She made no remark; but the tears came dropping, as she packed; and, with a sudden impulse to give him the thing above all others precious to her, she pulled from her bosom a locket, hung from a slender gold chain, and held it to him—

'Owen, will you have this?'

'Whose? My father's?'

'And my mother's. He gave it to me when he went to Nice.'

Owen took it and looked at it thoughtfully.

'No, Lucy,' he said; 'I would not take it from you on any account. You have always been his faithful child.'

'Mind you tell me if any one remembers him in Canada,' said Lucilla, between relief and disappointment, restoring her treasure to the place it had never left before. 'You will find out whether he is recollected at his mission.'

'Certainly. But I do not expect it. The place is a great town now. I say, Lucy, if you had one bit of poor Honor's hair!'

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'No: you will never forgive me. I had some once, made up in a little cross, with gold ends; but one day, when she would not let me go to Castle Blanch, I shied it into the river, in a rage.'

She was touched at his being so spiritless as not even to say that she ought to have been thrown

in after it.

'I wonder,' she said, by way of enlivening him, 'whether you will fall in with the auburn-haired Charlecote.'

'Whereas Canada is a bigger place than England, the disaster may be averted, I hope. A colonial heir-at-law might be a monstrous bore. Moreover, it would cancel all that I can't but hope for that child.'

'You might hope better things for him than expectations.'

'He shall never have any! But it might come without. Why, Lucy, a few years in that country, and I shall be able to give him the best of educations and release you from drudgery; and when independent, we could go back to the Holt on terms to suit even your proud stomach, and might make the dear old thing happy in her old age.'

'If that Holt were but out of your head.'

'If I knew it willed to the County Hospital, shouldn't I wish as much to be with her as before? I mean to bring up my son as a gentleman, with no one's help! But you see, Lucy, it is impossible not to wish for one's child what one has failed in oneself—to wish him to be a better edition.'

'I suppose not.'

'For these first few years the old woman will do well enough for him, poor child. Robert has promised to look in on him.'

'And Mrs. Murrell is to write to me once a month. I shall make a point of seeing him at least twice a year.'

'Thank you; and by the time he is of any size I shall have a salary. I may come back, and we would keep house together, or you might bring him out to me.'

'That will be the hope of my life.'

'I'll not be deluded into reckoning on young ladies. You will be disposed of long before!'

'Don't, Owen! No, never.'

'Never?'

'Never.'

'I always wanted to know,' continued Owen, 'what became of Calthorp.'

'I left him behind at Spitzwasserfützung, with a message that ends it for ever.'

'I am afraid that defection is to be laid to my door, like all the rest.'

'If so, I am heartily obliged to you for it! The shock was welcome that brought me home. A governess? Oh! I had rather be a scullery-maid, than go on as I was doing there!'

'Then you did not care for him?'

'Never! But he pestered me, Rashe pestered me; nobody cared for me—I—I—' and she sobbed a long, tearless sob.

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'Ha!' said Owen, gravely and kindly, 'then there was something in the Fulmort affair after all. Lucy, I am going away; let me hear it for once. If I ever come back, I will not be so heedless of you as I have been. If he have been using you ill!'

'I used him ill,' said Lucy, in an inward voice.

'Nothing more likely!' muttered Owen, in soliloquy. 'But how is it, Cilla: can't you make him forgive?'

'He does, but as Honor forgives you. You know it was no engagement. I worked him up to desperation last year. Through Phœbe, I was warned that he would not stand my going to Ireland. I answered that it was no concern of his; I defied him to be able to break with me. They bothered me so that I was forced to go to spite them. He thought—I can't wonder at it—that I was irreclaimable; he was staying here, was worked on by the sight of this horrible district, and, between pique and goodness run mad, has devoted self and fortune. He gave me to understand that he has made away with every farthing. I don't know if he would wish it undone.'

She spoke into the knapsack, jerking out brief sentences.

'He didn't tell you he had taken a vow of celibacy?'

'I should not think it worth while.'

'Then it is all right!' exclaimed Owen, joyously. 'Do you think old Fulmort, wallowing in gold, could see a son of his living with his curates, as in the old Sussex rhyme?—'

There were three ghostesses
Sitting on three postisses,

Eating of three crustisses.

No, depend on it, the first alarm of Robert becoming a ghost, there will be a famous good fat living bought for him; and then—'

'No, I shall have been a governess. They won't consent.'

'Pshaw! What are the Fulmorts? He would honour you the more! No, Lucy,' and he drew her up from the floor, and put his arm round her, 'girls who stick to one as you have done to me are worth something, and so is Robert Fulmort. You don't know what he has been to me ever since he came to fetch me. I didn't believe it was in his cloth or his nature to be so forbearing. No worrying with preachments; not a bit of "What a good boy am I;" always doing the very thing that was comfortable and considerate, and making the best of it at Hiltonbury. I didn't know how he could be capable of it, but now I see, it was for your sake. Cheer up, Lucy, you will find it right yet.'

Lucilla had no conviction that he was right; but she was willing to believe for the time, and was glad to lay her head on his shoulder and feel, while she could, that she had something entirely her own. Too soon it would be over. Lengthen the evening as they would, morning must come at last.

It came; the hurried breakfast, pale looks, and trivial words. Robert arrived to watch them off; Mrs. Murrell brought the child. Owen took him in his arms, and called her to the study. Robert sat still, and said—

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'I will do what I can. I think, in case I had to write about the child, you had better leave me your address.'

Lucilla wrote it on a card. The tone quashed all hope.

'We trust to you,' she said.

'Mr. Currie has promised to let me hear of Owen,' said Robert; but no more passed. Owen came back hasty and flushed, wanting to be gone and have it over. The cabs were called, and he was piling them with luggage; Robert was glad to be actively helpful. All were in the hall; Owen turned back for one more solitary gaze round the familiar room; Robert shook Lucilla's hand.

'O bid me good speed,' broke from her; 'or I cannot bear it.'

'God be with you. God bless you!' he said.

No more! He had not approved, he had not blamed. He would interfere no more in her fate. She seated herself, and drew down her black veil, a chill creeping over her.

'Thank you, Robert, for all,' was Owen's farewell. 'If you will say anything to Phoebe from me, tell her she is all that is left to comfort poor Honor.'

'Good-bye,' was the only answer.

Owen lingered still. 'You'll write? Tell me of her; Honor, I mean, and the child.'

'Yes, yes, certainly.'

Unable to find another pretext for delay, Owen again wrung Robert's hand, and placed himself by his sister, keeping his head out as long as he could see Robert standing with crossed arms on the doorstep.

When, the same afternoon, Mr. Parsons came home, he blamed himself for having yielded to his youngest curate the brunt of the summer work. Never had he seen a man not unwell look so much jaded and depressed.

Nearly at the same time, Lucilla and her boxes were on the platform of the Southminster station, Owen's eyes straining after her as the train rushed on, and she feeling positive pain and anger at the sympathy of Dr. Prendergast's kind voice, as though it would have been a relief to her tumultuous misery to have bitten him, like Uncle Kit long ago. She clenched her hand tight, when with old-world courtesy he made her take his arm, and with true consideration, conducted her down the hill, through the quieter streets, to the calm, shady precincts of the old cathedral. He had both a stall and a large town living; and his abode was the gray freestone prebendal house, whose two deep windows under their peaked gables gave it rather a cat-like physiognomy. Mrs. Prendergast and Sarah were waiting in the hall, each with a kiss of welcome, and the former took the pale girl at once up-stairs, to a room full of subdued sunshine, looking out on a green lawn sloping down to the river. At that sight and sound, Lucy's face lightened. 'Ah! I know I shall feel at home here. I hear the water's voice!'

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But she had brought with her a heavy cold, kept in abeyance by a strong will during the days of activity, and ready to have its way at once, when she was beaten down by fatigue, fasting, and disappointment. She dressed and came down, but could neither eat nor talk, and in her pride was glad to attribute all to the cold, though protesting with over-eagerness that such indisposition was rare with her.

She would not have suffered such nursing from Honor Charlecote as was bestowed upon her. The last month had made tenderness valuable, and without knowing all, kind Mrs. Prendergast

could well believe that there might be more than even was avowed to weigh down the young head, and cause the fingers, when unobserved, to lock together in suppressed agony.

While Sarah only knew that her heroine-looking governess was laid up with severe influenza, her mother more than guessed at the kind of battle wrestled out in solitude, and was sure that more than brother, more than friend, had left her to that lonely suffering, which was being for the first time realized. But no confidence was given; when Lucilla spoke, it was only of Owen, and Mrs. Prendergast returned kindness and forbearance.

It was soothing to be dreamily in that summer room, the friendly river murmuring, the shadows of the trees lazily dancing on the wall, the cathedral bells chiming, or an occasional deep note of the organ stealing in through the open window. It suited well with the languor of sensation that succeeded to so much vehemence and excitement. It was not thought, it was not resignation, but a species of repose and calm, as if all interest, all feeling, were over for her, and as if it mattered little what might further befall her, as long as she could be quiet, and get along from one day to another. If it had been repentance, a letter would have been written very unlike the cold announcement of her situation, the scanty notices of her brother, with which she wrung the heart that yearned after her at Hiltonbury. But sorry she was, for one part at least, of her conduct, and she believed herself reduced to that meek and correct state that she had always declared should succeed her days of gaiety, when, recovering from her indisposition, she came down subdued in tone, and anxious to fulfil what she had undertaken.

'Ah! if Robert could see me now, he would believe in me,' thought she to herself, as she daily went to the cathedral. She took classes at school, helped to train the St. Jude's choir, played Handel for Dr. Prendergast, and felt absolutely without heart or inclination to show that self-satisfied young curate that a governess was not a subject for such distant perplexed courtesy. Sad at heart, and glad to distract her mind by what was new yet innocent, she took up the duties of her vocation zealously; and quickly found that all her zeal was needed. Her pupil was a girl of considerable abilities—intellectual, thoughtful, and well taught; and she herself had been always so unwilling a learner, so willing a forgetter, that she needed all the advantages of her grown-up mind and rapidity of perception to keep her sufficiently beforehand with Sarah, whenever subjects went deep or far. If she pronounced like a native, and knew what was idiomatic, Sarah, with her clumsy pronunciation, had further insight into grammar, and asked perplexing questions; if she played admirably and with facility, Sarah could puzzle her with the science of music; if her drawing were ever so effective and graceful, Sarah's less sightly productions had correct details that put hers to shame, and, for mere honesty's sake, and to keep up her dignity, she was obliged to work hard, and recur to the good grounding that against her will she had received at Hiltonbury. 'Had her education been as superficial as that of her cousins,' she wrote to her brother, 'Sarah would have put her to shame long ago; indeed, nobody but the Fennimore could be thoroughly up to that girl.'

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Perhaps all her endeavours would not have impressed Sarah, had not the damsel been thoroughly imposed on by her own enthusiasm for Miss Sandbrook's grace, facility, alertness, and beauty. The power of doing prettily and rapidly whatever she took up dazzled the large and deliberate young person, to whom the right beginning and steady thoroughness were essential, and she regarded her governess as a sort of fairy—toiling after her in admiring hopelessness, and delighted at any small success.

Fully aware of her own plainness, Sarah adored Miss Sandbrook's beauty, took all admiration of it as personally as if it been paid to her bullfinch, and was never so charmed as when people addressed themselves to the governess as the daughter of the house. Lucilla, however, shrank into the background. She was really treated thoroughly as a relation, but she dreaded the remarks and inquiries of strangers, and wished to avoid them. The society of the cathedral town was not exciting nor tempting, and she made no great sacrifice in preferring her pretty schoolroom to the dinners and evening parties of the Close; but she did so in a very becoming manner, and delighted Sarah with stories of the great world, and of her travels.

There could be no doubt that father, mother, and daughter all liked and valued her extremely, and she loved Mrs. Prendergast as she had never loved woman before, with warm, filial, confiding love. She was falling into the interests of the cathedral and the parish, and felt them, and her occupations in the morning, satisfying and full of rest after the unsatisfactory whirl of her late life. She was becoming happier than she knew, and at any rate felt it a delusion to imagine the post of governess an unhappy one. Three years at Southminster (for Sarah strenuously insisted that she would come out as late as possible) would be all peace, rest, and improvement; and by that time Owen would be ready for her to bring his child out to him, or else

—
Little did she reckon of the grave, displeased, yet far more sorrowful letter in which Honor wrote, 'You have chosen your own path in life, may you find it one of improvement and blessing! But I think it right to say, that though real distress shall of course always make what is past forgotten, yet you must not consider Hiltonbury a refuge if you grow hastily weary of your exertions. Since you refuse to find a mother in me, and choose to depend on yourself alone, it must be in earnest, not caprice.'

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CHAPTER XIV

These are of beauty rare,

In holy calmness growing,
Of minds whose richness might compare
E'en with thy deep tints glowing.
Yet all unconscious of the grace they wear.

Like flowers upon the spray,
All lowliness, not sadness,
Bright are their thoughts, and rich, not gay,
Grave in their very gladness,
Shedding calm summer light over life's changeful day.

To the Fuchsia.—S. D.

Phœbe Fulmort sat in her own room. The little round clock on the mantelpiece pointed to eleven. The fire was low but glowing. The clear gas shone brightly on the toilette apparatus, and on the central table, loaded with tokens of occupation, but neat and orderly as the lines in the clasped volume where Phœbe was dutifully writing her abstract of the day's reading and observation, in childishly correct miniature round-hand.

The curtain was looped up, and the moon of a frosty night blanched a square on the carpet beneath the window, at which she often looked with a glistening gaze. Her father and brother had been expected at dinner-time; and though their detention was of frequent occurrence, Phœbe had deferred undressing till it should be too late for their arrival by the last train, since they would like her to preside over their supper, and she might possibly hear of Robert, whose doings her father had of late seemed to regard with less displeasure, though she had not been allowed to go with Miss Charlecote to the consecration of his church, and had not seen him since the Horticultural Show.

She went to the window for a final look. White and crisp lay the path, chequered by the dark defined shadows of the trees; above was the sky, pearly with moonlight, allowing only a few larger stars to appear, and one glorious planet. Fascinated by the silent beauty, she stood gazing, wishing she could distinguish Jupiter's moons, observing on the difference between his steady reflected brilliance and the sun-like glories of Arcturus and Aldebaran, and passing on to the moral Miss Charlecote loved, of the stars being with us all day unseen, like the great cloud of witnesses. She hoped Miss Charlecote saw that moon; for sunrise or set, rainbow, evening gleam, new moon, or shooting star, gave Phœbe double pleasure by comparing notes with Miss Charlecote, and though that lady was absent, helping Mrs. Saville to tend her husband's mortal sickness, it was likely that she might be watching and admiring this same fair moon. Well that there are many girls who, like Phœbe, can look forth on the Creator's glorious handiwork as such, in peace and soothing, 'in maiden meditation fancy free,' instead of linking these heavenly objects to the feverish fancies of troubled hearts!

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Phœbe was just turning from the window, when she heard wheels sounding on the frosty drive, and presently a carriage appeared, the shadow spectrally lengthened on the slope of the whitened bank. All at once it stopped where the roads diverged to the front and back entrances, a black figure alighted, took out a bag, dismissed the vehicle, and took the path to the offices. Phœbe's heart throbbed. It was Robert!

As he disappeared, she noiselessly opened her door, guardedly passed the baize door of the west wing, descended the stairs, and met him in the hall. Neither spoke till they were in the library, which had been kept prepared for the travellers. Robert pressed her to him and kissed her fervently, and she found voice to say, 'What is it? Papa?'

'Yes,' said Robert.

She needed not to ask the extent of the calamity. She stood looking in his face, while, the beginning once made, he spoke in low, quick accents. 'Paralysis. Last night. He was insensible when Edwards called him this morning. Nothing could be done. It was over by three this afternoon.'

'Where?' asked Phœbe, understanding, but not yet feeling.

'At his rooms at the office. He had spent the evening there alone. It was not known till eight this morning. I was there instantly, Mervyn and Bevil soon after, but he knew none of us. Mervyn thought I had better come here. Oh, Phœbe, my mother!'

'I will see if she have heard anything,' said Phœbe, moving quietly off, as though one in a dream, able to act, move, and decide, though not to think.

She found the household in commotion. Robert had spoken to the butler, and everywhere were knots of whisperers. Miss Fennimore met Phœbe with her eyes full of tears, tears as yet far from those of Phœbe herself. 'Your mother has heard nothing,' she said; 'I ascertained that from Boodle, who only left her dressing-room since your brother's arrival. You had better let her have her night's rest.'

Robert, who had followed Phœbe, hailed this as a reprieve, and thanked Miss Fennimore, adding the few particulars he had told his sister. 'I hope the girls are asleep,' he said.

'Sound asleep, I trust,' said Miss Fennimore. 'I will take care of them,' and laying her hand on Phœbe's shoulder, she suggested to her that her brother had probably not eaten all day, then left

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them to return to the library together. There had been more time for Robert to look the thought in the face than his sister. He was no longer freshly stunned. He really needed food, and ate in silence, while she mechanically waited on him. At last he looked up, saying, 'I am thankful. A few months ago, how could I have borne it?'

'I have been sure he understood you better of late,' said Phœbe.

'Sunday week was one of the happiest days I have spent for years. Imagine my surprise at seeing him and Acton in the church. They took luncheon with us, looked into the schools, went to evening service, and saw the whole concern. He was kinder than ever I knew him, and Acton says he expressed himself as much pleased. I owe a great deal to Bevil Acton, and, I know, to you. Now I know that he had forgiven me.'

'You, Robin! There was nothing to forgive. I can fancy poor Mervyn feeling dreadfully, but you, always dutiful except for the higher duty!'

'Hush, Phœbe! Mine was grudging service. I loved opposition, and there was an evil triumph in the annoyance I gave.'

'You are not regretting your work. O no!'

'Not the work, but the manner! Oh! that the gift of the self-willed son be not Corban.'

'Robert! indeed you had his approval. You told me so. He was seeing things differently. It was so new to him that his business could be thought hurtful, that he was displeased at first, or, rather, Mervyn made him seem more displeased than he was.'

'You only make me the more repent! Had I been what I ought at home, my principles would have been very differently received!'

'I don't know,' said Phœbe; 'there was little opportunity. We have been so little with them.'

'Oh! Phœbe, it is a miserable thing to have always lived at such a distance from them, that I should better know how to tell such tidings to any old woman in my district than to my mother!'

Their consultations were broken by Miss Fennimore coming to insist on Phœbe's sleeping, in preparation for the trying morrow. Robert was thankful for her heedfulness, and owned himself tired, dismissing his sister with a blessing that had in it a tone of protection.

How changed was Phœbe's peaceful chamber in her eyes! Nothing had altered, but a fresh act in her life had begun—the first sorrow had fallen on her.

She would have knelt on for hours, leaning dreamily on the new sense of the habitual words, 'Our Father,' had not Miss Fennimore come kindly and tenderly to undress her, insisting on her saving herself, and promising not to let her oversleep herself, treating her with wise and soothing affection, and authority that was most comfortable.

Little danger was there of her sleeping too late. All night long she lay, with dry and open eyes, while the fire, groaning, sank together, and faded into darkness, and the moonbeams retreated slowly from floor to wall, and were lost as gray cold dawn began to light the window. Phœbe had less to reproach herself with than any one of Mr. Fulmort's children, save the poor innocent, Maria; but many a shortcoming, many a moment of impatience or discontent, many a silent impulse of blame, were grieved over, and every kindness she had received shot through her heart with mournful gladness and warmth, filling her with yearning for another embrace, another word, or even that she had known that the last good-bye had been the last, that she might have prized it—oh, how intensely!

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Then came anxious imaginings for the future, such as would not be stilled by the knowledge that all would settle itself over her head. There were misgivings whether her mother would be properly considered, fears of the mutual relations between her brothers, a sense that the family bond was loosed, and confusion and jarring might ensue; but, as her mind recoiled from the shoals and the gloom, the thought revived of the Pilot amid the waves of this troublesome world. She closed her eyes for prayer, but not for sleep. Repose even more precious and soothing than slumber was granted—the repose of confidence in the Everlasting Arms, and of confiding to them all the feeble and sorrowful with whom she was linked. It was as though (in the words of her own clasped book) her God were *more* to her than ever, truly a very *present* Help in trouble; and, as the dawn brightened for a day so unlike all others, her heart trembled less, and she rose up with eyes heavy and limbs weary, but better prepared for the morning's ordeal than even by sleep ending in a waking to the sudden shock.

When Miss Fennimore vigilantly met her on leaving her room, and surveyed her anxiously, to judge of her health and powers, there was a serious, sweet collectedness in air and face that struck the governess with loving awe and surprise.

The younger girls had known their father too little to be much affected by the loss. Maria stared in round-eyed amaze, and Bertha, though subdued and shocked for a short space, revived into asking a torrent of questions, culminating in 'Should they do any lessons?' Whereto Miss Fennimore replied with a decided affirmative, and, though Phœbe's taste disapproved, she saw that it was wiser not to interfere.

Much fatigued, Robert slept late, but joined his sister long before the dreaded moment of hearing

their mother's bell. They need not have been fearful of the immediate effect; Mrs. Fulmort's perceptions were tardy, and the endeavours at preparation were misunderstood, till it was needful to be explicit. A long stillness followed, broken at last by Phœbe's question, whether she would not see Robert. 'Not till I am up, my dear,' she answered, in an injured voice; 'do, pray, see whether Boodle is coming with my warm water.'

Her mind was not yet awake to the stroke, and was lapsing into its ordinary mechanical routine; her two breakfasts, and protracted dressing, occupied her for nearly two hours, after which she did not refuse to see her son, but showed far less emotion than he did, while he gave the details of the past day. Her dull, apathetic gaze was a contrast with the young man's gush of tears, and the caresses that Phœbe lavished on her listless hand. Phœbe proposed that Robert should read to her—she assented, and soon dozed, awaking to ask plaintively for Boodle and her afternoon cup of tea.

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So passed the following days, her state nearly the same, and her interest apparently feebly roused by the mourning, but by nothing else. She did not like that Phœbe should leave her, but was more at ease with her maid than her son, and, though he daily came to sit with her and read to her, he was grieved to be unable to be of greater use, while he could seldom have Phœbe to himself. Sorely missing Miss Charlecote, he took his meals in the west wing, where his presence was highly appreciated, though he was often pained by Bertha's levity and Maria's imbecility. The governess treated him with marked esteem and consideration, strikingly dissimilar to the punctilious, but almost contemptuous, courtesy of her behaviour to the other gentlemen of the family, and, after her pupils were gone to bed, would fasten upon him for a discussion such as her soul delighted in, and his detested. Secure of his ground, he was not sure of his powers of reasoning with an able lady of nearly double his years, and more than double his reading and readiness of speech, yet he durst not retreat from argument, lest he should seem to yield the cause that he was sworn to maintain, 'in season and out of season.' It was hard that his own troubles and other people's should alike bring him in for controversy on all the things that end in 'ism.'

He learnt by letter from Sir Bevil Acton that his father had been much struck by what he had seen in Cecily-row, and had strongly expressed his concern that Robert had been allowed to strip himself for the sake of a duty, which, if it were such at all, belonged more to others. There might have been wrongheaded haste in the action, but if such new-fangled arrangements had become requisite, it was unfair that one member of the family alone should bear the whole burthen. Sir Bevil strongly supported this view, and Mr. Fulmort had declared himself confirmed in his intention of making provision for his son in his will, as well as of giving him a fair allowance at present. There must have been warnings of failing health of which none had been made aware, for Mr. Fulmort had come to town partly to arrange for the safe guardianship of poor Maria and her fortune. An alteration in his will upon the death of one of the trustees had been too long neglected, and perhaps some foreboding of the impending malady had urged him at last to undertake what had been thus deferred. Each of the daughters was to have £10,000, the overplus being divided between them and their eldest brother, who would succeed both to the business, and on his mother's death to the Beauchamp estate, while the younger had already received an ample portion as heir to his uncle. Mr. Fulmort, however, had proposed to place Robert on the same footing with his sisters, and Sir Bevil had reason to think he had at once acted on his design. Such thorough forgiveness and approval went to Robert's heart, and he could scarcely speak as he gave Phœbe the letter to read.

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When she could discuss it with him after her mother had fallen asleep for the night, she found that his thoughts had taken a fresh turn.

'If it should be as Bevil supposes,' he said, 'it would make an infinite difference.' And after waiting for an answer only given by inquiring looks, he continued—'As she is now, it would not be a violent change; I do not think she would object to my present situation.'

'Oh, Robert, you will not expose yourself to be treated as before.'

'That would not be. There was no want of attachment; merely over-confidence in her own power.'

'Not *over* confidence, it seems,' murmured Phœbe, not greatly charmed.

'I understood how it had been, when we were thrown together again,' he pursued. 'There was no explanation, but it was far worse to bear than if there had been. I felt myself a perfect brute.'

'I beg your pardon if I can't be pleased just yet,' said Phœbe. 'You know I did not see her, and I can't think she deserves it after so wantonly grieving you, and still choosing to forsake Miss Charlecote.'

'For that I feel accountable,' said Robert, sadly. 'I cannot forget that her determination coincided with the evening I made her aware of my position. I saw that in her face that has haunted me ever since. I had almost rather it had been resentment.'

'I hope she will make you happy,' said Phœbe, dolefully, thinking it a pity he should be disturbed when settled in to his work, and forced by experience to fear that Lucy would torment him.

'I do not do it for the sake of happiness,' he returned. 'I am not blind to her faults; but she has a grand, generous character that deserves patience and forbearance. Besides, the past can never

be cancelled, and it is due to her to offer her whatever may be mine. There may be storms, but she has been disciplined, poor dear, and I am more sure of myself than I was. She *should* conform, and my work should not be impeded.'

Grimly he continued to anticipate hurricanes for his wedded life, and to demonstrate that he was swayed by justice and not by passion; but it was suspicious that he recurred constantly to the topic, and seemed able to dwell on no other. If Phœbe could have been displeased with him, it would have been for these reiterations at such a time. Not having been personally injured, she pardoned less than did either Robert or Miss Charlecote; she could not foresee peace for her brother; and though she might pity him for the compulsion of honour and generosity, she found that his auguries were not intended to excite compassionate acquiescence, but cheerful contradiction, such as both her good sense and her oppressed spirits refused. If he could talk about nothing better than Lucy when alone with her, she could the less regret the rarity of these opportunities.

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The gentlemen of the family alone attended the funeral, the two elder sisters remaining in town, whither their husbands were to return at night. Mrs. Fulmort remained in the same dreary state of heaviness, but with some languid heed to the details, and interest in hearing from Maria and Bertha, from behind the blinds, what carriages were at the door, and who got into them. Phœbe, with strong effort, then controlled her voice to read aloud till her mother dozed as usual, and she could sit and think until Robert knocked, to summon her to the reading of the will. 'You must come,' he said; 'I know it jars, but it is Mervyn's wish, and he is right.' On the stairs Mervyn met her, took her from Robert, and led her into the drawing-room, where she was kindly greeted by the brothers-in-law, and seated beside her eldest brother. As a duty, she gave her attention, and was rewarded by finding that had he been living, her hero, Mr. Charlecote, would have been her guardian. The will, dated fifteen years back, made Humfrey Charlecote, Esquire, trustee and executor, jointly with James Crabbe, Esquire, the elderly lawyer at present reading it aloud. The intended codicil had never been executed. Had any one looked at the downcast face, it would have been with wonder at the glow of shy pleasure thrilling over cheeks and brow.

Beauchamp of course remained with the heiress, Mrs. Fulmort, to whom all thereto appertaining was left; the distillery and all connected with it descended to the eldest son, John Mervyn Fulmort; the younger children received £10,000 apiece, and the residue was to be equally divided among all except the second son, Robert Mervyn Fulmort, who, having been fully provided for, was only to receive some pictures and plate that had belonged to his great uncle.

The lawyer ceased. Sir Bevil leant towards him, and made an inquiry which was answered by a sign in the negative. Then taking up some memoranda, Mr. Crabbe announced that as far as he could yet discover, the brother and five sisters would divide about £120,000 between them, so that each of the ladies had £30,000 of her own; and, bowing to Phœbe, he requested her to consider him as her guardian. The Admiral, highly pleased, offered her his congratulations, and as soon as she could escape she hastened away, followed by Robert.

'Never mind, Phœbe,' he said; taking her hand; 'the kindness and pardon were the same, the intention as good as the deed, as far as *he* was concerned. Perhaps you were right. The other way might have proved a stumbling-block.' Speak as he would, he could not govern the tone of his voice nor the quivering of his entire frame under the downfall of his hopes. Phœbe linked her arm in his, and took several turns in the gallery with him.

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'Oh, Robin, if I were but of age to divide with you!'

'No, Phœbe, that would be unfit for you and for me. I am only where I was before. I knew I had had my portion. I ought not to have entertained hopes so unbecoming. But oh, Phœbe! that she should be cast about the world, fragile, sensitive as she is—'

Phœbe could have said that a home at the Holt was open to Lucilla; but this might seem an unkind suggestion, and the same moment, Sir Bevil was heard impetuously bounding up the stairs. 'Robert, where are you?' he called from the end of the gallery. 'I never believed you could have been so infamously treated.'

'Hush!' said Robert, shocked; 'I cannot hear this said. You know it was only want of time.'

'I am not talking of your father. He would have done his best if he had been allowed. It is your brother!—his own confession, mind! He boasted just now that his father would have done it on the spot, but for his interference, and expected thanks from all the rest of us for his care of our interests.'

'What is the use of telling such things, Acton?' said Robert, forcing his voice to calm rebuke, and grasping the baluster with an iron-like grip.

'The use! To mark my detestation of such conduct! I did my best to show him what I thought of it; and I believe even Bannerman was astounded at his coolness. I'll take care the thing is made public! I'll move heaven and earth but I'll get you preferment that shall show how such treatment is looked upon.'

'I beg you will do nothing of the kind!' exclaimed Robert. 'I am heartily obliged to you, Acton. You gained me the certainty of forgiveness, without which I should have felt a curse on my work. For the rest, I complain of nothing. I have had larger means than the others. I knew I was to look for no more. I prefer my own cure to any other; and reflection will show you that our family

affairs are not to be made public.'

'At any rate, your mother might do something. Let me speak to her. What, not now? Then I will come down whenever Phœbe will summon me.'

'Not now, nor ever,' said Robert. 'Even if anything were in her power, she could not understand; and she must not be harassed.'

'We will talk that over on our way to town,' said Sir Bevil. 'I start at once. I will not see that fellow again, nor, I should think, would you.'

'I stay till Saturday week.'

'You had better not. You have been abominably treated; but this is no time for collisions. You agree with me, Phœbe; his absence would be the wisest course.'

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'Phœbe knows that annoyance between Mervyn and me is unhappily no novelty. We shall not revert to the subject, and I have reasons for staying.'

'You need not fear,' said Phœbe; 'Robert always keeps his temper.'

'Or rather we have the safeguard of being both sullen, not hot,' said Robert. 'Besides, Mervyn was right. I have had my share, and have not even the dignity of being injured.'

The need of cooling his partisan was the most effective means of blunting the sharp edge of his own vexation. Hearing Mervyn cross the hall, he called to offer to take his share in some business which they had to transact together. 'Wait a moment,' was the answer; and as Sir Bevil muttered a vituperation of Mervyn's assurance, he said, decidedly, 'Now, once for all, I desire that this matter be never again named between any of us. Let no one know what has taken place, and let us forget all but that my father was in charity with me.'

It was more than Sir Bevil was with almost any one, and he continued to pace the gallery with Phœbe, devising impossible schemes of compensation until the moment of his departure for London.

Robert had not relied too much on his own forbearance. Phœbe met her two brothers at dinner—one gloomy, the other melancholy; but neither altering his usual tone towards the other. Unaware that Robert knew of his father's designs, nor of their prevention, Mervyn was totally exempt from compunction, thinking, indeed, that he had saved his father from committing an injustice on the rest of the family, for the sake of a fanatical tormentor, who had already had and thrown away more than his share. Subdued and saddened for the time, Mervyn was kind to Phœbe and fairly civil to Robert, so that there were no disturbances to interfere with the tranquil intercourse of the brother and sister in their walks in the woods, their pacings of the gallery, or low-voiced conferences while their mother dozed.

True to his resolve, Robert permitted no reference to his late hopes, but recurred the more vigorously to his parish interests, as though he had never thought of any wife save St. Matthew's Church.

Home affairs, too, were matters of anxious concern. Without much sign of sorrow, or even of comprehension of her loss, it had suddenly rendered the widow an aged invalid. The stimulus to exertion removed, there was nothing to rouse her from the languid torpor of her nature, mental and physical. Invalid habits gave her sufficient occupation, and she showed no preference for the company of any one except Phœbe or her maid, to whose control her passive nature succumbed. At Boodle's bidding, she rose, dressed, ate, drank, and went to bed; at Phœbe's she saw her other children, heard Robert read, or signed papers for Mervyn. But each fresh exertion cost much previous coaxing and subsequent plaintiveness; and when Phœbe, anxious to rouse her, persuaded her to come down-stairs, her tottering steps proved her feebleness; and though her sons showed her every attention, she had not been in the drawing-room ten minutes before a nervous trembling and faintness obliged them to carry her back to her room.

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The family apothecary, a kind old man, declared that there was nothing seriously amiss, and that she would soon 'recover her tone.' But it was plain that much would fall on Phœbe, and Robert was uneasy at leaving her with so little assistance or comfort at hand. He even wrote to beg his eldest sister to come for a few weeks till his mother's health should be improved; but Sir Nicholas did not love the country in the winter, and Augusta only talked of a visit in the spring.

Another vexation to Robert was the schoolroom. During the last few months Bertha had outgrown her childish distaste to study, and had exerted her mind with as much eagerness as governess could desire; her translations and compositions were wonders of ease and acuteness; she had plunged into science, had no objection to mathematics, and by way of recreation wandered in German metaphysics. Miss Fennimore rather discouraged this line, knowing how little useful brain exercise she herself had derived from Kant and his compeers, but this check was all that was wanting to give Bertha double zest, and she stunned Robert with demonstrations about her 'I' and her 'not I,' and despised him for his contempt of her grand discoveries.

He begged for a prohibition of the study, but Miss Fennimore thought this would only lend it additional charms, and added that it was a field which the intellect must explore for itself, and not take on the authority of others. When this answer was reported through Phœbe, Robert shrugged his shoulders, alarmed at the hot-bed nurture of intellect and these concessions to

mental independence, only balanced by such loose and speculative opinions as Miss Fennimore had lately manifested to him. Decidedly, he said, there ought to be a change of governess and system.

But Phœbe, tears springing into her eyes, implored him not to press it. She thoroughly loved her kind, clear-headed, conscientious friend, who had assisted her so wisely and considerately through this time of trouble, and knew how to manage Maria. It was no time for a fresh parting, and her mother was in no state to be harassed by alterations. This Robert allowed with a sigh, though delay did not suit with his stern, uncompromising youthfulness, and he went on to say, 'You will bear it in mind, Phœbe. There and elsewhere great changes are needed. This great, disorderly household is a heavy charge. Acting for my mother, as you will have to do, how are you to deal with the servants?'

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'None of them come in my way, except dear old Lieschen, and Boodle, and Mrs. Brisbane, and they are all kind and thoughtful.'

'Surface work, Phœbe. Taking my mother's place, as you do now, you will, or ought to, become aware of the great mischiefs below stairs, and I trust you will be able to achieve a great reformation.'

'I hope—' Phœbe looked startled, and hesitated. 'Surely, Robert, you do not think I ought to search after such things. Would it be dutiful, so young as I am?'

'Perhaps you are right,' said Robert; 'only, Phœbe, Phœbe, never let toleration harden you to be indifferent to evil.'

'I hope not,' said Phœbe, gravely.

'My poor child, you are in for a world of perplexities! I wish I had not to leave you to them.'

'Every labyrinth has a clue,' said Phœbe, smiling; 'as Miss Fennimore says when she gives us problems to work. Only you know the terms of the problem must be stated before the solution can be made out; so it is of no use to put cases till we know all the terms.'

'Right, Phœbe. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.'

'I cannot see the evil yet,' said Phœbe; 'the trouble has brought so much comfort. That happy Sunday with you, and my own year of being with them both, have been such blessings! Last year, how much worse it would have been for us all, when I scarcely knew mamma or Mervyn, and could not go about alone nor to church! And Miss Charlecote will soon come home. There is so much cause for thankfulness, that I can't be afraid.'

Robert said no more, but felt that innocent buoyancy a mystery to his lower-pitched spirit. Never very gay or merry, Phœbe had a fund of happiness and a power of finding and turning outwards the bright side, which made her a most comfortable companion.

CHAPTER XV

Happy are they that learn in Him,
Though patient suffering teach
The secret of enduring strength,
And praise too deep for speech:
Peace that no pressure from without,
No strife within can reach.—A. L. WARING

Well was it for Phœbe that she had been trained to monotony, for her life was most uniform after Robert had left home. Her schoolroom mornings, her afternoons with her mother, her evenings with Mervyn, were all so much alike that one week could hardly be distinguished from another. Bertha's vagaries and Mervyn's periodical journeys to London were the chief varieties, certainly not her mother's plaintiveness, her brother's discontent, or the sacrifice of her own inclinations, which were pretty certain to be traversed, but then, as she said, something else happened that did as well as what she had wished.

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One day, when Mervyn had been hunting, and had come home tired, he desired her to give him some music in the evening. She took the opportunity of going over some fine old airs, which the exigencies of drawing-room display had prevented her from practising for some time. Presently she found him standing by her, his face softer than usual. 'Where did you get that, Phœbe?'

'It is Haydn's. I learnt it just after Miss Fennimore came.'

'Play it again; I have not heard it for years.'

She obeyed, and looked at him. He was shading his face with his hand, but he hardly spoke again all the rest of the evening.

Phœbe's curiosity was roused, and she tried the effect of the air on her mother, whose great pleasure was her daughter's music, since a piano had been moved into her dressing-room. But it awoke no association there, and 'Thank you, my dear,' was the only requital.

While the next evening she was wondering whether to volunteer it, Mervyn begged for it, and as she finished, asked, 'What does old Gay say of my mother now?'

'He thinks her decidedly better, and so I am sure she is. She has more appetite. She really ate the breast of a partridge to-day!'

'He says nothing of a change?'

'She could not bear the journey.'

'It strikes me that she wants rousing. Shut up in a great lonely house like this, she has nothing cheerful to look at. She would be much better off at Brighton, or some of those places where she could see people from the windows, and have plenty of twaddling old dowager society.'

'I did ask Mr. Gay about the sea, but he thought the fatigue of the journey, and the vexing her by persuading her to take it, would do more harm than the change would do good.'

'I did not mean only as a change. I believe she would be much happier living there, with this great place off her hands. It is enough to depress any one's spirits to live in a corner like a shrivelled kernel in a nut.'

'Go away!' exclaimed Phœbe. 'Mervyn! it is her home! It is her own!'

'Well, I never said otherwise,' he answered, rather crossly; 'but you know very well that it is a farce to talk of her managing the house, or the estate either. It was bad enough before, but there will be no check on any one now.'

'I thought you looked after things.'

'Am I to spend my life as a steward? No, if the work is to be in my hands, I ought to be in possession at once, so as to take my place in the county as I ought, and cut the City business. The place is a mere misfortune and encumbrance to her as she is, and she would be ten times happier at a watering-place.'

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'Mervyn, what do you mean? You have all the power and consequence here, and are fully master of all; but why should not poor mamma live in her own house?'

'Can't you conceive that a man may have reasons for wishing to be put in possession of the family place when he can enjoy it, and she can't? Don't look at me with that ridiculous face. I mean to marry. Now, can't you see that I may want the house to myself?'

'You are engaged!'

'Not exactly. I am waiting to see my way through the bother.'

'Who is it? Tell me about it, Mervyn.'

'I don't mind telling you, but for your life don't say a word to any one. I would never forgive you, if you set my Ladies Bannerman and Acton at me.'

Phœbe was alarmed. She had little hope that their likings would coincide; his manner indicated defiance of opinion, and she could not but be averse to a person for whose sake he wished to turn them out. 'Well,' was all she could say, and he proceeded: 'I suppose you never heard of Cecily Raymond.'

'Of Moorcroft?' she asked, breathing more freely. 'Sir John's daughter?'

'No, his niece. It is a spooney thing to take up with one's tutor's daughter, but it can't be helped. I've tried to put her out of my head, and enter on a more profitable speculation, but it won't work!'

'Is she very pretty—prettier than Lucilla Sandbrook?' asked Phœbe, unable to believe that any other inducement could attach him.

'Not what you would call pretty at all, except her eyes. Not a bit fit to make a figure in the world, and a regular little parsoness. That's the deuce of it. It would be mere misery to her to be taken to London and made to go into society; so I want to have it settled, for if she could come here and go poking into cottages and schools, she would want nothing more.'

'Then she is very good?'

'You and she will be devoted to each other. And you'll stand up for her, I know, and then a fig for their two ladyships. You and I can be a match for Juliana, if she tries to bully my mother. Not that it matters. I am my own man now; but Cecily is crotchety, and must not be distressed.'

'Then I am sure she would not like to turn mamma out,' said Phœbe, stoutly.

'Don't you see that is the reason I want to have it settled beforehand. If she were a party to it, she would never consent; she would be confoundedly scrupulous, and we should be all worried to death. Come, you just sound my mother; you can do anything with her, and it will be better for you all. You will be bored to death here, seeing no one.'

'I do not know whether it be a right proposal to make.'

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'Right? If the place had been my father's, it would be a matter of course.'

'That makes the whole difference. And even so, would not this be very soon?'

'Of course you know I am proposing nothing at once. It would not be decent, I suppose, to marry within the half-year; but, poor little thing, I can't leave her in suspense any longer. You should not have played that thing.'

'Then you know that she cares for you?'

He laughed consciously at this home question.

'It must be a long time since you were at Mr. Raymond's.'

'Eight years; but I have made flying visits there since, and met her at her uncle's. Poor little thing, she was horribly gone off last time, and very ungracious, but we will find a remedy!'

'Then you could not gain consent to it?'

'It never came to that. I never committed myself.'

'But why not? If she was so good, and you liked her, and they all wanted you to marry, I can't see why you waited, if you knew, too, that she liked you—I don't think it was kind, Mervyn.'

'Ah! women always hang by one another. See here, Phœbe, it began when I was as green as yourself, a mere urchin, and she a little unconscious thing of the same age. Well, when I got away, I saw what a folly it was—a mere throwing myself away! I might have gone in for rank or fortune, as I liked; and how did I know that I was such a fool that I could not forget her? If Charles Charteris had not monopolized the Jewess, I should have been done for long ago! And apart from that, I wasn't ready for domestic joys, especially to be Darby to such a pattern little Joan, who would think me on the highway to perdition if she saw *Bell's Life* on the table, or heard me bet a pair of gloves.'

'You can't have any affection for her,' cried Phœbe, indignantly.

'Didn't I tell you she spoilt the taste of every other transaction of the sort? And what am I going to do now? When she has not a halfpenny, and I might marry anybody!'

'If you cared for her properly, you would have done it long before.'

'I'm a dutiful son,' he answered, in an indifferent voice, that provoked Phœbe to say with spirit, 'I hope she does not care for you, after all.'

'Past praying for, kind sister. Sincerely I've been sorry for it; I would have disbelieved it, but the more she turns away, the better I know it; so you see, after all, I shall deserve to be ranked with your hero, Bevil Acton.'

'Mervyn, you make me so angry that I can hardly answer! You boast of what you think she has suffered for you all this time, and make light of it!'

'It wasn't my fault if my poor father would send such an amiable youth into a large family. Men with daughters should not take pupils. I did my best to cure both her and myself, but I had better have fought it out at once when she was younger and prettier, and might have been more conformable, and not so countrified, as you'll grow, Phœbe, if you stay rusting here, nursing my mother and reading philosophy with Miss Fennimore. If you set up to scold me, you had better make things easy for me.'

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Phœbe thought for a few moments, and then said, 'I see plainly what you ought to do, but I cannot understand that this makes it proper to ask my mother to give up her own house, that she was born to. I suppose you would call it childish to propose your living with us; but we could almost form two establishments.'

'My dear child, Cecily would go and devote herself to my mother. I should never have any good out of her, and she would get saddled for life with Maria.'

'Maria is my charge,' said Phœbe, coldly.

'And what will your husband say to that?'

'He shall never be my husband unless I have the means of making her happy.'

'Ay, there would be a frenzy of mutual generosity, and she would be left to us. No; I'm not going to set up housekeeping with Maria for an ingredient.'

'There is the Underwood.'

'Designed by nature for a dowager-house. That would do very well for you and my mother, though Cheltenham or Brighton might be better. Yes, it might do. You would be half a mile nearer your dear Miss Charlecote.'

'Thank you,' said Phœbe, a little sarcastically; but repenting she added, 'Mervyn, I hope I do not seem unkind and selfish; but I think we ought to consider mamma, as she cannot stand up for herself just now. It is not unlikely that when mamma hears you are engaged, and has seen and grown fond of Miss Raymond, she may think herself of giving up this place; but it ought to begin from her, not from you; and as things are now, I could not think of saying anything about it. From what you tell me of Miss Raymond, I don't think she would be the less likely to take you without Beauchamp than with it; indeed, I think you must want it less for her sake than your

own.'

'Upon my word, Mrs. Phœbe, you are a cool hand!' exclaimed Mervyn, laughing; 'but you promise to see what can be done as soon as I've got my hand into the matter.'

'I promise nothing,' said Phœbe; 'I hope it will be settled without me, for I do not know what would be the most right or most kind, but it may be plainer when the time comes, and she, who is so good, will be sure to know. O Mervyn, I am very glad of that!'

Phœbe sought the west wing in such a tingle of emotion that she only gave Miss Fennimore a brief good night instead of lingering to talk over the day. Indignation was foremost. After destroying Robert's hopes for life, here was Mervyn accepting wedded happiness as a right, and after having knowingly trifled with a loving heart for all these years, coolly deigning to pick it up, and making terms to secure his own consequence and freedom from all natural duties, and to thrust his widowed mother from her own home. It was Phœbe's first taste of the lesson so bitter to many, that her parents' home was not her own for life, and the expulsion seemed to her so dreadful that she rebuked herself for personal feeling in her resentment, and it was with a sort of horror that she bethought herself that her mother might possibly prefer a watering-place life, and that it would then be her part to submit cheerfully. Poor Miss Charlecote! would not she miss her little moonbeam? Yes, but if this Cecily were so good, she would make up to her. The pang of suffering and dislike quite startled Phœbe. She knew it for jealousy, and hid her face in prayer.

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The next day was Sunday, and Mervyn made the unprecedented exertion of going twice to church, observing that he was getting into training. He spent the evening in dwelling on Cecily Raymond, who seemed to have been the cheerful guardian elder sister of a large family in narrow circumstances, and as great a contrast to Mervyn himself as was poor Lucilla to Robert; her homeliness and seriousness being as great hindrances to the elder brother, as fashion and levity to the younger. It was as if each were attracted by the indefinable essence, apart from all qualities, that constitutes the self; and Haydn's air, learnt long ago by Cecily as a surprise to her father on his birthday, had evoked such a healthy shoot of love within the last twenty-four hours, that Mervyn was quite transformed, though still rather unsuitably sensible of his own sacrifice, and of the favour he was about to confer on Cecily in entering on that inevitable period when he must cease to be a gentleman at large.

On Monday he came down to breakfast ready for a journey, as Phœbe concluded, to London. She asked if he would return by the next hunting day. He answered vaguely, then rousing himself, said, 'I say, Phœbe, you must write her a cordial sisterly sort of letter, you know; and you might make Bertha do it too, for nobody else will.'

'I wrote to Juliana on Friday.'

'Juliana! Are you mad?'

'Oh! Miss Raymond! But you told me you had said nothing! You have not had time since Friday night to get an answer.'

'Foolish child, no; but I shall be there to-night or to-morrow.'

'You are going to Sutton?'

'Yes; and, as I told you, I trust to you to write such a letter as to make her feel comfortable. Well, what's the use of having a governess, if you don't know how to write a letter?'

'Yes, Mervyn, I'll write, only I must hear from you first.'

'I hate writing. I tell you, if you write—let me see, on Wednesday, you may be sure it is all over.'

'No, Mervyn, I will not be so impertinent,' said Phœbe, and the colour rushed into her face as she recollected the offence that she had once given by manifesting a brother's security of being beloved. 'It would be insulting her to assume that she had accepted you, and write before I knew, especially after the way you have been using her.'

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'Pshaw! she will only want a word of kindness; but if you are so fanciful, will it do if I put a cover in the post? There! and when you get it on Wednesday morning, you write straight off to Cecily, and when you have got the notion into my mother's understanding, you may write to me, and tell me what chance there is of Beauchamp.'

What chance of Beauchamp! The words made Phœbe's honest brow contract as she stood by the chimney-piece, while her brother went out into the hall. 'That's all he cares for,' she thought. 'Poor mamma! But, oh! how unkind. I am sending him away without one kind wish, and she must be good—so much better than I could have hoped!'

Out she ran, and as he paused to kiss her bright cheek, she whispered, 'Good-bye, Mervyn; good speed. I shall watch for your cover.'

She received another kiss for those words, and they had been an effort, for those designs on Beauchamp weighed heavily on her, and the two tasks that were left to her were not congenial. She did not know how to welcome a strange sister, for whose sake the last of the Mervyns was grudged her own inheritance, and still less did she feel disposed to harass her mother with a new idea, which would involve her in bewilderment and discussion. She could only hope that there

would be inspiration in Mervyn's blank cover, and suppress her fever for suspense.

Wednesday came—no cover, blank or unblank. Had he been taken with a fit of diffidence, and been less precipitate than he intended? Womanhood hoped so, and rather enjoyed the possibility of his being kept a little in suspense. Or suppose he had forgotten his cover, and then should think the absence of a letter her fault? Thursday—still no tidings. Should she venture a letter to him? No; lovers were inexplicable people, and after all, what could she say? Perhaps he was only waiting for an opportunity, and if Cecily had been ungracious at the last meeting, she might not afford one. Day after day wore on, and still the post-bag was emptied in vain, and Phœbe's patience was kept on tenterhooks, till, when a full fortnight had passed, she learnt through the servants that Mr. Mervyn's wardrobe and valet, grooms and horses, had been sent for to London.

So he had been refused, and could not bear to tell her so! And here she was disappointed and pitying, and as vexed with Miss Raymond as if it had not been no more than he deserved. But poor Mervyn! he had expected it so little, and had been so really attached, that Phœbe was heartily grieved for him, and longed to know how he bore it. Nay, with all the danger of removal, the flatness of the balked excitement was personally felt, and Phœbe would have been glad, in her monotonous life, of something to hope or to fear. p. 335

Her greatest pleasure was in Miss Charlecote's return. The long watch over her old friend was over. Honor had shared his wife's cares, comforted and supported her in her sorrow, and had not left her till the move from her parsonage was made, and she was settled among her own relations. Much as Honor had longed to be with Phœbe, the Savilles had nearer claims, and she could not part with them while there was any need of her. Indeed, Mr. Saville, as once the husband of Sarah Charlecote, the brother-in-law of Humfrey, and her own friend and adviser, was much esteemed and greatly missed. She felt as if her own generation were passing away, when she returned to see the hatchment upon Beauchamp, and to hear of the widow's failing health. Knowing how closely Phœbe was attending her mother, Honor drove to Beauchamp the first day after her return, and had not crossed the hall before the slender black figure was in her arms.

Friends seem as though they must meet to know one another again, and begin afresh, after one of the great sorrows of life has fallen on either side, and especially when it is a first grief, a first taste of that cup of which all must drink. As much of the child as could pass from Phœbe's sweet, simple nature had passed in those hours that had made her the protector and nurse of her mother, and though her open eyes were limpid and happy as before, and the contour of the rounded cheek and lip as youthful and innocent, yet the soft gravity of the countenance was deepened, and there was a pensiveness on the brow, as though life had begun to unfold more difficulties than pleasures.

And Honor Charlecote? That ruddy golden hair, once Owen's pride, was mingled with many a silvery thread, and folded smoothly on a forehead paler, older, but calmer than once it had been. Sorrow and desertion had cut deeply, and worn down the fair comeliness of heathful middle age; but something of compensation there was in the less anxious eye, from which had passed a certain restless, strained expression; and if the face were more habitually sad, it was more peaceful. She did not love less those whom she 'had seen,' but He whom she 'had not seen' had become her rest and her reliance, and in her year of loneliness and darkness, a trust, a support, a confiding joy had sprung up, such as she had before believed in, but never experienced. 'Her Best, her All;' those had been words of devotional aspiration before, they were realities at last. And it was that peace that breathed into her fresh energy to work and love on, unwearied by disappointment, but with renewed willingness to spend and be spent, to rejoice with those who rejoiced, to weep with them that wept, to pray and hope for those who had wrung her heart.

Her tears were flowing as she tenderly embraced Phœbe, and the girl clung fast to her, not weeping, but full of warm, sweet emotion. 'Dear Miss Charlecote, now you are come, I have help and comfort!' p. 336

'Dear one, I have grieved to be away, but I could not leave poor Mrs. Saville.'

'Indeed, I know you could not; and it is better to have you now than even at the time. It is a new, fresh pleasure, when I can enjoy it better. And I feel as if we had a right to you now—since you know what I told you,' said Phœbe, with her pretty, shy, lover-like colouring.

'That you are Humfrey's ward?—my legacy from him? Good!' said Honora, ratifying the inheritance with a caress, doubly precious to one so seldom fondled. 'Though I am afraid,' she added, 'that Mr. Crabbe would not exactly recognize my claim.'

'Oh, I don't want you for what Mr. Crabbe can do for us, but it does make me feel right and at ease in telling you of what might otherwise seem too near home. But he was intended to have taken care of us all, and you always seem to me one with him—'

Phœbe stopped short, startled at the deep, bright, girlish blush on her friend's cheek, and fearing to have said what she ought not; but Honor, recovering in a moment, gave a strange bright smile and tightly squeezed her hand. 'One with him! Dear Phœbe, thank you. It was the most undeserved, unrequited honour of my life that he would have had it so. Yes, I see how you look at me in wonder, but it was my misfortune not to know on whom or what to set my affections till too late. No; don't try to repent of your words. They are a great pleasure to me, and I delight to include you in the charges I had from him—the nice children he liked to meet in the woods.'

'Ah! I wish I could remember those meetings. Robert does, and I do believe Robert's first

beginning of love and respect for what was good was connected with his fondness for Mr. Charlecote.'

'I always regard Bertha as a godchild inherited from him, like Charlecote Raymond, whom I saw ordained last week. I could not help going out of my way when I found I might be present, and take his sister Susan with me.'

'You went.'

'Yes, Susan had been staying with her uncle at Sutton, and met me at Oxford. I am glad we were able to go. There was nothing that I more wished to have seen.'

Irrepressible curiosity could not but cause Phœbe to ask how lately Miss Raymond had been at Sutton, and as Miss Charlecote answered the question she looked inquisitively at her young friend, and each felt that the other was initiated. Whether the cousin ought to have confided to Miss Charlecote what she had witnessed at Sutton was an open question, but at least Honor knew what Phœbe burnt to learn, and was ready to detail it.

It was the old story of the parish priest taking pupils, and by dire necessity only half fulfilling conflicting duties, to the sacrifice of the good of all. Overworked between pupils and flock, while his wife was fully engrossed by children and household cares, the moment had not been perceived when their daughter became a woman, and the pupil's sport grew to earnest. Not till Mervyn Fulmort had left Sutton for the University were they aware that he had treated Cecily as the object of his affection, and had promised to seek her as soon as he should be his own master. How much was in his power they knew not, but his way of life soon proved him careless of deserving her, and it was then that she became staid and careworn, and her youth had lost its bloom, while forced in conscience to condemn the companion of her girlhood, yet unable to take back the heart once bestowed, though so long neglected.

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But when Mervyn, declaring himself only set at liberty by his father's death, appeared at Sutton, Cecily did not waver, and her parents upheld her decision, that it would be a sin to unite herself to an irreligious man, and that the absence of principle which he had shown made it impossible for her to accept him.

Susan described her as going about the next morning looking as though some one had been killing her, but going through her duties as calmly and gently as ever, though preyed on by the misery of the parting in anger, and the threat that if he were not good enough for her, he would give her reason to think so! Honor had pity on the sister, and spared her those words, but Phœbe had well-nigh guessed them, and though she might esteem Cecily Raymond, could not but say mournfully that it was a last chance flung away.

'Not so, my dear. What is right comes right. A regular life without repentance is sometimes a more hopeless state than a wilder course, and this rejection may do him more good than acceptance.'

'It is right, I know,' said Phœbe. 'I could advise no one to take poor Mervyn; but surely it is not wrong to be sorry for him.'

'No, indeed, dear child. It is only the angels who do not mourn, though they rejoice. I sometimes wonder whether those who are forgiven, yet have left evil behind them on earth, are purified by being shown their own errors reduplicating with time and numbers.'

'Dear Miss Charlecote, do not say so. Once pardoned, surely fully sheltered, and with no more punishment!'

'Vain speculation, indeed,' answered Honor. 'Yet I cannot help thinking of the welcome there must be when those who have been left in doubt and fear or shipwreck come safely into haven; above all, for those who here may not have been able to "fetch home their banished."''

Phœbe pressed her hand, and spoke of trying whether mamma would see her.

'Ah!' thought Honora, 'neither of us can give perfect sympathy. And it is well. Had my short-sighted wish taken effect, that sweet face might be clouded by such grief as poor Cecily Raymond's.'

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Mrs. Fulmort did see Miss Charlecote, and though speaking little herself, was gratified by the visit, and the voices talking before her gave her a sense of sociability. This preference enabled Phœbe to enjoy a good deal of quiet conversation with her friend, and Honora made a point of being at Beauchamp twice or three times a week, as giving the only variety that could there be enjoyed. Of Mervyn nothing was heard, and house and property wanted a head. Matters came to poor Mrs. Fulmort for decision which were unheard-of mysteries and distresses to her, even when Phœbe, instructed by the steward, did her utmost to explain, and tell her what to do. It would end by feeble, bewildered looks, and tears starting on the pale cheeks, and 'I don't know, my dear. It goes through my head. Your poor papa attended to those things. I wish your brother would come home. Tell them to write to him.'

'They' wrote, and Phœbe wrote, but in vain, no answer came; and when she wrote to Robert for tidings of Mervyn's movements, entreating that he would extract a reply, he answered that he could tell nothing satisfactory of his brother, and did not know whether he were in town or not; while as to advising his mother on business, he should only make mischief by so doing.

Nothing satisfactory! What could that imply? Phœbe expected soon to hear something positive, for Bertha's teeth required a visit to London, and Miss Fennimore was to take her to Lady Bannerman's for a week, during which the governess would be with some relations of her own.

Phœbe talked of the snugness of being alone with her mother and Maria, and she succeeded in keeping both pleased with one another. The sisters walked in the park, and brought home primroses and periwinkles, which their mother tenderly handled, naming the copses they came from, well known to her in childhood, though since her marriage she had been too grand to be allowed the sight of a wild periwinkle. In the evening Phœbe gave them music, sang infant-school hymns with Maria, tried to teach her piquet; and perceived the difference that the absence of Bertha's teasing made in the poor girl's temper. All was very quiet, but when good night was said, Phœbe felt wearied out, and chid herself for her accesses of yawning, nay, she was shocked at her feeling of disappointment and tedium when the return of the travellers was delayed for a couple of days.

When at length they came, the variety brightened even Mrs. Fulmort, and she was almost loquacious about some mourning pocket-handkerchiefs with chess-board borders, that they were to bring. The girls all drank tea with her, Bertha pouring out a whole flood of chatter in unrestraint, for she regarded her mother as nobody, and loved to astonish her sisters, so on she went, a slight hitch in her speech giving a sort of piquancy to her manner.

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She had dined late every day, she had ridden with Sir Bevil in the Park, her curly hair had been thought to be *crépé*, she had drunk champagne, she would have gone to the Opera, but the Actons were particular, and said it was too soon—so tiresome, one couldn't do anything for this mourning. Phœbe, in an admonitory tone, suggested that she had seen the British Museum.

'Oh yes, I have it all in my note-book. Only imagine, Phœbe, Sir Nicholas had been at Athens, and knew nothing about the Parthenon! And, gourmet as he is, and so long in the Mediterranean, he had no idea whether the Spartan black broth was made with sepia.'

'My dear,' began her mother, 'young ladies do not talk learning in society.'

'Such a simple thing as this, mamma, every one must know. But they are all so unintellectual! Not a book about the Bannermans' house except Soyer and the London Directory, and even Bevil had never read the *Old Red Sandstone* nor Sir Charles Lyell. I have no opinion of the science of soldiers or sailors.'

'You have told us nothing of Juliana's baby,' interposed Phœbe.

'She's exactly like the Goddess Pasht, in the Sydenham Palace! Juliana does not like her a bit, because she is only a girl, and Bevil quite worships her. Everything one of them likes, the other hates. They are a study of the science of antipathies.'

'You should not fancy things, Bertha.'

'It is no fancy; every one is observing it. Augusta says she has only twice found them together in their own house since Christmas, and Mervyn says it is a warning against virulent constancy.'

'Then you saw Mervyn?' anxiously asked Phœbe.

'Only twice. He is at deadly feud with the Actons, because Bevil takes Robert's part, and has been lecturing him about the withdrawing all the subscriptions!'

'What?' asked Phœbe again.

'Oh! I thought Robert told you all, but there has been such a row! I believe poor papa said something about letting Robert have an evening school for the boys and young men at the distillery, but when he claimed it, Mervyn said he knew nothing about it, and wouldn't hear of it, and got affronted, so he withdrew all the subscriptions from the charities and everything else, and the boys have been mobbing the clergy, and Juliana says it is all Robert's fault.'

'And did you see Robert?'

'Very little. No one would come to such an old foggy's as Sir Nicholas, that could help it.'

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'Bertha, my dear, young ladies do not use such words,' observed her mother.

'Oh, mamma, you are quite behindhand. Slang is the thing. I see my line when I come out. It would not do for you, Phœbe—not your style—but I shall sport it when I come out and go to the Actons. I shall go out with them. Augusta is too slow, and lives with nothing but old admirals and *gourmands*; but I'll always go to Juliana for the season, Phœbe, wear my hair in the Eugenie style, and be piquante.'

'Perhaps things will be altered by that time.'

'Oh no. There will be no retrograde movement. Highly educated women have acquired such a footing that they may do what they please.'

'Are we highly educated women?' asked Maria.

'I am sure you ought to be, my dear. Nothing was grudged for your education,' said her mother.

'Well, then, I'll always play at bagatelle, and have a German band at the door,' quoth Maria,

conclusively.

'Did you go to St. Matthew's?' again interrupted Phœbe.

'Yes, Bevil took me. It is the oddest place. A white brick wall with a red cross built into it over the gate, and the threshold is just a step back four or five hundred years. A court with buildings all round, church, schools, and the curates' rooms. Such a sitting-room; the floor matted, and a great oak table, with benches, where they all dine, schoolmaster, and orphan boys, and all, and the best boy out of each class.'

'It is a common room, like one at a college,' explained Phœbe. 'Robert has his own rooms besides.'

'Such a hole!' continued Bertha. 'It is the worst of all the curates' sitting-rooms, looking out into the nastiest little alley. It was a shame he did not have the first choice, when it is all his own.'

'Perhaps that is the reason he took the worst,' said Phœbe.

'A study in extremes,' said Bertha. 'Their dinner was our luncheon—the very plainest boiled beef, the liquor given away and at dinner, at the Bannermans', there were more fine things than Bevil said he could appreciate, and Augusta looking like a full-blown dahlia. I was always wanting to stick pins into her arms, to see how far in the bones are. I am sure I could bury the heads.'

Here, seeing her mother look exhausted, Phœbe thought it wise to clear the room; and after waiting a few minutes to soothe her, left her to her maid. Bertha had waited for her sister, and clinging round her, said, 'Well, Phœbe, aren't you glad of us? Have you seen a living creature?'

'Miss Charlecote twice, Mr. Henderson once, besides all the congregation on Sunday.'

'Matter-of-fact Phœbe! Perhaps you can bear it, but does not your mind ache, as if it had been held down all this time?' p. 341

'So that it can't expand to your grand intellect?' said Phœbe.

'It is no great self-conceit to hope one is better company than Maria! But come, before we fall under the dominion of the Queen of the West Wing, I have a secret for you.' Then, after a longer stammer than usual, 'How should you like a French sister-in-law?'

'Nonsense, Bertha!'

'Ah! you've not had my opportunities. I've seen her—both of them. Juliana says the mother is his object; Augusta, the daughter. The mother is much the most brilliant; but then she has a husband—a mere matter of faith, for no one ever sees him. Mervyn is going to follow them to Paris, that's certain, as soon as the Epsom day is over.'

'You saw them!'

'Only in the Park—oh, no! not in a room! Their ladyships would never call on Madame la Marquise; she is not received, you know. I heard the sisters talk it all over when they fancied me reading, and wonder what they should do if it should turn out to be the daughter. But then Juliana thinks Mervyn might never bring her home, for he is going on at such a tremendous rate, that it is the luckiest thing our fortunes do not depend on the business.'

Phœbe looked quite appalled as she entered the schoolroom, not only at Mervyn's fulfilment of his threat, but at Bertha's flippancy and shrewdness. Hitherto she had been kept ignorant of evil, save what history and her own heart could tell her. But these ten days had been spent in so eagerly studying the world, that her girlish chatter was fearfully precocious.

'A little edged tool,' said Miss Fennimore, when she talked her over afterwards with Phœbe. 'I wish I could have been with her at Lady Bannerman's. It is an unsafe age for a glimpse of the world.'

'I hope it may soon be forgotten.'

'It will never be forgotten' said Miss Fennimore. 'With so strong a relish for society, such keen satire, and reasoning power so much developed, I believe nothing but the devotional principle could subdue her enough to make her a well-balanced woman. How is that to be infused?—that is the question.'

'It is, indeed.'

'I believe,' pursued the governess, 'that devotional temper is in most cases dependent upon uncomprising, exclusive faith. I have sometimes wondered whether Bertha, coming into my hands so young as she did, can have imbibed my distaste to dogma; though, as you know, I have made a point of non-interference.'

'I should shudder to think of any doubts in poor little Bertha's mind,' said Phœbe. 'I believe it is rather that she does not think about the matter.'

'I will read Butler's *Analogy* with her,' exclaimed Miss Fennimore. 'I read it long ago, and shall be glad to satisfy my own mind by going over it again. It is full time to endeavour to form and deepen Bertha's convictions.' p. 342

'I suppose,' said Phœbe, almost to herself, 'that all naughtiness is the want of living faith—'

But Miss Fennimore, instead of answering, had gone to another subject.

'I have seen St. Matthew's, Phœbe.'

'And Robert?' cried Phœbe. 'Bertha did not say you were with her.'

'I went alone. No doubt your brother found me a great infliction; but he was most kind, and showed me everything. I consider that establishment a great fact.'

Phœbe showed her gratification.

'I heard him preach,' continued Miss Fennimore. 'His was a careful and able composition, but it was his sermon in brick and stone that most impressed me. Such actions only arise out of strong conviction. Now, the work of a conviction may be only a proof of the force of the will that held it; and thus the effect should not establish the cause. But when I see a young man, brought up as your brother has been, throwing himself with such energy, self-denial, and courage into a task so laborious and obscure, I must own that, such is the construction of the human mind, I am led to reconsider the train of reasoning that has led to such results.'

And Miss Fennimore's sincere admiration of Robert was Phœbe's one item of comfort.

Gladly she shared it with Miss Charlecote, who, on her side, knew more than she told Phœbe of the persecution that Robert was undergoing from a vestry notoriously under the influence of the Fulmort firm, whose interest it was to promote the vice that he came to withstand. Even the lads employed in the distillery knew that they gratified their employer by outrages on the clergy and their adherents, and there had been moments when Robert had been exposed to absolute personal danger, by mobs stimulated in the gin-shops; their violence against his attacks on their vicious practices being veiled by a furious party outcry against his religious opinions. He meanwhile set his face like a rock, and strong, resolute, and brave, went his own way, so unmoved as apparently almost to prefer his own antagonistic attitude, and bidding fair to weary out his enemies by his coolness, or to disarm them by the charities of which St. Matthew's was the centre.

As Phœbe never read the papers, and was secluded from the world's gossip, it was needless to distress her with the knowledge of the malignity of the one brother, or the trials of the other; so Honor obeyed Robert by absolute silence on this head. She herself gave her influence, her counsel, her encouragement, and, above all, her prayers, to uphold the youth who was realizing the dreams of her girlhood.

It might be that the impress of those very dreams had formed the character she was admiring. Many a weak and fragile substance, moulded in its softness to a noble shape, has given a clear and lasting impress to a firm and durable material, either in the heat of the furnace, or the ductility of growth. So Robert and Phœbe, children of the heart that had lost those of her adoption, cheered these lonely days by their need of her advice and sympathy.

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Nor was she without tasks at home. Mr. Henderson, the vicar, was a very old man, and was constantly growing more feeble and unequal to exertion. He had been appointed by the squire before last, and had the indolent conservative orthodoxy of the old school, regarding activity as a perilous innovation, and resisting all Miss Charlecote's endeavours at progress in the parish. She had had long patience, till, when his strength failed, she ventured to entreat him to allow her to undertake the stipend of a curate, but this was rejected with displeasure, and she was forced to redouble her own exertions; but neither reading to the sick, visiting the cottages, teaching at school, nor even setting up a night-school in her own hall, availed to supply the want of an active pastor and of a resident magistrate.

Hiltonbury was in danger of losing its reputation as a pattern parish, which it had retained long after the death of him who had made it so. The younger race who had since grown up were not such as their fathers had been, and the disorderly household at Beauchamp had done mischief. The primitive manners, the simplicity, and feudal feeling were wearing off, and poor Honor found the whole charge laid to her few modern steps in education! If Hiltonbury were better than many of the neighbouring places, yet it was not what it had been when she first had known it, and she vexed herself in the attempt to understand whether the times or herself were the cause.

Even her old bailiff, Brooks, did not second her. He had more than come to the term of service at which the servant becomes a master, and had no idea of obeying her, when he thought he knew best. Backward as were her notions of modern farming, they were too advanced for him, and either he would not act on them at all, or was resolved against their success when coerced. There was no dismissing him, and without Mr. Saville to come and enforce her authority, Honor found the old man so stubborn that she had nearly given up the contest, except where the welfare of men, not of crops, was concerned.

A maiden's reign is a dreary thing, when she tends towards age. And Honor often felt what it would have been to have had Owen to back her up, and infuse new spirit and vigour.

The surly ploughboy, who omitted to touch his cap to the lady, little imagined the train of painful reflections roused by this small indication of the altering spirit of the place!

Even in our ashes glow the wanted fires.—GRAY

'My dear, I did not like the voice that I heard just now.'

'I am sure I was not out of temper.'

'Indeed?'

'Well, I am sure any one would be vexed.'

'Cannot you tell me what was the matter without being sure so often?'

'I am sure—there, mamma, I beg your pardon—I am sure I did not mean to complain.'

'Only, Sarah, neither your voice has such a ring, nor are you so sure, when nothing has gone wrong. What was it?'

'It is that photography, mamma. Miss Sandbrook is so busy with it! I could not copy in my translation that I did yesterday, because she had not looked over it, and when she said she was coming presently, I am afraid I said it was always presently and never present. I believe I did say it crossly, and I am sorry I denied it,' and poor Sarah's voice was low and meek enough.

'Coming? Where is she?'

'In the dark chamber, doing a positive of the Cathedral.'

Mrs. Prendergast entered the schoolroom, outside which she had been holding this colloquy. The powerful sun of high summer was filling the room with barred light through the Venetian blinds, and revealing a rather confused mass of the appliances of study, interspersed with saucers of water in which were bathing paper photographs, and every shelf of books had a fringe of others on glass set up to dry. On the table lay a paper of hooks, a three-tailed artificial minnow, and another partly clothed with silver twist, a fly-book, and a quantity of feathers and silks.

'I must tell Francis that the schoolroom is no place for his fishing-tackle!' exclaimed Mrs. Prendergast.

'O, mamma, it is Miss Sandbrook's. She is teaching him to dress flies, because she says he can't be a real fisherman without, and the trout always rise at hers. It is quite beautiful to see her throw. That delicate little hand is so strong and ready.'

A door was opened, and out of the housemaid's closet, defended from light by a yellow blind at every crevice, came eager exclamations of 'Famous,' 'Capital,' 'The tower comes out to perfection;' and in another moment Lucilla Sandbrook, in all her bloom and animation, was in the room, followed by a youth of some eighteen years, Francis Beaumont, an Indian nephew of Mrs. Prendergast.

'Hit off at last, isn't it, aunt? Those dog-tooth mouldings will satisfy even the uncle.'

'Really it is very good,' said Mrs. Prendergast, as it was held up to the light for her inspection.

'Miss Sandbrook has bewitched the camera,' continued he. 'Do you remember the hideous muddles of last summer? But, oh! Miss Sandbrook, we must have one more; the sun will be off by and by.'

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'Only ten minutes,' said Lucilla, in a deprecating tone. 'You must not keep me a second more, let the sun be in ever such good humour. Come, Sarah, come and show us the place you said would be so good.'

'It is too hot,' said Sarah, bluntly, 'and I can't waste the morning.'

'Well, you pattern-pupil, I'll come presently. Indeed I will, Mrs. Prendergast.'

'Let me see this translation, Sarah,' said Mrs. Prendergast, as the photographers ran down-stairs.

She looked over it carefully, and as the ten minutes had passed without sign of the governess's return, asked what naturally followed in the morning's employment.

'Italian reading, mamma; but never mind.'

'Find the place, my dear.'

'It is only while Francis is at home. Oh, I wish I had not been cross.' And though Sarah usually loved to read to her mother, she was uneasy all the time, watching the door, and pausing to listen at the most moving passages. It was full half an hour before the voices were heard returning, and then there was a call, 'Directly, Sarah!' the dark chamber was shut up, and all subsided.

Mrs. Prendergast stayed on, in spite of an imploring glance from her daughter, and after an interval of the mysterious manipulations in the closet, the photograph was borne forth in triumph.

Lucilla looked a little abashed at finding Mrs. Prendergast in presence, and began immediately, 'There, Mr. Beaumont, you see! I hope Mrs. Prendergast is going to banish you forthwith; you make us shamefully idle.'

'Yes,' said Mrs. Prendergast, gravely, 'I am going to carry him off at once, and make a law

against future invasions.'

Francis attempted loud appeals, but his aunt quashed them with demeanour that showed that she was in earnest, and drove him away before her.

'Indeed, Miss Sandbrook,' said Sarah, with affectionate compunction, 'I did not mean to speak so loud and so crossly.'

'My dear,' said Lucilla, leaning back and fanning herself with her hat, 'we all know that we reverse the laws of teacher and pupil! Small blame to you if you were put out, and now I hope your mamma will keep him to herself, and that I shall have time to get cool. There! read me some French, it is a refreshing process—or practise a little. I declare that boy has dragged me in and out so often, that I haven't energy to tell a noun from a verb.'

Mrs. Prendergast had hardly descended to the drawing-room before her husband's voice called her to the study, where he stood, his broad mouth distended by a broader smile, his eyes twinkling with merriment.

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'Old woman' (his favourite name for her), 'do you know what a spectacle I have been witnessing?' and as she signed inquiry, 'Mrs. Sprydone, with numerous waggings of the head, and winkings of the eyes, inveigled me into her den, to see—guess.'

'Francis and Miss Sandbrook in the cloister photographing.'

'Old woman, you are a witch.'

'I knew what they were about, as well as Mrs. Sprydone's agony to open my eyes.'

'So your obstinate blindness drove her to me! She thought it right that I should be aware The Close, it seems, is in a fever about that poor girl. What do you know? Is it all gossip?'

'I know there is gossip, as a law of nature, but I have not chosen to hear it.'

'Then you think it all nonsense?'

'Not *all*.'

'Well, what then? The good ladies seem terribly scandalized by her dress. Is there any harm in that? I always thought it very becoming.'

'Exactly so,' said his wife, smiling.

'If it is too smart, can't you give her a hint?'

'When she left off her mourning, she spoke to me, saying that she could not afford not to wear out what she already had. I quite agreed; and though I could wish there were less stylishness about her, it is pleasant to one's own eye, and I see nothing to object to.'

'I'm sure it is no concern of the ladies, then! And how about this lad? One of their wild notions, is not it? I have heard her tell him half-a-dozen times that she was six years his elder.'

'Four-and-twenty is just the age that young-looking girls like to boast of. I am not afraid on her account; she has plenty of sense and principle, and I believe, too, there is a very sore spot in her heart, poor girl. She plays with him as a mere boy; but he is just at the time of life for a passion for a woman older than himself, and his devotion certainly excites her more than I could wish.'

'I'll tell you what, Peter didn't like it at all.'

'Peter was certainly not in a gracious mood when he was here last week. I could not make out whether seeing her a governess were too much for him, or whether he suspected me of ill-using her.'

'No, no; it was rivalry between him and Master Francis!' said the Doctor, laughing. 'How he launched out against young men's conceit when Francis was singing with her. Sheer jealousy! He could see nothing but dilapidation, dissent, and dirt at Laneham, and now has gone and refused it.'

'Refused Laneham!—that capital college living!—with no better dependence than his fellowship, and such a curacy as Wrapworth?'

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'Indeed he has. Here's his letter. You may read it and give it to Miss Sandbrook if you like—he seems quite dispirited.'

'"Too old to enter on a new field of duties,"' read Mrs. Prendergast, indignantly. 'Why, he is but forty-four! What did he think of us for coming here?'

'Despised me for it,' said the Doctor, smiling. 'Never mind; he will think himself younger as he grows older—and one can't blame him for keeping to Wrapworth as long as the old Dean of --- lives, especially as those absentee Charterises do so much harm.'

'He does not expect them to give him the living? They ought, I am sure, after his twenty years' labour there already.'

'Not they! Mr. Charteris gratuitously wrote to tell him that, on hearing of his burying that poor young Mrs. Sandbrook there, all scruples had been removed, and the next presentation was

offered for sale. You need not tell Miss Sandbrook so.'

'Certainly not; but pray how does Peter mean to avoid the new field of duty, if he be sure of turning out on the Dean's death? Oh! I see—"finish his days at his College, if the changes at the University have not rendered it insupportable to one who remembers elder and better days." Poor Peter! Well; these are direful consequences of Miss Sandbrook's fit of flightiness! Yes, I'll show her the letter, it might tame her a little; and, poor thing, I own I liked her better when she was soft and subdued.'

'Ha! Then you are not satisfied? Don't go. Let me know how it is. I am sure Sarah is distracted about her—more than even Francis. I would not part with her for a great deal, not only on Peter's account, but on her own and Sarah's; but these ladies have raked up all manner of Charteris scandal, and we are quite in disgrace for bringing her here.'

'Yes,' said Mrs. Prendergast, 'while we lived at our dear old country home, I never quite believed what I heard of jealous ill-nature, but I have seen how it was ever since those Christmas parties, when certainly people paid her a great deal of attention.'

'Who would not?—the prettiest, most agreeable young woman there.'

'It may be vexatious to be eclipsed not only in beauty, but in style, by a strange governess,' said Mrs. Prendergast. 'That set all the mothers and daughters against her, and there have been some spiteful little attempts at mortifying her, which have made Sarah and me angry beyond description! All that they say only impels me towards her. She is a rare creature, most engaging, but I do sometimes fear that I may have spoilt her a little, for she has certainly not done quite so well of late. At first she worked hard to keep in advance of Sarah, saying how she felt the disadvantage of superficial learning and desultory habits; she kept in the background, and avoided amusements; but I suppose reaction is natural with recovered spirits, and this summer she has taken less pains, and has let Francis occupy her too much, and—what I like least of all—her inattention brings back the old rubs with Sarah's temper.'

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'You must take her in hand.'

'If she were but my daughter or niece!'

'I thought you had made her feel as such.'

'This sort of reproof is the difficulty, and brings back the sense of our relative positions. However, the thing is to be done as much for her sake as for our own.'

Lucilla knew that a lecture was impending, but she really loved and esteemed Mrs. Prendergast too much to prepare to champ the bit. That lady's warmth and simplicity, and, above all, the largeness of mind that prevented her from offending or being offended by trifles, had endeared her extremely to the young governess. Not only had these eight months passed without the squabble that Owen had predicted would send her to Hiltonbury in a week, but Cilla had decidedly, though insensibly, laid aside many of the sentiments and habits in which poor Honor's opposition had merely confirmed her. The effect of the sufferings of the past summer had subdued her for a long time, the novelty of her position had awed her, and what Mrs. Prendergast truly called the reaction had been so tardy in coming on that it was a surprise even to herself. Sensible that she had given cause for displeasure, she courted the *tête-à-tête*, and herself began thus—'I beg your pardon for my idleness. It is a fatal thing to be recalled to the two passions of my youth—fishing and photography.'

'My husband will give Francis employment in the morning,' said Mrs. Prendergast. 'It will not do to give Sarah's natural irritability too many excuses for outbreaks.'

'She never accepts excuses,' said Lucilla, 'though I am sure she might. I have been a sore trial to her diligence and methodicalness; and her soul is too much bent on her work for us to drag her out to be foolish, as would be best for her.'

'So it might be for her; but, my dear, pardon me, I am not speaking only for Sarah's sake.'

With an odd jerk of head and hand, Cilly exclaimed, 'Oh! the old story—the other f—flirting, is it?'

'I never said that! I never thought that,' cried Mrs. Prendergast, shocked at the word and idea that had never crossed her mind.

'If not,' said Cilla, 'it is because you are too innocent to know flirting when you see it! Dear Mrs. Prendergast, I didn't think you would have looked so grave.'

'I did not think you would have spoken so lightly; but it is plain that we do not mean the same thing.'

'In fact, you in your quietness, think awfully of that which for years was to me like breathing! I thought the taste was gone for ever, but, you see'—and her sad sweet expression pleaded for her—'you have made me so happy that the old self is come back.' There was a silence, broken by this strange girl saying, 'Well, what are you going to do to me?'

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'Only,' said the lady, in her sweet, full, impressive voice, 'to beg you will indeed be happy in giving yourself no cause for self-reproach.'

'I'm past that,' said Lucilla, with a smile on her lip and a tear in her eye. 'I've not known that

sensation since my father died. My chief happiness since that has lain in being provoking, but you have taken away that pleasure. I couldn't purposely vex you, even if I were your adopted child!

Without precisely knowing the full amount of these words, Mrs. Prendergast understood past bitterness and present warmth, and, gratified to find that at least there was no galling at their mutual relations, responded with a smile and a caress that led Lucilla to continue—'As for the word that dismayed you, I only meant to acknowledge an unlucky propensity to be excited about any nonsense, in which any *man* kind is mixed up. If Sarah would take to it, I could more easily abstain, but you see her coquetries are with nobody more recent than Horace and Dante.'

'I cannot wish it to be otherwise with her,' said Mrs. Prendergast gravely.

'No! It is a bad speculation,' said Lucilla, sadly. 'She will never wish half her life could be pulled out like defective crochet; nor wear out good people's forbearance with her antics. I did think they were outgrown, and beat out of me, and that your nephew was too young; but I suppose it is ingrained, and that I should be flattered by the attentions of a he-baby of six months old! But I'll do my best, Mrs. Prendergast; I promise you I'll not be the schoolmistress abroad in the morning, and you shall see what terms I will keep with Mr. Beaumont.'

Mrs. Prendergast was less pleased after than before this promise. It was again that freedom of expression that the girl had learnt among the Charterises, and the ideas that she accepted as mere matters of course, that jarred upon the matron, whose secluded life had preserved her in far truer refinement. She did not know how to reply, and, as a means of ending the discussion, gave her Mr. Prendergast's letter, but was amazed at her reception of it.

'Passed the living! Famous! He will stick to Wrapworth to the last gasp! That is fidelity! Pray tell him so from me.'

'You had better send your message through Dr. Prendergast. We cannot but be disappointed, though I understand your feeling for Wrapworth, and we are sorry for the dispirited tone about the letter.'

'Well he may be, all alone there, and seeing poor Castle Blanch going to rack and ruin. I could cry about it whenever I think of it; but how much worse would it have been if he had deserted too! As long as he is in the old vicarage there is a home spot to me in the world! Oh, I thank him, I do thank him for standing by the old place to the last.'

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'It is preposterous,' thought Mrs. Prendergast. 'I won't tell the Doctor. He would think it so foolish in him, and improper in her; I verily believe it is her influence that keeps him at Wrapworth! He cannot bear to cross her wishes nor give her pain. Well, I am thankful that Sarah is neither beautiful nor attractive.'

Sincere was Lucilla's intention to resume her regular habits, and put a stop to Francis Beaumont's attentions, but the attraction had already gone so far that repression rendered him the more assiduous, and often bore the aspect (if it were not absolutely the coyness) of coquetry. While deprecating from her heart any attachment on his part, her vanity was fanned at finding herself in her present position as irresistible as ever, and his eagerness to obtain a smile or word from her was such an agreeable titillation, that everything else became flat, and her hours in the schoolroom an imprisonment. Sarah's methodical earnestness in study bored her, and she was sick of restraint and application. Nor was this likely to be merely a passing evil, for Francis's parents were in India, and Southminster was his only English home. Nay, even when he had returned to his tutor, Lucilla was not restored to her better self. Her craving for excitement had been awakened, and her repugnance to mental exertion had been yielded to. The routine of lessons had become bondage, and she sought every occasion of variety, seeking to outshine and dazzle the ladies of Southminster, playing off Castle Blanch fascinations on curates and minor canons, and sometimes flying at higher game, even beguiling the Dean himself into turning over her music when she sang.

She had at first, by the use of all her full-grown faculties, been just able to keep sufficiently ahead of her pupil; but her growing indolence soon caused her to slip back, and not only did she let Sarah shoot ahead of her, but she became impatient of the girl's habits of accuracy and research; she would give careless and vexatious answers, insist petulantly on correcting by the ear, make light of Sarah and her grammar, and hastily reject or hurry from the maps, dictionaries, and cyclopædias with which Sarah's training had taught her to read and learn. But her dislike of trouble in supporting an opinion did not make her the less pertinacious in upholding it, and there were times when she was wrathful and petulant at Sarah's presumption in maintaining the contrary, even with all the authorities in the bookshelves to back her.

Sarah's temper was not her prime quality, and altercations began to run high. Each dispute that took place only prepared the way for another, and Mrs. Prendergast, having taken a governess chiefly to save her daughter from being fretted by interruptions, found that her annoyances were tenfold increased, and irritations were almost habitual. They were the more disappointing because the girl preserved through them all such a passionate admiration for her beautiful and charming little governess, that, except in the very height of a squabble, she still believed her perfection, and was her most vehement partisan, even when the wrong had been chiefly on the side of the teacher.

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On the whole, in spite of this return to old faults, Lucilla was improved by her residence at

Southminster. Defiance had fallen into disuse, and the habit of respect and affection had softened her and lessened her pride; there was more devotional temper, and a greater desire after a religious way of life. It might be that her fretfulness was the effect of an uneasiness of mind, which was more hopeful than her previous fierce self-satisfaction, and that her aberrations were the last efforts of old evil habits to re-establish their grasp by custom, when her heart was becoming detached from them.

Be that as it might, Mrs. Prendergast's first duty was to her child, her second to the nephew intrusted to her, and love and pity as she might, she felt that to retain Lucilla was leading all into temptation. Her husband was slow to see the verification of her reluctant opinion, but he trusted to her, and it only remained to part as little harshly or injuriously as might be.

An opening was afforded when, in October, Mrs. Prendergast was entreated by the widow of one of her brothers to find her a governess for two girls of twelve and ten, and two boys younger. It was at a country-house, so much secluded that such temptations as at Southminster were out of reach, and the younger pupils were not likely to try her temper in the same way as Sarah had done.

So Mrs. Prendergast tenderly explained that Sarah, being old enough to pursue her studies alone, and her sister, Mrs. Willis Beaumont, being in distress for a governess, it would be best to transfer Miss Sandbrook to her. Lucilla turned a little pale, but gave no other sign, only answering, 'Thank you,' and 'Yes,' at fit moments, and acceding to everything, even to her speedy departure at the end of a week.

She left the room in silence, more stunned than even by Robert's announcement, and with less fictitious strength to brave the blow that she had brought on herself. She repaired to the schoolroom, and leaning her brow against the window-pane, tried to gather her thoughts, but scarcely five minutes had passed before the door was thrown back, and in rushed Sarah, passionately exclaiming—

'It's my fault! It's all my fault! Oh, Miss Sandbrook, dearest Miss Sandbrook, forgive me! Oh! my temper! my temper! I never thought—I'll go to papa! I'll tell him it is my doing! He will never—never be so unjust and cruel!'

'Sarah, stand up; let me go, please,' said Lucy, unclasping the hands from her waist. 'This is not right. Your father and mother both think the same, and so do I. It is just that I should go—'

'You shan't say so! It is my crossness! I won't let you go. I'll write to Peter! He won't let you go!' Sarah was really beside herself with despair, and as her mother advanced, and would have spoken, turned round sharply, 'Don't, don't, mamma; I won't come away unless you promise not to punish her for my temper. You have minded those horrid, wicked, gossiping ladies. I didn't think you would.'

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'Sarah,' said Lucilla, resolutely, 'going mad in this way just shows that I am doing you no good. You are not behaving properly to your mother.'

'She never acted unjustly before.'

'That is not for you to judge, in the first place; and in the next, she acts justly. I feel it. Yes, Sarah, I do; I have not done my duty by you, and have quarrelled with you when your industry shamed me. All my old bad habits are come back, and your mother is right to part with me.'

'There! there, mamma; do you hear that?' sobbed Sarah, imploringly. 'When she speaks in that way, can you still—? Oh! I know I was disrespectful, but you can't—you can't think that was her fault!'

'It was,' said Lucilla, looking at Mrs. Prendergast. 'I know she has lost the self-control she once had. Sarah, this is of no use. I would go now, if your mother begged me to stay—and that,' she added, with her firm smile, 'she is too wise to do. If you do not wish to pain me, and put me to shame, do not let me have any more such exhibitions.'

Pale, ashamed, discomfited, Sarah turned away, and not yet able to govern herself, rushed into her room.

'Poor Sarah!' said her mother. 'You have rare powers of making your pupils love you, Miss Sandbrook.'

'If it were for their good,' sighed Lucilla.

'It has been much for her good; she is far less uncouth, and less exclusive. And it will be more so, I hope. You will still be her friend, and we shall often see you here.'

Lucilla's tears were dropping fast; and looking up, she said with difficulty—'Don't mind this; I know it is right; I have not deserved the happy home you have given me here. Where I am less happy, I hope I may keep a better guard on myself. I thought the old ways had been destroyed, but they are too strong still, and I ought to suffer for them.'

Never in all her days had Lucilla spoken so humbly!

CHAPTER XVII

Though she's as like to this one as a crab is like to an apple,
I can tell what I can tell.—*King Lear*

Often a first grief, where sorrow was hitherto been a stranger, is but the foretaste to many another, like the first hailstorm, after long sunshine, prelude to a succession of showers, the clouds returning after the rain, and obscuring the sky of life for many a day.

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Those who daily saw Mrs. Fulmort scarcely knew whether to attribute her increasing invalidism to debility or want of spirits; and hopes were built on summer heat, till, when it came, it prostrated her strength, and at last, when some casual ailment had confined her to bed, there was no rally. All took alarm; a physician was called in, and the truth was disclosed. There was no formed disease; but her husband's death, though apparently hardly comprehended, had taken away the spring of life, and she was withering like a branch severed from the stem. Remedies did but disturb her torpor by feverish symptoms that hastened her decline, and Dr. Martyn privately told Miss Charlecote that the absent sons and daughters ought to be warned that the end must be very near.

Honor, as lovingly and gently as possible, spoke to Phœbe. The girl's eyes filled with tears, but it was in an almost well-pleased tone that she said, 'Dear mamma, I always knew she felt it.'

'Ah! little did we think how deeply went the stroke that showed no wound!'

'Yes! She felt that she was going to him. We could never have made her happy here.'

'You are content, my unselfish one?'

'Don't talk to me about myself, please!' implored Phœbe. 'I have too much to do for that. What did he say? That the others should be written to? I will take my case and write in mamma's room.'

Immediate duty was her refuge from anticipation, gentle tendance from the sense of misery, and, though her mother's restless feebleness needed constant waiting on, her four notes were completed before post-time. Augusta was eating red mullet in Guernsey, Juliana was on a round of visits in Scotland, Mervyn was supposed to be in Paris, Robert alone was near at hand.

At night Phœbe sent Boodle to bed; but Miss Fennimore insisted on sharing her pupil's watch. At first there was nothing to do; the patient had fallen into a heavy slumber, and the daughter sat by the bed, the governess at the window, unoccupied save by their books. Phœbe was reading Miss Maurice's invaluable counsels to the nurses of the dying. Miss Fennimore had the Bible. It was not from a sense of appropriateness, as in pursuance of her system of re-examination. Always admiring the Scripture in a patronizing temper, she had gloried in critical inquiry, and regarded plenary inspiration as a superstition, covering weak points by pretensions to infallibility. But since her discussions with Robert, and her readings of Butler with Bertha, she had begun to weigh for herself the internal, intrinsic evidence of Divine origin, above all, in the Gospels, which, to her surprise, enchained her attention and investigation, as she would have thought beyond the power of such simple words.

Pilate's question, 'What is truth?' was before her. To her it was a link of evidence. Without even granting that the writer was the fisherman he professed to be, what, short of Shakesperian intuition, could thus have depicted the Roman of the early Empire in equal dread of Cæsar and of the populace, at once unscrupulous and timid, contemning Jewish prejudice, yet, with lingering mythological superstition, trembling at the hint of a present Deity in human form; and, lost in the bewilderment of the later Greek philosophy, greeting the word *truth* with the startled inquiry, what it might be. What *is* truth? It had been the question of Miss Fennimore's life, and she felt a blank and a disappointment as it stood unanswered. A movement made her look up. Phœbe was raising her mother, and Miss Fennimore was needed to support the pillows.

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'Phœbe, my dear, are you here?'

'Yes, dear mamma, I always am.'

'Phœbe, my dear, I think I am soon going. You have been a good child, my dear; I wish I had done more for you all.'

'Dear mamma, you have always been so kind.'

'They didn't teach me like Honora Charlecote,' she faltered on; 'but I always did as your poor papa told me. Nobody ever told me how to be religious, and your poor papa would not have liked it. Phœbe, you know more than I do. You don't think God will be hard with me, do you? I am such a poor creature; but there is the Blood that takes away sin.'

'Dear mother, that is the blessed trust.'

'The *Truth*,' flashed upon Miss Fennimore, as she watched their faces.

'Will He give me His own goodness?' said Mrs. Fulmort, wistfully. 'I never did know how to think about Him—I wish I had cared more. What do you think, Phœbe?'

'I cannot tell how to answer fully, dear mamma,' said Phœbe; 'but indeed it is safe to think of His great loving-kindness and mercy. Robert will be here to-morrow. He will tell you better.'

'He will give me the Holy Sacrament,' said Mrs. Fulmort, 'and then I shall go—'

Presently she moved uneasily. 'Oh, Phœbe, I am so tired. Nothing rests me.'

'There remaineth a rest,' gently whispered Phœbe—and Miss Fennimore thought the young face had something of the angel in it—'no more weariness there.'

'They won't think what a poor dull thing I am there,' added her mother. 'I wish I could take poor Maria with me. They don't like her here, and she will be teased and put about.'

'No, mother, never while I can take care of her!'

'I know you will, Phœbe, if you say so. Phœbe, love, when I see God, I shall thank Him for having made you so good and dear, and letting me have some comfort in one of my children.'

Phœbe tried to make her think of Robert, but she was exhausted, dozed, and was never able to speak so much again.

Miss Fennimore thought instead of reading. Was it the mere effect on her sympathies that bore in on her mind that Truth existed, and was grasped by the mother and daughter? What was there in those faltering accents that impressed her with reality? Why, of all her many instructors, had none touched her like poor, ignorant, feeble-minded Mrs. Fulmort? p. 355

Robert arrived the next day. His mother knew him and was roused sufficiently to accept his offices as a clergyman. Then, as if she thought it was expected of her, she asked for her younger daughters, but when they came, she looked distressed and perplexed.

'Bless them, mother,' said Robert, bending over her, and she evidently accepted this as what she wanted; but 'How—what?' she added; and taking the uncertain hand, he guided it to the head of each of his three sisters, and prompted the words of blessing from the failing tongue. Then as Bertha rose, he sank on his knees in her place, 'Bless me, bless me, too, mother; bless me, and pardon my many acts of self-will.'

'You are good—you—you are a clergyman,' she hesitated, bewildered.

'The more reason, mamma; it will comfort him.' And it was Phœbe who won for her brother the blessing needed as balm to a bleeding heart.

'The others are away,' said the dying woman; 'maybe, if I had made them good when they were little, they would not have left me now.'

While striving to join in prayer for them, she slumbered, and in the course of the night she slept herself tranquilly away from the world where even prosperity had been but a troubled maze to her.

Augusta arrived, weeping profusely, but with all her wits about her, so as to assume the command, and to provide for her own, and her Admiral's comfort. Phœbe was left to the mournful repose of having no one to whom to attend, since Miss Fennimore provided for the younger ones; and in the lassitude of bodily fatigue and sorrow, she shrank from Maria's babyish questions and Bertha's levity and curiosity, spending her time chiefly alone. Even Robert could not often be with her, since Mervyn's absence and silence threw much on him and Mr. Crabbe, the executor and guardian; and the Bannermans were both exacting and self-important. The Actons, having been pursued by their letters from place to place in the Highlands, at length arrived, and Mervyn last of all, only just in time for the funeral.

Phœbe did not see him till the evening after it, when, having spent the day nearly alone, she descended to the late dinner, and after the quietness in which she had lately lived, and with all the tenderness from fresh suffering, it seemed to her that she was entering on a distracting turmoil of voices. Mervyn, however, came forward at once to meet her, threw his arm round her, and kissed her rather demonstratively, saying, 'My little Phœbe, I wondered where you were;' then putting her into a chair, and bending over her, 'We are in for the funeral games. Stand up for yourself!' p. 356

She did not know in the least what he could mean, but she was too sick at heart to ask; she only thought he looked unwell, jaded, and fagged, and with a heated complexion.

He handed Lady Acton into the dining-room; Augusta, following with Sir Bevil, was going to the head of the table, when he called out, 'That's Phœbe's place!'

'Not before my elders,' Phœbe answered, trying to seat herself at the side.

'The sister at home is mistress of the house,' he sternly answered. 'Take your proper place, Phœbe.'

In much discomfort she obeyed, and tried to attend civilly to Sir Nicholas's observations on the viands, hoping to intercept a few, as she perceived how they chafed her eldest brother.

At last, on Mervyn himself roundly abusing the flavour of the ice-pudding, Augusta not only defended it, but confessed to having herself directed Mrs. Brisbane to the concoction that morning.

'Mrs. Brisbane shall take orders from no lady but Miss Fulmort, while she is in my house,' thundered Mervyn.

Phœbe, in agony, began to say she knew not what to Sir Bevil, and he seconded her with equal

vehemence and incoherency, till by the time they knew what they were talking of, they were with much interest discussing his little daughter, scarcely turning their heads from one another, till, in the midst of dessert, the voice of Juliana was heard,—‘Sir Bevil, Sir Bevil, if you can spare me any attention—What was the name of that person at Hampstead that your sister told me of?’

‘That person! What, where poor Anne Acton was boarded? Dr. Graham, he called himself, but I don’t believe he was a physician. Horrid vulgar fellow!’

‘Excellent for the purpose, though,’ continued Lady Acton, addressing herself as before to Mr. Crabbe; ‘advertises for nervous or deficient ladies, and boards them on very fair terms: would take her quite off our hands.’

Phœbe turned a wild look of imploring interrogation on Sir Bevil, but a certain family telegraph had electrified him, and his eyes were on the grapes that he was eating with nervous haste. Her blood boiling at what she apprehended, Phœbe could endure her present post no longer, and starting up, made the signal for leaving the dinner-table so suddenly that Augusta choked upon her glass of wine, and carried off her last macaroon in her hand. Before she had recovered breath to rebuke her sister’s precipitation, Phœbe, with boldness and spirit quite new to the sisters, was confronting Juliana, and demanding what she had been saying about Hampstead.

‘Only,’ said Juliana, coolly, ‘that I have found a capital place there for Maria—a Dr. Graham, who boards and lodges such unfortunates. Sir Bevil had an idiot cousin there who died. I shall write to-morrow.’

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‘I promised that Maria should not be separated from me,’ said Phœbe.

‘Nonsense, my dear,’ said Augusta; ‘we could not receive her; she can never be made presentable.’

‘You?’ said Phœbe.

‘Yes, my dear; did you not know? You go home with us the day after to-morrow; and next spring I mean to bring you out, and take you everywhere. The Admiral is so generous!’

‘But the others?’ said Phœbe.

‘I don’t mind undertaking Bertha,’ said Lady Acton. ‘I know of a good school for her, and I shall deposit Maria at Dr. Graham’s as soon as I can get an answer.’

‘Really,’ continued Augusta, ‘Phœbe will look very creditable by and by, when she has more colour and not all this crape. Perhaps I shall get her married by the end of the season; only you must learn better manners first, Phœbe—not to rush out of the dining-room in this way. I don’t know what I shall do without my other glass of wine—when I am so low, too!’

‘A fine mistress of the house, indeed,’ said Lady Acton. ‘It is well Mervyn’s absurd notion is impossible.’

‘What was that? To keep us all?’ asked Phœbe, catching at the hope.

‘Not Maria nor the governess. You need not flatter yourself,’ said Juliana; ‘he said he wouldn’t have them at any price; and as to keeping house alone with a man of his character, even you may have sense to see it couldn’t be for a moment.’

‘Did Robert consent to Maria’s going to Hampstead?’ asked Phœbe.

‘Robert—what has he to do with it? He has no voice.’

‘He said something about getting the three boarded with some clergyman’s widow,’ said Augusta; ‘buried in some hole, I suppose, to make them like himself—go to church every day, and eat cold dinners on Sunday.’

‘I should like to see Bertha doing that,’ said Juliana, laughing.

But the agony of helplessness that had oppressed Phœbe was relieved. She saw an outlet, and could form a resolution. Home might have to be given up, but there was a means of fulfilling her mother’s charge, and saving Maria from the private idiot asylum; and for that object Phœbe was ready to embrace perpetual seclusion with the dullest of widows. She found her sisters discussing their favourite subject—Mervyn’s misconduct and extravagance—and she was able to sit apart, working, and thinking of her line of action. Only two days! She must be prompt, and not wait for privacy or for counsel. So when the gentlemen came in, and Mr. Crabbe came towards her, she took him into the window, and asked him if any choice were permitted her as to her residence.

‘Certainly; so nearly of age as you are. But I naturally considered that you would wish to be with Lady Bannerman, with all the advantages of London society.’

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‘But she will not receive Maria. I promised that Maria should be my charge. You have not consented to this Hampstead scheme?’

‘Her ladyship is precipitate,’ half whispered the lawyer. ‘I certainly would not, till I had seen the establishment, and judged for myself.’

‘No, nor then,’ said Phœbe. ‘Come to-morrow, and see her. She is no subject for *an*

establishment. And I beg you will let me be with her; I would much prefer being with any lady who would receive us both.'

'Very amiable,' said Mr. Crabbe.

'Ha!' interrupted Mervyn, 'you are not afraid I shall let Augusta carry you off, Phœbe. She would give the world to get you, but I don't mean to part with you.'

'It is of no use to talk to her, Mervyn,' cried Augusta's loud voice from the other end of the room. 'She knows that she cannot remain with you. Robert himself would tell her so.'

'Robert knows better than to interfere,' said Mervyn, with one of his scowls. 'Now then, Phœbe, settle it for yourself. Will you stay and keep house for me at home, or be Augusta's companion? There! the choice of Hercules. Virtue or vice?' he added, trying to laugh.

'Neither,' said Phœbe, readily. 'My home is fixed by Maria's.'

'Phœbe, are you crazy?' broke out the three voices; while Sir Nicholas slowly and sententiously explained that he regretted the unfortunate circumstance, but Maria's peculiarities made it impossible to produce her in society; and that when her welfare and happiness had been consulted by retirement, Phœbe would find a home in his house, and be treated as Lady Bannerman's sister, and a young lady of her expectations, deserved.

'Thank you,' said Phœbe; then turning to her brother, 'Mervyn, do you, too, cast off poor Maria?'

'I told you what I thought of that long ago,' said Mervyn, carelessly.

'Very well, then,' said Phœbe, sadly; 'perhaps you will let us stay till some lady can be found of whom Mr. Crabbe may approve, with whom Maria and I can live.'

'Lady Acton!' Sir Bevil's voice was low and entreating, but all heard it.

'I am not going to encumber myself,' she answered. 'I always disliked girls, and I shall certainly not make Acton Manor an idiot asylum.'

'And mind,' added Augusta, 'you won't come to me for the season! I have no notion of your leaving me all the dull part of the year for some gay widow at a watering-place, and then expecting me to go out with you in London.'

'By Heaven!' broke out Mervyn, 'they *shall* stay here, if only to balk your spite. My sisters shall not be driven from pillar to post the very day their mother is put under ground.'

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'Some respectable lady,' began Robert.

'Some horrid old harridan of a boarding-house keeper,' shouted Mervyn, the louder for his interference. 'Ay, you would like it, and spend all their fortunes on parsons in long coats! I know better! Come here, Phœbe, and listen. You shall live here as you have always done, Maria and all, and keep the Fennimore woman to mind the children. Answer me, will that content you? Don't go looking at Robert, but say yes or no.'

Mervyn's innuendo had deprived his offer of its grace, but in spite of the pang of indignation, in spite of Robert's eye of disapproval, poor desolate Phœbe must needs cling to her home, and to the one who alone would take her and her poor companion. 'Mervyn, thank you; it is right!'

'Right! What does that mean? If any one has a word to say against my sisters being under my roof, let me hear it openly, not behind my back. Eh, Juliana, what's that?'

'Only that I wonder how long it will last,' sneered Lady Acton.

'And,' added Robert, 'there should be some guarantee that they should not be introduced to unsuitable acquaintance.'

'You think me not to be trusted with them.'

'I do not.'

Mervyn ground his teeth, answering, 'Very well, sir, I stand indebted to you. I should have imagined, whatever your opinion of me, you would have considered your favourite sky-blue governess an immaculate guardian, or can you be contented with nothing short of a sisterhood?'

'Robert,' said Phœbe, fearing lest worse should follow, 'Mervyn has always been good to us; I trust to him.' And her clear eyes were turned on the eldest brother with a grateful confidence that made him catch her hand with something between thanks and triumph, as he said—

'Well said, little one! There, sir, are you satisfied?'

'I must be,' replied Robert.

Sir Bevil, able to endure no longer, broke in with some intelligence from the newspaper, which he had been perusing ever since his unlucky appeal to his lady. Every one thankfully accepted this means of ending the discussion.

'Well, Miss,' was Juliana's good night, 'you have attained your object. I hope you may find it answer.'

'Yes,' added Augusta, 'when Mervyn brings home that Frenchwoman, you will wish you had been less tenacious.'

'That's all an idea of yours,' said Juliana. 'She'll have punishment enough in Master Mervyn's own temper. I wouldn't keep house for him, no, not for a week.'

'Stay till you are asked,' said Augusta.

Phœbe could bear no more, but slipped through the swing-door, reached her room, and sinking into a chair, passively let Lieschen undress her, not attempting to raise her drooping head, nor check the tears that trickled, conscious only of her broken, wounded, oppressed state of dejection, into the details of which she durst not look. How could she, when her misery had been inflicted by such hands? The mere fact of the unseemly broil between the brothers and sisters on such an evening was shame and pain enough, and she felt like one bruised and crushed all over, both in herself and Maria, while the one drop of comfort in Mervyn's kindness was poisoned by the strife between him and Robert, and the doubt whether Robert thought she ought to have accepted it.

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When her maid left her, she only moved to extinguish her light, and then cowered down again as if to hide in the darkness; but the soft summer twilight gloom seemed to soothe and restore her, and with a longing for air to refresh her throbbing brow, she leant out into the cool, still night, looking into the northern sky, still pearly with the last reminiscence of the late sunset, and with the pale large stars beaming calmly down.

'Oh mother, mother! Well might you long to take your poor Maria with you—there where the weary are at rest—where there is mercy for the weak and slow! Home! home! we have none but with you!'

Nay, had she not a home with Him whose love was more than mother's love; whose soft stars were smiling on her now; whose gentle breezes fanned her burning cheeks, even as a still softer breath of comfort was stilling her troubled spirit! She leant out till she could compose herself to kneel in prayer, and from prayer rose up quietly, weary, and able to rest beneath the Fatherly Wings spread over the orphan.

She was early astir, though with heavy, swollen eyelids; and anxious to avoid Bertha's inquiries till all should be more fully settled, she betook herself to the garden, to cool her brow and eyes. She was bathing them in the dewy fragrant heart of a full-blown rose, that had seemed to look at her with a tearful smile of sympathy, when a step approached, and an arm was thrown round her, and Robert stood beside her.

'My Phœbe,' he said tenderly, 'how are you? It was a frightful evening!'

'Oh! Robert, were you displeased with me?'

'No, indeed. You put us all to shame. I grieved that you had no more preparation, but some of the guests stayed late, afterwards I was hindered by business, and then Bevil laid hands on me to advise me privately against this establishment for poor Maria.'

'I thought it was Juliana who pressed it!'

'Have you not learnt that whatever he dislikes she forwards?'

'Oh! Robert, you can hinder that scheme from ever being thought of again!'

'Yes,' said Robert; '*there* she should never have been, even had you not made resistance.'

'And, Robert, may we stay here?' asked Phœbe, trembling.

'Crabbe sees no objection,' he answered.

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'Do you, Robert? If you think we ought not, I will try to change; but Mervyn is kind, and it *is* home! I saw you thought me wrong, but I could not help being glad he relented to Maria.'

'You were right. Your eldest brother is the right person to give you a home. I cannot. It would have shown an evil, suspicious temper if you had refused him.'

'Yet you do not like it.'

'Perhaps I am unjust. I own that I had imagined you all happier and better in such a home as Mrs. Parsons or Miss Charlecote could find for you; and though Mervyn would scarcely wilfully take advantage of your innocence, I do not trust to his always knowing what would be hurtful to you or Bertha. It is a charge that I grudge to him, for I do not think he perceives what it is.'

'I could make you think better of him. I wonder whether I may.'

'Anything—anything to make me think better of him,' cried Robert eagerly.

'I do not know it from him alone, so it cannot be a breach of confidence,' said Phœbe. 'He has been deeply attached, not to a pretty person, nor a rich nor grand one, but she was very good and religious—so much so that she would not accept him.'

'How recently?'

'The attachment has been long; the rejection this spring.'

'My poor Phœbe, I could not tell you how his time has been passed since early spring.'

'I know in part,' she said, looking down; 'but, Robin, *that* arose from despair. Oh, how I longed for him to come and let me try to comfort him!'

'And how is this to change my opinion,' asked Robert, 'except by showing me that no right-minded woman could trust herself with him?'

'Oh, Robert, no! Sisters need not change, though others ought, perhaps. I meant you to see that he does love and honour goodness for itself, and so that he will guard his sisters.'

'I will think so, Phœbe. You deserve to be believed, for you draw out his best points. For my own part, the miserable habits of our boyhood have left a habit of acrimony, of which, repent as I will, I cannot free myself. I gave way to it last night. I can be cool, but I cannot help being contemptuous. I make him worse, and I aggravated your difficulties by insulting him.'

'He insulted you,' said Phœbe. 'When I think of those words I don't know how I can stay with him.'

'They fell short! They were nothing,' said Robert. 'But it was the more unbecoming in me to frame my warning as I did. Oh, Phœbe, your prayers and influence have done much for me. Help me now to treat my brother so as not to disgrace my calling.'

'You—when you freely forgive all the injuries he has done you!'

'If I freely forgave, I suppose I should love;' and he murmured sadly, 'He that hateth his brother is a murderer.'

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Phœbe shrank, but could not help thinking that if the spirit of Cain existed among them, it was not with the younger brother.

When she next spoke, it was to express her fear lest Miss Fennimore should refuse to remain, since the position would be uncomfortable. Her talent was thrown away on poor Maria, and Bertha had been very vexing and provoking of late. Phœbe greatly dreaded a change, both from her love for her governess, and alarm lest a new duenna might be yet more unwelcome to Mervyn, and she was disappointed to see that Robert caught at the hope that the whole scheme might be baffled on this score.

Phœbe thought a repetition of the dinner-table offence would be best obviated by taking her place as tea-maker at once. Mervyn first came down, and greeted her like something especially his own. He detected the red blistered spot on her cheek, and exclaimed, 'Eh! did they make you cry? Never mind; the house will soon be clear of them, and you my little queen. You have nothing to say against it. Has any one been putting things in your head?' and he looked fiercely at his brother.

'No, Mervyn; Robert and I both think you very kind, and that it is the right thing.'

'Yes,' said Robert, 'no arrangement could be more proper. I am sorry, Mervyn, if my manner was offensive last night.'

'I never take offence, it is not my way,' said Mervyn, indifferently, almost annoyed that his brother had not spirit to persevere in the quarrel.

After the breakfast, where the elder sisters were cold and distant, and Sir Bevil as friendly as he durst, Mervyn's first move was to go, in conjunction with Mr. Crabbe, to explain the arrangement to Miss Fennimore, and request her to continue her services. They came away surprised and angry: Miss Fennimore would 'consider of it.' Even when Mervyn, to spare himself from 'some stranger who might prove a greater nuisance,' had offered a hundred in addition to her present exorbitant salary, she courteously declined, and repeated that her reply should be given in the evening.

Mervyn's wrath would have been doubled had he known the cause of her delay. She sent Maria to beg Robert to spare her half an hour, and on his entrance, dismissing her pupils, she said, 'Mr. Fulmort, I should be glad if you would candidly tell me your opinion of the proposed arrangement. I mean,' seeing his hesitation, 'of that part which relates to myself.'

'I do not quite understand you,' he said.

'I mean, whether, as the person whose decision has the most worth in this family, you are satisfied to leave your sisters under my charge? If not, whatever it may cost me to part with that sweet and admirable Phœbe,' and her voice showed unwonted emotion, 'I would not think of remaining with them.'

'You put me in a very strange position, Miss Fennimore; I have no authority to decide. They could have no friend more sincerely anxious for their welfare or so welcome to Phœbe's present wishes.'

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'Perhaps not; but the question is not of my feelings nor theirs, but whether you consider my influence pernicious to their religious principles. If so, I decline their guardian's terms at once.' After a pause, she added, pleased at his deliberation, 'It may assist you if I lay before you the state of my own mind.'

She proceeded to explain that her parents had been professed Unitarians, her mother, loving and devout to the hereditary faith, beyond which she had never looked—'Mr. Fulmort,' she said, 'nothing will approve itself to me that condemns my mother!'

He began to say that often where there was no wilful rejection of truth, saving grace and faith might be vouchsafed.

'You are charitable,' she answered, in a tone like sarcasm, and went on. Her father, a literary man of high ability, set aside from work by ill-health, thought himself above creeds. He had given his daughter a man's education, had read many argumentative books with her, and died, leaving her liberally and devoutly inclined in the spirit of Pope's universal prayer—'Jehovah, Jove, or Lord.' It was all aspiration to the Lord of nature, the forms, adaptations to humanity, kaleidoscope shapes of half-comprehended fragments, each with its own beauty, and only becoming worthy of reprobation where they permitted moral vices, among which she counted intolerance.

What she thought reasonable—Christianity, modified by the world's progress—was her tenet, and she had no scruple in partaking in any act of worship; while naturally conscientious, and loving all the virtues, she viewed the terrors of religion as the scourge of the grovelling and superstitious; or if suffering existed at all, it could be only as expiation, conducting to a condition of high intellect and perfect morality. No other view, least of all that of a vicarious atonement, seemed to her worthy of the beneficence of the God whom she had set up for herself.

Thus had she rested for twenty years; but of late she had been dissatisfied. Living with Phœbe, 'though the child was not naturally intellectual,' there was no avoiding the impression that what she acted and rested on was substantial truth. 'The same with others,' said Miss Fennimore, meaning her auditor himself. 'And, again, I cannot but feel that devotion to any system of faith is the restraint that Bertha is deficient in, and that this is probably owing to my own tone. These examples have led me to go over the former ground in the course of the present spring; and it has struck me that, if the Divine Being be not the mere abstraction I once supposed, it is consistent to believe that He has a character and will—individuality, in short—so that there might be one single revelation of absolute truth. I have not thoroughly gone through the subject, but I hope to do so; and when I mark what I can only call a supernatural influence on an individual character, I view it as an evidence in favour of the system that produced it. My exposition of my opinions shocks you; I knew it would. But knowing this, and thinking it possible that an undoubting believer might have influenced Bertha, are you willing to trust your sisters to me?'

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'Let me ask one question—why was this explanation never offered before to those who had more right to decide?'

'My tenets have seldom been the subject of inquiry. When they have, I have concealed nothing; and twice have thus missed a situation. But these things are usually taken for granted; and I never imagined it my duty to volunteer my religious sentiments, since I never obtruded them. I gave no scandal by objecting to any form of worship, and concerned myself with the moral and intellectual, not the religious being.'

'Could you reach the moral without the religious?'

'I should tell you that I have seldom reared a pupil from childhood. Mine have been chiefly from fifteen to eighteen, whose parents required their instruction, not education, from me; and till I came here, I never fully beheld the growth and development of character. I found that whereas all I could do for Phœbe was to give her method and information, leaving alone the higher graces elsewhere derived, with Bertha, my efforts were inadequate to supply any motive for overcoming her natural defects; and I believe that association with a person of my sceptical habit has tended to prevent Phœbe's religion from influencing her sister.'

'This is the reason you tell me?'

'Partly; and likewise because I esteem you very differently from my former employers, and know that your views for your sisters are not like those of the persons with whom I have been accustomed to deal.'

'You know that I have no power. It rests entirely with my brother and Mr. Crabbe.'

'I am perfectly aware of it; but I could not allow myself to be forced on your sisters by any family arrangement contrary to the wishes of that member of it who is most qualified to judge for them.'

'Thank you, Miss Fennimore; I will treat you as openly as you have treated me. I have often felt indignant that my sisters should be exposed to any risk of having their faith shaken; and this morning I almost hoped to hear that you did not consent to Mervyn's scheme. But what you have said convinces me that, whatever you may have been previously, you are more likely to strengthen and confirm them in all that is good than half the people they would meet. I know that it would be a heavy affliction to Phœbe to lose so kind a friend; it might drive her from the home to which she clings, and separate Bertha, at least, from her; and under the circumstances, I cannot wish you to leave the poor girls at present.' He spoke rather confusedly, but there was more consent in manner than words.

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'Thank you,' she replied, fervently. 'I cannot tell you what it would cost me to part with Phœbe, my living lesson.'

'Only let the lesson be still unconscious.'

'I would not have it otherwise for worlds. The calm reliance that makes her a ministering spirit is far too lovely to be ruffled by a hint of the controversies that weary my brain. If it be effect of credulity, the effects are more beautiful than those of clear eyesight.'

'You will not always think it credulity.'

'There would be great rest in being able to accept all that you and she do,' Miss Fennimore answered with a sigh; 'in finding an unchanging answer to "What is truth?" Yet even your Gospel leaves that question unanswered.'

'Unanswered to Pilate; but those who are true find the truth; I verily trust that your eyes will become cleared to find it. Miss Fennimore, you know that I am unready and weak in argument, and you have often left me no refuge but my positive conviction; but I can refer you to those who are strong. If I can help you by carrying your difficulties to others, or by pointing out books, I should rejoice—'

'You cannot argue—you can only act,' said Miss Fennimore, smiling, as a message called him away.

The schoolroom had been left undisturbed, for the sisters were otherwise occupied. By Mr. Fulmort's will, the jewels, excepting certain Mervyn heirlooms, were to be divided between the daughters, and their two ladyships thought this the best time for their choice, though as yet they could not take possession. Phœbe would have given the world that the sets had been appropriated, so that Mervyn and Mr. Crabbe should not have had to make her miserable by fighting her battles, insisting on her choosing, and then overruling her choice as not of sufficiently valuable articles, while Bertha profited by the lesson in harpy-hood, and regarded all claimed by the others as so much taken from herself; and poor Maria clasped on every bracelet one by one, threaded every ring on her fingers, and caught the same lustre on every diamond, delighting in the grand exhibition, and in her own share, which by general consent included all that was clumsy and ill-set. No one had the heart to disturb her, but Phœbe felt that the poor thing was an eyesore to them all, and was hardly able to endure Augusta's compliment, 'After all, Phœbe, she is not so bad; you may make her tolerably presentable for the country.'

Lady Acton patronized Bertha, in opposition to Phœbe; and Sir Bevil was glad to have one sister to whom he could be good-natured without molestation. The young lady, heartily weary of the monotony of home, was much disappointed at the present arrangement; Phœbe had become the envied elder sister instead of the companion in misfortune, and Juliana was looked on as the sympathizing friend who would fain have opened the prison doors that Phœbe closed against her by making all that disturbance about Maria.

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'It is all humbug about Maria,' said Juliana. 'Much Phœbe will let her stand in her way when she wants to come to London for the season—but I'll not take her out, I promise her.'

'But you will take me,' cried Bertha. 'You'll not leave me in this dismal hole always.'

'Never fear, Bertha. This plan won't last six months. Mervyn and Phœbe will get sick of one another, and Augusta will be ready to take her in—she is pining for an errand girl.'

'I'll not go there to read cookery books and meet old fogies. You will have me, Juliana, and we will have such fun together.'

'When you are come out, perhaps—and you must cure that stammer.'

'I shall die of dulness before then! If I could only go to school!'

'I wouldn't be you with Maria for your most lively companion.'

'It is much worse than when we used to go down into the drawing-room. Now we never see any one but Miss Charlecote, and Phœbe is getting exactly like her!'

'What, all her sanctimonious ways? I thought so.'

'And to make it more aggravating, Miss Fennimore is going to get religious too. She made me read all Butler's *Analogy*, and wants to put me into *Paley*, and she is always running after Robert.'

'Middle-aged governesses always do run after young clergymen—especially the most *outrés*.'

'And now she snaps me up if I say anything the least comprehensive or speculative, or if I laugh at the conventionalities Phœbe learns at the Holt. Yesterday I said that the progress of common sense would soon make people cease to connect dulness with mortality, or to think a serious mistiness the sole evidence of respect, and I was caught up as if it were high treason.'

'You must not get out of bounds in your talk, Bertha, or sound unfeeling.'

'I can't help being original,' said Bertha. 'I must evolve my ideas out of my individual consciousness, and assert my independence of thought.'

Juliana laughed, not quite following her sister's metaphysical tone, but satisfied that it was anti-Phœbe, she answered by observing, 'An intolerable fuss they do make about that girl!'

'And she is not a bit clever,' continued Bertha. 'I can do a translation in half the time she takes, and have got far beyond her in all kinds of natural philosophy!'

'She flatters Mervyn, that's the thing; but she will soon have enough of that. I hope he won't get her into some dreadful scrape, that's all!'

'What sort of scrape?' asked Bertha, gathering from the smack of the hope that it was something exciting.

'Oh, you are too much of a chit to know—but I say, Bertha, write to me, and let me know whom Mervyn brings to the house.'

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With somewhat the like injunction, only directed to a different quarter, Robert likewise left Beauchamp.

As he well knew would be the case, nothing in his own circumstances was changed by his mother's death, save that he no longer could call her inheritance his home. She had made no will, and her entire estate passed to her eldest son, from whom Robert parted on terms of defiance, rather understood than expressed. He took leave of his birthplace as one never expecting to return thither, and going for his last hour at Hiltonbury to Miss Charlecote, poured out to her as many of his troubles as he could bear to utter. 'And,' said he, 'I have given my approval to the two schemes that I most disapproved beforehand—to Mervyn's giving my sisters a home, and to Miss Fennimore's continuing their governess! What will come of it?'

'Do not repent, Robert,' was the answer. 'Depend upon it, the great danger is in rashly meddling with existing arrangements, especially by a strain of influence. It is what the young are slow to learn, but experience brings it home.'

'With you to watch them, I will fear the less.'

Miss Charlecote wondered whether any disappointment of his own added to his depression, and if he thought of Lucilla.

CHAPTER XVIII

My sister is not so defenceless left
As you imagine. She has a hidden strength
Which you remember not.—*Comus*

Phœbe was left to the vacancy of the orphaned house, to a blank where her presence had been gladness, and to relief more sad than pain, in parting with her favourite brother, and seeing him out of danger of provoking or being provoked.

To have been the cause of strife and object of envy weighed like guilt on her heart, and the tempest that had tossed her when most needing peace and soothing, left her sore and suffering. She did not nurse her grief, and was content that her mother should be freed from the burthen of existence that had of late been so heavy; but the missing the cherished recipient of her care was inevitable, and she was not of a nature to shake off dejection readily, nor to throw sorrow aside in excitement.

Mervyn felt as though he had caught a lark, and found it droop instead of singing. He was very kind, almost oppressively so; he rode or drove with her to every ruin or view esteemed worth seeing, ordered books for her, and consulted her on improvements that pained her by the very fact of change. She gave her attention sweetly and gratefully, was always at his call, and amused his evenings with cards or music, but she felt herself dull and sad, and saw him disappointed in her.

Then she tried bringing in Bertha as entertainment for both, but it was a downright failure. Bertha was far too sharp and pert for an elder brother devoid both of wit and temper, and the only consequence was that she fathomed his shallow acquirements in literature and the natural sciences, and he pronounced her to be eaten up with conceit, and the most intolerable child he ever saw—an irremediable insult to a young woman of fifteen; nor could Bertha be brought forward without disappointing Maria, whose presence Mervyn would not endure, and thus Phœbe was forced to yield the point, and keep in the background the appendages only tolerated for her sake.

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Greatly commiserating Bertha's weariness of the schoolroom, she tried to gratify the governess and please her sisters by resuming her studies; but the motive of duty and obedience being gone, these were irksome to a mind naturally meditative and practical, and she found herself triumphed over by Bertha for forgetting whether Lucca were Guelf or Ghibelline, putting oolite below red sandstone, or confusing the definition of ozone. She liked Bertha to surpass her; but inattention she regarded as wrong in itself, as well as a bad example, and her apologies were so hearty as quite to affect Miss Fennimore.

Mervyn's attentions wore off with the days of seclusion. By the third week he was dining out, by the fourth he was starting for Goodwood, half inviting Phœbe to come with him, and assuring her that it was just what she wanted to put her into spirits again. Poor Phœbe—when Mr. Henderson talking to Miss Fennimore, and Bertha at the same time insisting on Decandolle's system to Miss Charlecote, had seemed to create a distressing whirl and confusion!

Miss Fennimore smiled, both with pleasure and amusement, as Phœbe asked her permission to walk to the Holt, and be fetched home by the carriage at night.

‘Don’t laugh at me,’ said Phœbe. ‘I am so glad to have some one’s leave to ask.’

‘I will not laugh, my dear, but I will not help you to reverse our positions. It is better we should both be accustomed to them.’

‘It seems selfish to take the carriage for myself,’ said Phœbe; ‘but I think I have rather neglected Miss Charlecote for Mervyn, and I believe she would like to have me alone.’

The solitude of the walk was a great boon, and there was healing in the power of silence—the repose of not being forced to be lively. Summer flowers had passed, but bryony mantled the bushes in luxuriant beauty, and kingly teasles raised their diademed heads, and exultingly stretched forth their sceptred arms. Purple heather mixed with fragrant thyme, blue harebells and pale bents of quiver-grass edged the path, and thistledown, drifting from the chalk uplands, lay like snow in the hollows, or danced like living things on the path before her. A brood of goldfinches, with merry twitter and flashing wings, flitted round a tall milk thistle with variegated leaves and a little farther on, just at the opening of a glade from the path, she beheld a huge dragon-fly, banded with green, black, and gold, poised on wings invisible in their rapid motion, and hawking for insects. She stood to watch, collecting materials to please Miss Charlecote, and make a story for Maria.

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‘Stand still. He is upon you.’

She saw Miss Charlecote a few yards off, nearly on all-fours in the thymy grass.

‘Only a grasshopper. I’ve only once seen such a fellow. He makes portentous leaps. There! on your flounce!’

‘I have him! No! He went right over you!’

‘I’ve got him under my handkerchief. Put your hand in my pocket—take out a little wide-mouthed bottle. That’s it. Get in, sir, it is of no use to bite. There’s an air-hole in the cork. Isn’t he a beauty?’

‘O, the lovely green! What saws he wears on his thighs! See the delicate pink lining! What horns! and a quaint face, like a horse’s.’

‘“The appearance of them is as the appearance of horses.” Not that this is a locust, only a *gryllus*, happily for us.’

‘What is the difference?’

‘Long or short horns, since Bertha is not here to make me call them antennæ. I must take him home to draw, as soon as I have gathered some willow for my puss. You are coming home with me?’

‘I meant to drink tea with you, and be sent for in the evening.’

‘Good child. I was almost coming to you, but I was afraid of Mervyn. How has it been, my dear?’

Phœbe’s ‘he is very kind’ was allowed to stand for the present, and Honora led the way by a favourite path, which was new to Phœbe, making the circuit of the Holt; sometimes dipping into a hollow, over which the lesser scabious cast a tint like the gray of a cloud; sometimes rising on a knoll so as to look down on the rounded tops of the trees, following the undulations of the grounds; and beyond them the green valley, winding stream, and harvest fields, melting into the chalk downs on the horizon. To Phœbe, all had the freshness of novelty, with the charm of familiarity, and without the fatigue of admiration required by the show-places to which Mervyn had taken her. Presently Miss Charlecote opened the wicket leading to an oak coppice. There was hardly any brushwood. The ground was covered with soft grass and round elastic cushions of gray lichen. There were a few brackens, and here and there the crimson midsummer men, but the copsewood consisted of the redundant shoots of the old, gnarled, knotted stumps, covered with handsome foliage of the pale sea-green of later summer, and the leaves far exceeding in size those either of the sapling or the full-sized tree—vigorous playfulness of the poor old wounded stocks.

‘Ah!’ said Honor, pausing, ‘here I found my purple emperor, sunning himself, his glorious wings wide open, looking black at first, but turning out to be of purple-velvet, of the opaque mysterious beauty which seems nobler than mere lustre.’

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‘Did you keep him? I thought that was against your principles.’

‘I only mocked him by trying to paint him. He was mine because he came to delight me with the pleasure of having seen him, and the remembrance of him that pervades the path. It was just where Humfrey always told me the creatures might be found.’

‘Was Mr. Charlecote fond of natural history?’ asked Phœbe, shyly.

‘Not as natural history, but he knew bird, beast, insect, and tree, with a friendly hearty intimacy, such as Cockney writers ascribe to peasants, but which they never have. While he used the homeliest names, a dish-washer for a wagtail, cuckoo’s bread-and-cheese for wood-sorrel (partly I

believe to tease me), he knew them thoroughly, nests, haunts, and all.'

Phœbe could not help quoting the old lines, 'He prayeth well that loveth well both man and bird and beast.'

'Yes, and some persons have a curious affinity with the gentle and good in creation—who can watch and even handle a bird's nest without making it be deserted, whom bees do not sting, and horses, dogs, and cats love so as to reveal their best instincts in a way that seems fabulous. In spite of the Lyra Innocentium, I think this is less often the case with children than with such grown people as—like your guardian, Phœbe—have kept something of the majesty and calmness of innocence.'

Phœbe was all in a glow with the pleasure of hearing him so called, but bashful under that very delight, she said, 'Perhaps part of Solomon's wisdom was in loving these things, since he knew the plants from the cedar to the hyssop.'

'And spoke of Nature so beautifully in his Song, but I am afraid as he grew old he must have lost his healthful pleasure in them when he was lifted up.'

'Or did he only make them learning and ornament, instead of a joy and devotion?' said Phœbe, thinking of the difference between Bertha's love and Miss Charlecote's.

'Nor does he say that he found vanity in them, though he did in his own gardens and pools of water. No, the longer I live, the more sure I am that these things are meant for our solace and minor help through the trials of life. I assure you, Phœbe, that the crimson leaf of a Herb-Robert in the hedge has broken a strain of fretful repining, and it is one great blessing in these pleasures that one never can exhaust them.'

Phœbe saw that Miss Charlecote was right in her own case, when on coming in, the grasshopper's name and history were sought, and there followed an exhibition of the 'puss' for whom the willow had been gathered, namely a grass-green caterpillar, with a kitten's face, a curious upright head and shoulders, and two purple tails, whence on irritation two pink filaments protruded,—lashes for the ichneumons, as Honora explained. The lonely woman's interest in her quaint pet showed how thickly are strewn round us many a calm and innocent mode of solace and cheerfulness if we knew but how to avail ourselves of it.

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Honora had allowed the conversation to be thus desultory and indifferent, thinking that it gave greater rest to Phœbe, and it was not till the evening was advancing, that she began to discharge herself of an urgent commission from Robert, by saying, 'Phœbe, I want you to do something for me. There is that little dame's school in your hamlet. It is too far off for me to look after, I wish you would.'

'Robin has been writing to me about parish work,' said Phœbe, sadly. 'Perhaps I ought, but I don't know how, and I can't bear that any change in our ways should be observed;' and the tears came more speedily than Honor had expected.

'Dear child,' she said, 'there is no need for that feeling. Parish work, at least in a lay family, must depend on the amount of home duty. In the last years of my dear mother's life I had to let everything go, and I know it is not easy to resume, still less to begin, but you will be glad to have done so, and will find it a great comfort.'

'If it be my duty, I must try,' said Phœbe, dejectedly, 'and I suppose it is. Will you come and show me what to do? I never went into a cottage in my life.'

I have spoken too soon! thought Honor; yet Robert urged me, and besides the evil of neglecting the poor, the work will do her good; but it breaks one's heart to see this meek, mournful obedience.

'While we are alone,' continued Phœbe, 'I can fix times, and do as I please, but I cannot tell what Mervyn may want me to do when he is at home.'

'Do you expect that he will wish you to go out with him?' asked Honora.

'Not this autumn,' she answered; 'but he finds it so dull at home, that I fully expect he will have his friends to stay with him.'

'Phœbe, let me strongly advise you to keep aloof from your brother's friends. When they are in the house, live entirely in the schoolroom. If you begin at once as a matter of course, he will see the propriety, and acquiesce. You are not vexed?'

'Thank you, I believe it is all right. Robert will be the more at ease about us. I only do not like to act as if I distrusted Mervyn.'

'It would not be discreet for any girl so young as you are to be entertaining her brother's sporting friends. You could hardly do so without acquiring the same kind of reputation as my poor Lucy's Rashe, which he would not wish.'

'Thank you,' said Phœbe more heartily. 'You have shown me the way out of a difficulty. I need not go into company at all this winter, and after that, only with our old country neighbours.'

Honora was infinitely relieved at having bestowed this piece of advice, on which she had agreed with Robert as the only means of insuring Phœbe's being sheltered from society that Mervyn

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might not esteem so bad for his sister as they did.

The quietness of Mervyn's absence did much for the restoration of Phœbe's spirits. The dame's school was not delightful to her; she had not begun early enough in life for ease, but she did her tasks there as a duty, and was amply rewarded by the new enjoyment thus afforded to Maria. The importance of being surrounded by a ring of infants, teaching the alphabet, guiding them round the gooseberry bush, or leading their songs and hymns, was felicity indescribable to Maria. She learnt each name, and, with the reiteration that no one could endure save Phœbe and faithful Lieschen, rehearsed the individual alphabetical acquirements of every one; she painted pictures for them, hemmed pinafores, and was happier than she had ever been in her life, as well as less fretful and more manageable, and she even began to develop more sense and intelligence in this direction than she had seemed capable of under the dreary round of lessons past her comprehension.

It was a great stimulus to Phœbe, and spurred her to personal parish work, going beyond the soup and subscriptions that might have bounded her charities for want of knowing better. Of course the worst and most plausible people took her in, and Miss Charlecote sometimes scolded, sometimes laughed at her, but the beginning was made, and Robert was pleased.

Mervyn did bring home some shooting friends, but he made no difficulties as to the seclusion that Miss Charlecote had recommended for his sister; accepting it so easily that Phœbe thought he must have intended it from the first. From that time he was seldom at home without one or more guests—an arrangement that kept the young ladies chiefly to the west wing, and always, when in the garden, forced them to be on their guard against stumbling upon smoking gentlemen. It was a late-houred, noisy company, and the sounds that reached the sisters made the younger girls curious, and the governess anxious. Perhaps it was impossible that girls of seventeen and fifteen should not be excited by the vicinity of moustaches and beards whom they were bidden to avoid; and even the alternate French and German which Miss Fennimore enforced on Bertha more strongly than ever, merely produced the variety of her descanting on their *knebelbarten*, or on *l'heure à guelle les voix de ces messieurs-là entonnaient sur le grand escalier*, till Miss Fennimore declared that she would have Latin and Greek talked if there were no word for a gentleman in either! There were always stories to be told of Bertha's narrow escapes of being overtaken by them in garden or corridor, till Maria, infected by the panic, used to flounder away as if from a beast of prey, and being as tall as, and considerably stouter than, Phœbe, with the shuffling gait of the imbecile, would produce a volume of sound that her sister always feared might attract notice, and irritate Mervyn.

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Honora Charlecote tried to give pleasure to the sisters by having them at the Holt, and would fain have treated Bertha as one of the inherited godchildren. But Bertha proved by reference to the brass tablet that she *could* not be godchild to a man who died three years before her birth, and it was then perceived that his sponsorship had been to an elder Bertha, who had died in infancy, of water on the head, and whom her parents, in their impatience of sorrow, had absolutely caused to be forgotten. Such a delusion in the exact Phœbe could only be accounted for by her tenderness to Mr. Charlecote, and it gave Bertha a subject of triumph of which she availed herself to the utmost. She had imbibed a sovereign contempt for Miss Charlecote's capacity, and considered her as embodying the passive individual who is to be instructed or confuted in a scientific dialogue. So she lost no occasion of triumphantly denouncing all 'cataclysms' of the globe, past or future, of resolving all nature into gases, or arguing upon duality—a subject that fortunately usually brought on her hesitation of speech, a misfortune of which Miss Fennimore and Phœbe would unscrupulously avail themselves to change the conversation. The bad taste and impertinence were quite as apparent to the governess as to the sister, and though Bertha never admitted a doubt of having carried the day against the old world prejudices, yet Miss Fennimore perceived, not only that Miss Charlecote's notions were not of the contracted and unreasonable order that had been ascribed to her, but that liberality in her pupil was more uncandid, narrow, and self-sufficient than was 'credulity' in Miss Charlecote. Honor was more amused than annoyed at these discussions; she was sorry for the silly, conceited girl, though not in the least offended nor disturbed, but Phœbe and Miss Fennimore considered them such an exposure that they were by no means willing to give Bertha the opportunity of launching herself at her senior.

The state of the household likewise perplexed Phœbe. She had been bred up to the sight of waste, ostentation, and extravagance, and they did not distress her; but her partial authority revealed to her glimpses of dishonesty; detected falsehoods destroyed her confidence in the housekeeper; her attempts at charities to the poor were intercepted; her visits to the hamlet disclosed to her some of the effects on the villagers of a vicious, disorderly establishment; and she understood why a careful mother would as soon have sent her daughter to service at the lowest public-house as at Beauchamp.

Mervyn had detected one of the footmen in a flagrant act of peculation, and had dismissed him, but Phœbe believed the evil to have extended far more widely than he supposed, and made up her mind to entreat him to investigate matters. In vain, however, she sought for a favourable moment, for he was never alone. The intervals between other visitors were filled up by a Mr. Hastings, who seemed to have erected himself into so much of the domesticated friend that he had established a bowing and speaking acquaintance with Phœbe; Bertha no longer narrated her escapes of encounters with him; and, being the only one of the gentlemen who ever went to church, he often joined the young ladies as they walked back from thence. Phœbe heartily wished him gone, for he made her brother inaccessible; she only saw Mervyn when he wanted

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her to find something for him or to give her a message, and if she ventured to say that she wanted to speak to him, he promised—‘Some time or other’—which always proved *sine die*. He was looking very ill, his complexion very much flushed, and his hand heated and unsteady, and she heard through Lieschen of his having severe morning headaches, and fits of giddiness and depression, but these seemed to make him more unable to spare Mr. Hastings, as if life would not be endurable without the billiards that she sometimes heard knocking about half the night.

However, the anniversary of Mr. Fulmort’s death would bring his executor to clear off one branch of his business, and Mervyn’s friends fled before the coming of the grave old lawyer, all fixing the period of their departure before Christmas. Nor could Mervyn go with them; he must meet Mr. Crabbe, and Phœbe’s heart quite bounded at the hope of being able to walk about the house in comfort, and say part of what was on her mind to her brother.

‘Whose writing is this?’ said Phœbe to herself, as the letters were given to her, two days before the clearance of the house. ‘I ought to know it—It is! No! Yes, indeed it is—poor Lucy. Where can she be? What can she have to say?’

The letter was dateless, and Phœbe’s amaze grew as she read.

‘DEAR PHŒBE,

‘You know it is my nature to do odd things, so never mind that, but attend to me, as one who knows too well what it is to be motherless and undirected. Gossip is long-tongued enough to reach me here, in full venom as I know and trust, but it makes my blood boil, till I can’t help writing a warning that may at least save you pain. I know you are the snowdrop poor Owen used to call you, and I know you have Honor Charlecote for philosopher, and friend, but she is nearly as unsophisticated as yourself, and if report say true, your brother is getting you into a scrape. If it is a fact that he has Jack Hastings dangling about Beauchamp, he deserves the lot of my unlucky Charteris cousins! Mind what you are about, Phœbe, if the man is there. He is plausible, clever, has no end of amusing resources, and keeps his head above water; but I *know* that in no place where there are womankind has he been received without there having been cause to repent it! I hope you may be able to laugh—if not, it may be a wholesome cure to hear that his friends believe him to have secured one of the heiresses at Beauchamp. There, Phœbe, I have said my say, and I fear it is cutting and wounding, but it came out of the love of a heart that has not got rid of some of its old feelings, and that could not bear to think of sorrow or evil tongues busy about you. That I write for your sake, not for my own, you may see by my making it impossible to answer.

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‘LUCILLA SANDBROOK.

‘If you hold council with Honor over this—as, if you are wise, you will—you may tell her that I am learning gratitude to her. I would ask her pardon if I could without servility.’

‘Secured one of the heiresses!’ said Phœbe to herself. ‘I should like to be able to tell Lucy how I can laugh! Poor Lucy, how very kind in her to write. I wonder whether Mervyn knows how bad the man is! Shall I go to Miss Charlecote? Oh, no; she is spending two days at Moorcroft! Shall I tell Miss Fennimore? No, I think not, it will be wiser to talk to Miss Charlecote; I don’t like to tell Miss Fennimore of Lucy. Poor Lucy—she is always generous! He will soon be gone, and then I can speak to Mervyn.’

This secret was not a serious burthen to Phœbe, though she could not help smiling to herself at the comical notion of having been secured by a man to whom she had not spoken a dozen times, and then with the utmost coldness and formality.

The next day she approached the letter-bag with some curiosity. It contained one for her from her sister Juliana, a very unusual correspondent, and Phœbe’s mind misgave her lest it should have any connection with the hints in Lucilla’s note. But she was little prepared for what she read.

‘Acton Manor, Dec. 24th.

‘MY DEAR PHŒBE,

‘Although, after what passed in July, I cannot suppose that the opinion of your elders can have any effect on your proceedings, yet for the sake of our relationship, as well as of regard to appearances, I cannot forbear endeavouring to rescue you from the consequences of your own folly and obstinacy. Nothing better was to be expected from Mervyn; but at your age, with your pretences to religion, you cannot plead simplicity, nor ignorance of the usages of the world. Neither Sir Bevil nor myself can express our amazement at your recklessness, thus forfeiting the esteem of society, and outraging the opinion of our old friends. To put an end to the impropriety, we will at once receive you here, overlooking any inconvenience, and we shall expect you all three on Tuesday, under charge of Miss Fennimore, who seems to have been about as fit as Maria to think for you. It is too late to write to Mervyn to-night, but he shall hear from us to-morrow, as well as from your guardian, to whom Sir Bevil has written, You had better bring my jewels; and the buhl clock from my mother’s mantelshelf, which I was to have. Mrs. Brisbane will pack them. Tell Bertha, with my love, that she might have been more explicit in her correspondence.

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‘Your affectionate sister,
‘JULIANA ACTON.’

When Miss Fennimore entered the room, she found Phœbe sitting like one petrified, only just able to hold out the letter, and murmur—‘What does it mean?’ Imagining that it could only contain something fatal about Robert, Miss Fennimore sprang at the paper, and glanced through it, while Phœbe again faintly asked, ‘What have I done?’

‘Lady Acton is pleased to be mysterious!’ said the governess. ‘The kind sister she always was!’

‘Don’t say that,’ exclaimed Phœbe, rallying. ‘It must be something shocking, for Sir Bevil thinks so too,’ and the tears sprang forth.

‘He will never think anything unkind of you, my dear,’ said Miss Fennimore, with emphasis.

‘It must be about Mr. Hastings!’ said Phœbe, gathering recollection and confidence. ‘I did not like to tell you yesterday, but I had a letter from poor Lucy Sandbrook. Some friends of that man, Mr. Hastings, have set it about that he is going to be married to me!’ and Phœbe laughed outright. ‘If Juliana has heard it, I don’t wonder that she is shocked, because you know Miss Charlecote said it would never do for me to associate with those gentlemen, and besides, Lucy says that he is a very bad man. I shall write to Juliana, and say that I have never had anything to do with him, and he is going away to-morrow, and Mervyn must be told not to have him back again. That will set it all straight at Acton Manor.’

Phœbe was quite herself again. She was too well accustomed to gratuitous unkindness and reproaches from Juliana to be much hurt by them, and perceiving, as she thought, where the misconception lay, had no fears that it would not be cleared up. So when she had carefully written her letter to her sister, she dismissed the subject until she should be able to lay it before Miss Charlecote, dwelling more on Honor’s pleasure on hearing of Lucy than on the more personal matter.

Miss Fennimore, looking over the letter, had deeper misgivings. It seemed to her rather to be a rebuke for the whole habit of life than a warning against an individual, and she began to doubt whether even the seclusion of the west wing had been a sufficient protection in the eyes of the family from the contamination of such society as Mervyn received. Or was it a plot of Lady Acton’s malevolence for hunting Phœbe away from her home? Miss Fennimore fell asleep, uneasy and perplexed, and in her dreams beheld Phœbe as the Lady in Comus, fixed in her chair and resolute against a cup effervescing with carbonic acid gas, proffered by Jack Hastings, who thereupon gave it to Bertha, as she lay back in the dentist’s chair, and both becoming transformed into pterodactyles, flew away while Miss Fennimore was vainly trying to summon the brothers by electric telegraph.

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There was a whole bevy of letters for Phœbe the following morning, and first a kind sensible one from her guardian, much regretting to learn that Mr. Fulmort’s guests were undesirable inmates for a house where young ladies resided, so that, though he had full confidence in Miss Fulmort’s discretion, and understood that she had never associated with the persons in question, he thought her residence at home ought to be reconsidered, and should be happy to discuss the point on coming to Beauchamp, so soon as he should have recovered from an unfortunate fit of the gout, which at present detained him in town. Miss Fulmort might, however, be assured that her wishes should be his chief consideration, and that he would take care not to separate her from Miss Maria.

That promise, and the absence of all mention of Lucilla’s object of dread, gave Phœbe courage to open the missive from her eldest sister.

‘MY DEAR PHŒBE,

‘I always told you it would never answer, and you see I was right. If Mervyn will invite that horrid man, whatever you may do, no one will believe that you do not associate with him, and you may never get over it. I am telling everybody what children you are, quite in the schoolroom, but nothing will be of any use but your coming away at once, and appearing in society with me, so you had better send the children to Acton Manor, and come to me next week. If there are any teal in the decoy bring some, and ask Mervyn where he got that Barton’s dry champagne.

‘Your affectionate sister,
‘AUGUSTA BANNERMAN.’

She had kept Robert’s letter to the last, as refreshment after the rest.

‘St. Matthew’s, Dec. 18th.

‘DEAR PHŒBE,

‘I am afraid this may not be your first intimation of what may vex and grieve you greatly, and what calls for much cool and anxious judgment. In you we have implicit confidence, and your adherence to Miss Charlecote’s kind advice has spared you all imputation, though not, I fear, all pain. You may, perhaps, not know how disgraceful are the characters of some of the persons whom Mervyn has collected about him. I do him the justice to believe that he would shelter you from all intercourse with them as

carefully as I should; but I cannot forgive his having brought them beneath the same roof with you. I fear the fact has done harm in our own neighbourhood. People imagine you to be associating with Mervyn's crew, and a monstrous report is abroad which has caused Bevil Acton to write to me and to Crabbe. We all agree that this is a betrayal of the confidence that you expressed in Mervyn, and that while he chooses to make his house a scene of dissipation, no seclusion can render it a fit residence for women or girls. I fear you will suffer much in learning this decision, for Mervyn's sake as well as your own. Poor fellow! if he will bring evil spirits about him, good angels must depart. I would come myself, but that my presence would embitter Mervyn, and I could not meet him properly. I am writing to Miss Charlecote. If she should propose to receive you all at the Holt immediately, until Crabbe's most inopportune gout is over, you had better go thither at once. It would be the most complete vindication of your conduct that could be offered to the county, and would give time for considering of establishing you elsewhere, and still under Miss Fennimore's care. For Bertha's sake as well as your own, you must be prepared to leave home and resign yourself to be passive in the decision of those bound to think for you, by which means you may avoid being included in Mervyn's anger. Do not distress yourself by the fear that any blame can attach to you or to Miss Fennimore; I copy Bevil's expressions—"Assure Phœbe that though her generous confidence may have caused her difficulties, no one can entertain a doubt of her guileless intention and maidenly discretion. If it would not make further mischief, I would hasten to fetch her, but if she will do me the honour to accept her sister's invitation, I hope to do all in my power to make her happy and mark my esteem for her." These are his words; but I suppose you will hardly prefer Acton Manor, though, should the Holt fail us, you might send the other two to the Manor, and come to Albury-street as Augusta wishes, when we could consult together on some means of keeping you united, and retaining Miss Fennimore, who must not be thrown over, as it would be an injury to her prospects. Tell her from me that I look to her for getting you through this unpleasant business.

Your ever affectionate
R. M. FULMORT.'

Phœbe never spoke, but handed each sheet as she finished it to her governess.

'Promise me, Phœbe,' said Miss Fennimore, as she came to Robert's last sentence, 'that none of these considerations shall bias you. Make no struggle for me, but use me as I may be most serviceable to you.'

Phœbe, instead of answering, kissed and clung to her.

'What do you think of doing?' asked the governess.

'Nothing,' said Phœbe.

'You looked as if a thought had occurred to you.'

'I only recollected the words, "your strength is to sit still," said Phœbe, 'and thought how well they agreed with Robert's advice to be passive. Mr. Crabbe has promised not to separate us, and I will trust to that. Mervyn was very kind in letting us stay here, but he does not want us, and will not miss us,'—and with those words, quiet as they were, came a gush of irrepressible tears, just as a step resounded outside, the door was burst open, and Mervyn hurried in, purple with passion, and holding a bundle of letters crushed together in his hand.

'I say,' he hoarsely cried, 'what's all this? Who has been telling infamous tales of my house?'

'We cannot tell—' began Phœbe.

'Do you know anything of this?' he interrupted, fiercely turning on Miss Fennimore.

'Nothing, sir. The letters which your sister has received have equally surprised and distressed me.'

'Then they have set on you, Phœbe! The whole pack in full cry, as if it mattered to them whether I chose to have the Old Gentleman in the house, so long as he did not meddle with you!'

'I beg your pardon, Mr. Fulmort,' interposed the governess, 'the remonstrance is quite just. Had I been aware of the character of some of your late guests, I could not have wished your sisters to remain in the house with them.'

'Are these your sentiments, Phœbe?' he asked, sternly.

'I am afraid they ought to be,' she sadly answered.

'Silly child; so this pack of censorious women and parsons have frightened you into giving me up.'

'Sisters do not give up brothers, Mervyn. You know how I thank you for having me here, but I could not amuse you, or make it pleasant to you, so there must be an end of it.'

'So they hunt you out to be bullied by Juliana, or slaved to death by Augusta, which is it to be? Or maybe Robert has got his sisterhood cut and dried for you; only mind, he shan't make away with your £30,000 while I live to expose those popish tricks.'

'For shame, Mervyn,' cried Phœbe, all in a glow; 'I will not hear Robert so spoken of: he is always kind and good, and has taught me every right thing I know!'

'Oh, very well; and pray when does he summon you from among the ungodly? Will the next train be soon enough?'

'Don't, Mervyn! Your friends go to-day, don't they? Mr. Crabbe does not desire any change to be made before he comes to see about it. May we not stay till that time, and spend our Christmas together?'

'You must ask Robert and Juliana, since you prefer them.'

'No,' said Phœbe, with spirit; 'it is right to attend to my elder sisters, and Robert has always helped and taught me, and I must trust his guidance, as I always have done. And I trust you too, Mervyn. You never thought you were doing us any harm. I may trust you still,' she added, with so sweet and imploring a look that Mervyn gave an odd laugh, with some feeling in it.

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'Harm? Great harm I have done this creature, eh?' he said, with his hand on her shoulder.

'Few could do *her* harm, Mr. Fulmort,' said the governess, 'but report may have done some mischief.'

'Who cares for report! I say, Phœbe, we will laugh at them all. You pluck up a spirit, stay with me, and we'll entertain all the county, and then get some great swell to bring you out in town, and see what Juliana will say!'

'I will stay with you while you are alone, and Mr. Crabbe lets me,' said Phœbe.

'Old fool of a fellow! Why couldn't my father have made me your guardian, and then there would have been none of this row! One would think I had had her down to act barmaid to the fellows. And you never spoke to one, did you, Phœbe?'

'Only now and then to Mr. Hastings. I could not help it after the day he came into the study when I was copying for you.'

'Ah, well! that is nothing—nobody minds old Jack. I shall let them all know you were as safe as a Turk's wife in a harem, and maybe old Crabbe will hear reason if we get him down here alone, without a viper at each ear, as he had last time.'

With which words Mervyn departed, and Miss Fennimore exclaimed in some displeasure, 'You can never think of remaining, Phœbe.'

'I am afraid not,' said Phœbe; 'Mervyn does not seem to know what is proper for us, and I am too young to judge, so I suppose we must go. I wish I could make him happy with music, or books, or anything a woman could do! If you please, I think I must go over to the Holt. I cannot settle to anything just yet, and I shall answer my letters better when I have seen Miss Charlecote.'

In fact Phœbe felt herself going to her other guardian; but as she left the room, Bertha came hurriedly in from the garden, with a plaid thrown round her. 'What—what—what's the matter?' she hastily asked, following Phœbe to her room. 'Is there an end of all these mysteries?'

'Yes,' said Phœbe, 'Miss Fennimore is ready for you.'

'As if that were all I wanted to know. Do you think I did not hear Mervyn storming like a lion?'

'I am sorry you did hear,' said Phœbe, 'for it was not pleasant. It seems that it is not thought proper for us to live here while Mervyn has so many gentleman-guests, so,' with a sigh, 'you will have your wish, Bertha. They mean us to go away!'

'It is not my wish now,' said Bertha, pulling pins in and out of Phœbe's pincushion. 'I am not the child I was in the summer. Don't go, Phœbe; I know you can get your way, if you try for it.'

'I must try to be put in the right way, Bertha, that is all I want.'

'And you are going to the Holt for the most precise, narrow-minded way you can get. I wish I were in your place, Phœbe.'

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Scarcely had Phœbe driven from the door, before she saw Miss Charlecote crossing the grass on foot, and after the interchange of a few words, it was agreed to talk while driving on towards Elverslope. Each was laden with the same subject, for not only had Honor heard from Robert, but during her visit to Moorcroft she had become enlightened on the gossip that seldom reached the Holt, and had learnt that the whole neighbourhood was scandalized at the Beauchamp doings, and was therefore shy of taking notice of the young people there. She had been incredulous at first, then extremely shocked and distressed, and though in part convinced that more than she guessed had passed beyond the west wing, she had come primed with a representation which she cautiously administered to Phœbe. The girl was more indignant on her brother's account than alarmed on her own.

'If that is the way the Raymonds talk of Mervyn,' cried she, 'no wonder they made their niece cast him off, and drive him to despair.'

'It was no unkindness of the Raymonds, my dear. They were only sorry for you.'

'I do not want them to be sorry for me; they ought to be sorry for Mervyn,' said Phœbe, almost petulantly.

'Perhaps they are,' said Honor. 'It was only in kindness that they spoke, and they had almost anticipated my explanation that you were kept entirely apart. Every gentleman hereabouts who has been at Beauchamp has declared such to be the case.'

'I should think so!' said Phœbe; 'Mervyn knows how to take care of us better than that!'

'But all ladies do not seem willing to believe as much, shame on them,' said Honor; 'and, tell me, Phœbe, have people called on you?'

'Not many, but I have not called on them since they left their cards of inquiry. I had been thinking whether I ought.'

'We will consider. Perhaps I had better take you round some day, but I have been a very remiss protector, my poor child, if all be true that I am told of some of Mervyn's friends. It was an insult to have them under the same roof with you.'

'Will you look at this letter?' said Phœbe. 'It is very kind—it is from Lucy.'

These plain words alone occurred to Phœbe as a preparation for a letter that was sure to move Miss Charlecote greatly, if only by the slight of not having written to her, the most obvious person. But the flighty generosity, and deep though inconsistent feeling were precious, and the proud relenting of the message at the end touched Honor with hope. They laughed at the report that had elicited Lucilla's letter, but the reserve of the warning about Mr. Hastings, coming from the once unscrupulous girl, startled Honor even more than what she had heard at Moorcroft. Was the letter to be answered? Yes, by all means, cried Honor, catching at any link of communication. She could discover Lucilla's address, and was sure that even brief thanks and explanations from Phœbe would be good for Lucy.

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Like Miss Fennimore, Honor was surprised by Phœbe's composure under her share of the evil report. The strictures which would have been dreadful to an older person seemed to fly over her innocent head, their force either uncomprehended or unfelt. She yielded implicitly to the propriety of the change, but her grief was at the family quarrel, the leaving home, and the unmerited degree of blame cast on Mervyn, not the aspersions on herself; although, as Honor became vexed at her calmness, she withheld none of them in the desire to convince her of the expediency of leaving Beauchamp at once for the Holt. No, even though this was Robert's wish, Phœbe could still not see the necessity, as long as Mervyn should be alone. If he should bring any of his discreditable friends, she promised at once to come to Miss Charlecote, but otherwise she could perceive no reason for grieving him, and astonishing the world, by implying that his sisters could not stay in his house. She thought him unwell, too, and wished to watch him, and, on the whole, did not regret her guardian's gout, which would give her a little more time at home, and put off the discussion till there should be less anger.

Is this weak? is it childish indifference? thought Honor, or is it a spirit superior to the selfish personal dread that would proclaim its own injured innocence by a vehement commotion.

Phœbe rejoiced that she had secured her interview with her friend, for when the guests were gone, Mervyn claimed her whole attention, and was vexed if she were not continually at his back. After their *tête-à-tête* dinner, he kept her sitting over the dessert while he drank his wine. She tried this opportunity of calling his attention to the frauds of the servants, but he merely laughed his mocking laugh at her simplicity in supposing that everybody's servants did not cheat.

'Miss Charlecote's don't.'

'Don't they? Ha—ha! Why, she's the very mark for imposition, and hypocrisy into the bargain.'

Phœbe did not believe it, but would not argue the point, returning to that nearer home.

'Nonsense, Phœbe,' he said; 'it's only a choice who shall prey upon one, and if I have a set that will do it with a civil countenance, and let me live out of the spoil, I'll not be bothered.'

'I cannot think it need go on so.'

'Well, it won't; I shall break up the concern, and let the house, or something.'

'Let the house? Oh, Mervyn! I thought you meant to be a county man.'

'Let those look to that who have hindered me,' said Mervyn, fiercely swallowing one glassful, and pouring out another.

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'Should you live in London?'

'At Jericho, for aught I care, or any one else.'

Her attempt to controvert this remark brought on a tirade against the whole family, which she would not keep up by reply, and which ended in moody silence. Again she tried to rise, but he asked why she could not stay with him five minutes, and went on absently pouring out wine and drinking it, till, as the clock struck nine, the bottom of the decanter was reached, when he let her lead the way to the drawing-room, and there taking up the paper, soon fell asleep, then awoke at ten at the sound of her moving to go to bed, and kept her playing piquet for an hour and a half.

An evening or two of this kind convinced Phœbe that even with Mervyn alone it was not a desirable life. She was less shocked than a girl used to a higher standard at home might have been, but that daily bottle and perpetual cards weighed on her imagination, and she felt that her younger sisters ought not to grow up to such a spectacle. Still her loving heart yearned over Mervyn, who was very fond of her, and consulted her pleasure continually in his own peculiar and selfish way, although often exceedingly cross to her as well as to every one else; but this ill-temper was so visibly the effect of low spirits that she easily endured and forgave it. She saw that he was both unwell and unhappy. She could not think what would become of him when the present arrangement should be broken up; but could only cling to him, as long as she could pity him. It was no wonder that on the Sunday, Honora seeing her enter the church, could only help being reminded of the expression of that child-saint of Raffaele, wandering alone through the dragon-haunted wood, wistful and distressed, yet so confident in the Unseen Guide and Guardian that she treads down evils and perils in innocence, unconscious of her full danger and of their full blackness.

CHAPTER XIX

Close within us we will carry, strong, collected, calm, and brave,
The true panoply of quiet which the bad world never gave;
Very serpents in discretion, yet as guileless as the dove,
Lo! obedience is the watchword, and the countersign is love.

W. G. TUPPER

On the next hunting day, Mervyn took Phœbe with him to the meet, upon a favourite common towards Elverslope, where on a fine morning ladies were as apt to be found as hounds and huntsmen, so that she would be at no loss for companions when he left her.

Phœbe rode, as she did everything else, well, quietly and firmly, and she looked very young and fresh, with her rounded rosy cheeks and chin. Her fair hair was parted back under a round hat, her slenderly plump figure appeared to advantage mounted on her bright bay, and altogether she presented a striking contrast to her brother. She had not seen him in hunting costume for nearly a year, and she observed with pain how much he had lost his good looks; his well-made youthful air was passing away, and his features were becoming redder and coarser; but he was in his best humour, good-natured, and as nearly gay as he ever was; and Phœbe enjoyed her four-miles' ride in the beauty of a warm December's day, the sun shining on dewy hedges, and robins and thrushes trying to treat the weather like spring, as they sang amid the rich stores of coral fruit that hung as yet untouched on every hawthorn or eglantine.

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The ladies mustered strong on the smooth turf of the chalk down bordering the copse which was being drawn. Phœbe looked out for acquaintance, but a few gentlemen coming up to greet her, she did not notice, as Mervyn did, that the girls with whom he had wished to leave her had become intent on some doings in the copse, and had trotted off with their father. He made his way to the barouche where sat the *grande dame* of the county, exchanged civilities, and asked leave to introduce his sister. Phœbe, who had never seen the lady before, thought nothing of the cold distant bow; it was for Mervyn, who knew what her greetings could be, to fume and rage inwardly. Other acknowledgments passed, but no party had approached or admitted Phœbe, and when the hounds went away, she was still riding alone with her brother and a young officer. She bade them not to mind her, she would ride home with the servant, and as all were in motion, she had enough to do to hold in her horse, while Mervyn and his friend dashed forward, and soon she found herself alone, except for the groom; the field were well away over the down, the carriages driving off, the mounted maidens following the chase as far as the way was fair and lady-like.

Phœbe had no mind to do so. Her isolation made her feel forlorn, and brought home Miss Charlecote's words as to the opinion entertained of her by the world. Poor child, something like a tear came into her eye and a blush to her cheek, but, 'never mind,' she thought, 'they will believe Miss Charlecote, and she will take care of me. If only Mervyn will not get angry, and make an uproar! I shall soon be gone away! When shall I come back?'

She rode up to the highest part of the down for a take-leave gaze. There lay Elverslope in its basin-like valley scooped out in the hills, with the purple bloom of autumnal haze veiling its red brick and slate; there, on the other side, the copses and arable fields dipped and rose, and rose and dipped again, till the undulations culminated in the tall fir-trees in the Holt garden, the landmark of the country; and on the bare slope to the west, Beauchamp's pillars and pediment made a stately speck in the landscape. 'Home no longer!' thought Phœbe; 'there will be strangers there—and we shall be on the world! Oh! why cannot Mervyn be like Robert? How happy we could be!'

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Beauchamp had not been a perfect Eden in itself, but still it had all the associations of the paradise of her guileless childhood; and to her the halo around it would always have the radiance of the loving spirit through which she viewed it. The undefined future was hard to bear, but she thought of Robert, and of the promise that neither her sisters nor Miss Fennimore should be parted from her, and tried to rest thankful on that comfort.

She had left the down for the turnpike road, the sounds of the hunt often reaching her, with glimpses of men and dogs in the distance taking a direction parallel with her own. Presently a red coat glanced through the hedge of one of the cross lanes, as if coming towards the road, and

as she reached the opening at the end, a signal was made to her to stop. Foreboding some accident, she hastily turned up the narrow white muddy lane, and was met by an elderly gentleman.

'Don't be alarmed,' he said kindly; 'only your brother seems rather unwell, and I thought I had best see him under your charge.'

Mervyn was by this time in sight, advancing slowly, and Phœbe with rapid thanks rode on to meet him. She knew that dull, confused, dazzled eye belonged to his giddy fits, and did not wonder at the half-uttered murmur, rather in the imprecation line, with which he spoke; but the reel in his saddle terrified her greatly, and she was dismayed to see that the gentleman had proceeded into the high road instead of offering further assistance. She presently perceived that the danger of falling was less real than apparent, and that her brother could still keep his seat, and govern his horse, though nearly unable to look or speak. She kept close to him, and was much relieved to find that the stranger had not returned to the sport, but was leisurely following at some distance behind the groom. Never had two miles seemed so long as under her frequent alarms lest Mervyn should become unable to keep the saddle; but at each moment of terror, she heard the pace of the hunter behind quickened to come to her help, and if she looked round she met an encouraging sign.

When the lodge was reached, and Mervyn, somewhat revived, had ridden through the gates, she turned back to give her warm thanks. A kind, fatherly, friendly face looked at her with a sort of compassion, as putting aside her thanks, the gentleman said, quickly, yet half-reluctantly, 'Have you ever seen him like this before?'

'Yes; the giddiness often comes on in the morning, but never so badly as this. I think it was from the rapid motion.'

'Has he had advice?'

'I cannot persuade him to see any one. Do you think he ought? I would send at once, at the risk of his being angry.'

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'Does Dr. Martyn attend you? Shall I leave a message as I go home?'

'I should be most thankful!'

'It may be nothing, but you will be happier that it should be ascertained;' and with another kindly nod, he rode off.

Mervyn had gone to his room, and answered her inquiries at the door with a brief, blunt 'better,' to be interpreted that he did not wish to be disturbed. She did not see him till dinnertime, when he had a sullen headache, and was gruff and gloomy. She tried to learn who the friend in need had been, but he had been incapable of distinguishing anybody or anything at the moment of the attack, and was annoyed at having been followed. 'What a pottering ass to come away from a run on a fool's errand!' he said. 'Some Elverslope spy, who will set it about the country that I had been drinking, and cast that up to you!' and then he began to rail against the ladies, singly and collectively, inconsistently declaring it was Phœbe's own fault for not having called on them, and that he would have Augusta to Beauchamp, give a ball and supper, and show whether Miss Fulmort were a person to be cut.

This mode of vindication not being to Miss Fulmort's taste, she tried to avert it by doubts whether Augusta could be had; and was told that, show Lady Bannerman a bottle of Barton's dry champagne, and she would come to the world's end. Meantime, Phœbe must come out to-morrow for a round of visits, whereat her heart failed her, as a thrusting of herself where she was not welcome; but he spoke so fiercely and dictatorially, that she reserved her pleading for the morning, when he would probably be too inert not to be glad of the escape.

At last, Dr. Martyn's presence in the drawing-room was announced to her. She began her explanation with desperate bravery; and though the first words were met with a scoffing grunt, she found Mervyn less displeased than she had feared—nay, almost glad that the step had been taken, though he would not say so, and made a great favour of letting her send the physician to him in the dining-room.

After a time, Dr. Martyn came to tell her that he had found her brother's head and pulse in such a state as to need instant relief by cupping; and that the young Union doctor had been sent for from the village for the purpose. A constitutional fullness of blood in the head had been aggravated by his mode of life, and immediate discipline, severe regimen, and abstinence from business or excitement, were the only means of averting dangerous illness; in fact, his condition might at any time become exceedingly critical, though perseverance in care might possibly prevent all absolute peril. He himself was thoroughly frightened. His own sensations and forebodings seconded the sentence too completely for resistance; it was almost a relief to give way; and his own method of driving away discomfort had so signally failed, that he was willing to resign himself to others.

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Phœbe assisted at the cupping valorously and handily. She had a civil speech from young Mr. Jackson, and Mervyn, as she bade him good night, said, 'I can't spare you now, Phœbe.'

'Not till you are better,' she answered.

And so she told Miss Charlecote, and wrote to Robert; but neither was satisfied. Honora said it was unlucky. It might certainly be a duty to nurse Mervyn if he were really ill, and if he made himself fit company for her, but it would not set her straight with the neighbourhood; and Robert wrote in visible displeasure at this complication of the difficulty. 'If Mervyn's habits had disordered his health, it did not render his pursuits more desirable for his sisters. If he wanted Phœbe's attendance, let him come to town with her to the Bannermans; but his ailments must not be made an excuse for detaining her in so unsuitable a position as that into which he had brought her.'

It was not so kind a letter as Phœbe would have claimed from Robert, and it was the more trying as Mervyn, deprived of the factitious exhilaration that had kept him up, and lowered by treatment, was dispirited, depressed, incapable of being entertained, cross at her failures, yet exacting of her attendance. He had business at his office in the City that needed his presence, so he insisted till the last morning upon going, and then owned himself in no state to go farther than the study, where he tried to write, but found his brain so weak and confused that he could hardly complete a letter, and was obliged to push over even the simplest calculation to Phœbe. In vain she tried to divert his mind from this perilous exertion; he had not taste nor cultivation enough to be interested in anything she could devise, and harping upon some one of the unpleasant topics that occupied his thoughts was his only entertainment when he grew tired of cards or backgammon.

Phœbe sat up late writing to Robert a more minute account of Mervyn's illness, which she thought must plead for him; and rather sad at heart, she had gone to bed and fallen asleep, when far on in the night a noise startled her. She did not suspect her own imagination of being to blame, except so far as the associations with illness in the house might have recalled the sounds that once had been wont to summon her to her mother's room. The fear that her brother might be worse made her listen, till the sounds became matters of certainty. Springing to the window, her eyes seemed to stiffen with amaze as she beheld in the clear, full moonlight, on the frosty sward, the distinctly-traced shadow of a horse and cart. The objects themselves were concealed by a clump of young trees, but their forms were distinctly pictured on the turf, and the conviction flashed over her that a robbery must be going forward.

'Perils and dangers of this night, indeed!' One prayer, one thought. She remembered the great house-bell, above the attic stairs in the opposite wing, at the other end of the gallery, which led from the top of the grand staircase, where the chief bedroom doors opened, and a jet of gas burnt all night on the balustrade. Throwing on her dressing-gown, she sped along the passage, and pushing open the swing-door, beheld Mervyn at the door of his own room, and at the head of the stairs a man, in whom she recognized the discarded footman, raising a pistol. One swift bound—her hand was on the gas-pipe. All was darkness, save a dim stripe from within the open door of her mother's former dressing-room, close to where she stood. She seized the lock, drew it close, and had turned the key before the hand within had time to wrench round the inner handle. That same instant, the flash and report of a pistol made her cry out her brother's name.

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'Hollo! what did you put out the light for?' he angrily answered; and as she could just distinguish his white shirt sleeves, she sprang to him. Steps went hurriedly down the stairs. 'Gone!' they both cried at once; Mervyn, with an imprecation on the darkness, adding, 'Go and ring the bell. I'll watch here.'

She obeyed, but the alarm had been given, and the house was astir. Candle-light gleamed above—cries, steps, and exclamations were heard, and she was obliged to hurry down, to save herself from being run over. Two figures had joined Mervyn, the voice of one proclaiming her as Bertha, quivering with excitement. 'In there? My emeralds are in there! Open the door, or he will make off with my—my emeralds!'

'Safe, my child? Don't stand before that door,' cried Miss Fennimore, pulling Phœbe back with a fond, eager grasp.

'Here, some of you,' shouted Mervyn to the men, whose heads appeared behind the herd of maids, 'come and lay hold of the fellow when I unlock the door.'

The women fell back with suppressed screams, and readily made way for the men, but they shuffled, backed, and talked of pistols, and the butler suggested the policeman.

'The policeman—he lives two miles off,' cried Bertha. 'He'll go out of window with my emeralds! Unlock the door, Mervyn.'

'Unlock it yourself,' said Mervyn, with an impatient stamp of his foot. 'Pshaw! but thank you,' as Miss Fennimore put into his hand his double-barrelled gun, the first weapon she had found—unloaded, indeed, but even as a club formidable enough to give him confidence to unlock the door, and call to the man to give himself up. The servants huddled together like sheep, but there was no answer. He called for a light. It was put into his hand by Phœbe, and as he opened the door, was blown out by a stream of cold air from the open window.

The thief was gone. Everybody was ready to press in and look for him in every impossible place, but he had evidently escaped by the leads of the portico beneath; not, however, with 'my emeralds'—he had only attempted the lock of the jewel cabinet.

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Phœbe hurried to see whether Maria had been frightened, and finding her happily asleep, followed the rest of the world down-stairs, where the servants seemed to be vying with each

other in the magnitude of the losses they announced, while Mervyn was shouting himself hoarse with passionate orders that everything should be left alone—doors, windows, plate-chests, and all—for the inspection of the police; and human nature could not resist lifting up and displaying signs of the robbery every moment, in the midst of the storm of vituperation thus excited.

Mervyn could hardly attend to Phœbe's mention of the cart, but as soon as it reached his senses, he redoubled his hot commands to keepers and stablemen to set off in pursuit, and called for his horse to ride to Elverslope, to give information at the police station and telegraph office. Phœbe implored him to rest and send a messenger, but he roughly bade her not to be so absurd, commanded again that nothing should be disturbed, or, if she *would* be busy, that she should make out a list of all that was missing.

'Grateful!' indignantly thought Miss Fennimore, as Phœbe was left leaning on a pillar in the portico, watching him ride away, the pale light of the yellow setting moon giving an almost ghostly appearance to her white drapery and wistful attitude. Putting an arm round her, the governess found her shivering from head to foot, and pale and cold as marble; her knees knocked together when she walked, and her teeth chattered as she strove to smile, but her quietness still showed itself in all her movements, as she returned into the hall, and reached the welcome support of a chair beside the rekindled fire.

Miss Fennimore chafed her hands, and she looked up, smiled, and said, 'Thank you.'

'Then you were frightened, after all, Phœbe,' cried Bertha, triumphantly.

'Was I?—I don't know,' said Phœbe, as in a dream.

'What, when you don't know what you are talking of, and are still trembling all over?'

'I can't tell. I think what came on me then was thankfulness.'

'I am sure we may be thankful that our jewels are the only things safe!'

'Oh! Bertha, you don't know, then, that the man was taking aim at Mervyn!' and the shudder returned.

'There, Phœbe, for the sake of candour and psychology, confess your terror.'

'Indeed, Bertha,' said Phœbe, with a smile on her tremulous lip, 'it is very odd, but I don't think I was afraid; there was a feeling of shadowing Wings that left no room for terror.'

'That enabled you to think and act?' asked Miss Fennimore.

'I didn't think; it came to me,' said Phœbe. 'Pray, let me go; Bertha dear, you had better go to bed. Pray lie down, Miss Fennimore.'

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She moved slowly away, her steps still unsteady and her cheeks colourless, but the sweet light of thankfulness on her face; while Bertha said, in her moralizing tone, 'It is a curious study to see Phœbe taking her own steady nerves and power of resource for something external to herself, and being pious about it.'

Miss Fennimore was not gratified by her apt pupil's remark. 'If Phœbe's conduct do not fill you with reverence, both for her and that which actuates her, I can only stand astonished,' she said.

Bertha turned away, and erected her eyebrows.

No one could go to bed, and before five o'clock Phœbe came down, dressed for the day, and set to work with the butler and the inventory of the plate to draw up an account of the losses. Not merely the plate in common use was gone, but the costly services and ornaments that had been the glory of old Mr. Fulmort's heart; and the locks had not been broken but opened with a key; the drawing-rooms had been rifled of their expensive bijouterie, and the foray would have been completely successful had it included the jewels. There were no marks of a violent entrance; windows and doors were all fastened as usual, with the single exception of the back door, which was found ajar, but with no traces of having been opened in an unusual manner, though the heavy bolts and bars would have precluded an entrance from the outside even with a false key.

Early in the day, Mervyn returned with the superintendent of police. He was still too much excited to rest, and his heavy tread re-echoed from floor to floor, as he showed the superintendent round the house, calling his sister or the servants to corroborate his statements, or help out his account of what he had hardly seen or comprehended. Thus he came to Phœbe for her version of the affair in the gallery, of which he only knew his own share—the noise that had roused him, the sight of the burglar, the sudden darkness, the report of the pistol; and the witness of his danger—the bullet—was in the wall nearly where his head had been. When Phœbe had answered his questions, he gazed at her, and exclaimed—'Hallo! why, Phœbe, it seems that but for you, Parson Robert would be in possession here!' and burst into a strange nervous laugh, ending by coming to her and giving a hearty kiss to her forehead, ere hurrying away to report her evidence to the policeman.

When all measures had been taken, intelligence sent back to the station, and a search instituted in every direction, Mervyn consented to sit down to breakfast, but talked instead of eating, telling Phœbe that even without her recognition of James Smithson, the former footman, the superintendent would have attributed the burglary to a person familiar with the house, provided with facsimiles of all the keys, except those of the jewels, as well as sufficiently aware of the

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habits of the family to make the attempt just before the jewels were to be removed, and when the master was likely to be absent. The appearance of the back door had led to the conclusion that the thieves had been admitted from within; a London detective had therefore been sent for, who was to come in the guise of a clerk from the distillery, bringing down the books to Mr. Fulmort, and Phœbe was forbidden to reveal his true character to any one but Miss Fennimore. So virulently did Mervyn talk of Smithson, that Phœbe was sorry she had recognized him, and became first compassionate, then disconcerted and shocked. She rose to leave the room as the only means of silencing him; he got up to come after her, abusing the law because house-breaking was not a hanging matter, his face growing more purple with passion every moment; but his steps suddenly failed, his exclamation transferred his fury to his own giddiness, and Phœbe, flying to his side, was only just in time to support him to a couch. It was the worst attack he had yet had, and his doctors coming in the midst of it, used prompt measures to relieve him, and impressed on both him and his sister that everything would depend on perfect quiet and absence from all disturbance; and he was so much exhausted by the reaction of his excitement, loss of blood, and confusion of head, that he attempted little but long fretful sighs when at length he was left to her. After much weariness and discomfort he fell asleep, and Phœbe ventured to creep quietly out of the library to see Miss Charlecote, who was hearing the night's adventures in the schoolroom. Scarcely, however, had Honor had time to embrace the little heroine, whose conduct had lost nothing in Miss Fennimore's narration, when a message came from Elverslope. It was the day of the petty sessions, and a notable bad character having been taken up with some suspicious articles upon him, the magistrates were waiting for Mr. Fulmort to make out the committal on his evidence.

'I must go instead,' said Phœbe, after considering for a moment.

'My dear,' exclaimed Honor, 'you do not know how unpleasant it will be!'

'Mervyn must sleep,' said Phœbe; 'and if this be an innocent man, he ought to be cleared at once. If it be not improper, I think I ought to go. May I?' looking at the governess, who suggested her speaking to the superintendent, and learning whether her brother had been absolutely summoned.

It proved to be only a verbal message, and the superintendent urged her going, telling her that her evidence would suffice for the present, and that she would be the most important witness at the assizes—which he evidently considered as a great compliment.

Miss Charlecote undertook to go and take care of her young friend, and they set off in silence, Phœbe leaning back with her veil down, and Honor, perceiving that she needed this interval of quiet repose, watching her with wonder. Had it been Honor's own case, she would have hung back out of dislike to pursuing an enemy, and from dread of publicity, but these objections had apparently not occurred to the more simple mind, only devising how to spare her brother; and while Honor would have been wretched from distrust of her own accuracy, and her habits of imperfect observation would have made her doubt her own senses and memory, she honoured Phœbe's careful training in seeing what she saw, and hearing what she heard, without cross lights or counter sounds from imagination. Once Phœbe inquired in a low, awe-struck voice, 'Shall I be put on oath?'

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'Most likely, my dear.'

Phœbe's hands were pressed together as though in preparation for a religious rite. She was not dismayed, but from her strict truth at all times, she was the more sensible of the sacredness and solemnity of the great appeal.

An offence on so large a scale had brought a throng of loiterers to the door of the town-hall, and Honor felt nervous and out of place as way was made for the two ladies to mount the stairs to the justice-room; but there she was welcomed by several of the magistrates, and could watch Phœbe's demeanour, and the impression it made on persons accustomed to connect many strange stories with the name of Miss Fulmort. That air of maidenly innocence, the girlish form in deep mourning, the gentle seriousness and grave composure of the young face, the simple, self-possessed manner, and the steady, distinct tones of the clear, soft voice were, as Honor felt, producing an effect that was shown in the mood of addressing her, always considerate and courteous, but increasing in respect and confidence.

And as Phœbe raised her eyes, the chairman's face—the first to meet her glance—was the kind ruddy one, set in iron gray hair, that she remembered as belonging to the hunter who had sacrificed the run to see Mervyn safely home. The mutual recognition, and the tone of concern for his illness, made her feel in the presence of a friend, and she was the more at ease in performing her part.

To her great relief, the man in custody was unknown to her. James Smithson, she said, was taller, and had a longer face, and she had not seen him whom she had locked into the dressing-room. However, she identified a gold and turquoise letter-weight; and the setting of a seal, whence the stone with the crest had been extracted, both of which had been found in the man's pocket, together with some pawnbroker's tickets, which represented a buhl-clock and other articles from Beauchamp. She was made to give an account of the robbery. Honor had never felt prouder of any of her favourites than of her, while listening to the modest, simple, but clear and circumstantial recital, and watching how much struck the country gentlemen were by the girl who had been of late everywhere pitied or censured.

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The statement over, she was desired to answer a few questions from Captain Morden, the chief of the constabulary force, who had come from the county town to investigate the affair. Taking her aside, he minutely examined her on the appearance of some of the articles mentioned in the inventory, on the form of the shadow of the horse and cart, on the thieves themselves, and chiefly on Smithson, and how she could be so secure of the identity of the robber in the pea-jacket with the footman in powder and livery.

'I can hardly tell,' said Phœbe; 'but I have no doubt in my own mind.'

'Was he like this?' asked Captain Morden, showing her a photograph.

'Certainly not.'

'Nor this?'

'No.'

'Nor this?'

'Yes, that is Smithson in plain clothes.'

'Right, Miss Fulmort. You have an eye for a likeness. These fellows have such a turn for having their portraits done, that in these affairs we always try if the shilling photographers have duplicates. This will be sent to town by the next train.'

'I am not sure that I should have known it if I had not seen it before.'

'Indeed! Should you object to tell me under what circumstances?'

'At the photographer's, at the time he was at Hiltonbury,' said Phœbe. 'I went to him with one of my sisters, and we were amused by finding many of the likenesses of our servants. Smithson and another came in to be taken while we were there, and we afterwards saw this portrait when calling for my sister's.'

'Another—another servant?' said the keen captain.

'Yes, one of the maids.'

'Her name, if you please.'

'Indeed,' said Phœbe, distressed, as she saw this jotted down. 'I cannot bring suspicion and trouble on any one.'

'You will do no such thing, Miss Fulmort. We will only keep our eye on her. Neither she, nor any one else, shall have any ground for supposing her under suspicion, but it is our duty to miss no possible indication. Will you oblige me with her name?'

'She is called Jane, but I do not know her real name,' said Phœbe, with much reluctance, and in little need of the injunction to secrecy on this head. The general eagerness to hunt down the criminals saddened her, and she was glad to be released, with thanks for her distinct evidence. The kind old chairman then met her, quite with an air of fatherly protection, such as elderly men often wear towards orphaned maidens, and inquired more particularly for her brother's health. She was glad to thank him again for having sent the physician, when his aid was so needful, and she was in so much difficulty. 'A bold stroke,' he, said, smiling; 'I thought you might throw all the blame on me if it were needless.'

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'Needless—oh! it may have saved him. Is that the carriage? I must get home as soon as I can.'

'Yes, I am sure you must be anxious, but I hope to see more of you another time. Lady Raymond must come and see if you cannot find a day to spend with my girls.'

Lady Raymond! So this was Sir John! Mervyn's foe and maligner! Was he repenting at the sight of what he had done? Yet he really looked like a very good, kind old man, and seemed satisfied with the very shabby answer he obtained to a speech that filled Honor with a sense of her young friend's victory. There was Phœbe, re-established in the good graces of the neighbourhood, favoured by the very *élite* of the county for goodness, sought by those who had never visited at Beauchamp in the days of its gaiety and ostentation! Ungrateful child, not to be better pleased—only saying that she supposed she should go away when her brother should be well again, and not seeing her way to any day for Moorcroft! Was she still unforgiving for Mervyn's rejection, or had she a feeling against visiting those who had not taken notice of her family before?

Mervyn met Phœbe in the hall, still looking very ill, with his purple paleness, his heavy eyes, and uncertain steps, and though he called himself all right, since his sleep, it was with a weary gasp that he sank into his chair, and called on her for an account of what she had done. His excitement seemed to have burnt itself out, for he listened languidly, and asked questions by jerks, dozing half-way through the answer, and wakening to some fresh inquiry; once it was—'And did the old sinner take any notice of you?'

'The prisoner?'

'Nonsense. Old Raymond. Of course he was in the chair.'

'He was very kind. It was he who came home from the hunt with us the other day.'

'Ha! I said it was some old woman of a spy, wanting to get up a story against me!'

'Nay, I think he felt kindly, for he talked of Lady Raymond calling, and my spending a day at Moorcroft.'

'Oh! so the godly mean to rescue you, do they?'

'I did not accept. Perhaps they will never think of it again.'

'No; his ladies will not let him!' sneered Mervyn.

Nevertheless, his last words that night were, 'So the Raymonds have asked you!'

He was in a more satisfactory state the next day; feeble, but tamed into endurance of medical treatment, and almost indifferent about the robbery; as though his passion were spent, and he were tired of the subject. However, the police were alert. The man whom they had taken up was a squatter in the forest, notorious as a poacher and thief, and his horse and cart answered to Phœbe's description of the shadow. He had been arrested when returning with them from the small seaport on the other side of the forest in the next county, and on communicating with the authorities there, search at a dealer's in marine stores had revealed hampers filled with the Beauchamp plate, as yet unmelted. The spoils of lesser bulk had disappeared with Smithson and the other criminal.

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CHAPTER XX

Mascarille.—Oh! oh! je ne prenois pas garde;
Tandis que sans songer à mal, je vous regarde
Votre œil en tapinois me dérobe mon cœur,
Au voleur! au voleur! au voleur! au voleur!

Cathos.—Ah! voilà qui est poussé dans le dernier galant!

Les Precieuses Ridicules

The detective arrived, looking so entirely the office clerk as to take in Mervyn himself at first sight; and the rest of the world understood that he was to stay till their master could go over the accounts with him. As housekeeper's room company, his attentions were doubly relished by the housemaids, and jealousy was not long in prompting the revelation that Jane Hart had been Smithson's sweetheart, and was supposed to have met him since his dismissal. Following up this trail, the detective proved to his own satisfaction that she had been at a ball at a public-house in the next village the night before the hunt, and had there met both Smithson and the poacher. This, however, he reserved for Mervyn's private ear, still watching his victim, in the hope that she might unconsciously give some clue to the whereabouts of her lover. The espionage diverted Mervyn, and gave him the occupation for his thoughts that he sorely needed; but it oppressed Phœbe, and she shrank from the sight of the housemaid, as though she herself were dealing treacherously by her.

'Phœbe,' said Mervyn, mysteriously, coming into the library, where his tardy breakfast was spread, 'that villain Smithson has been taken up at Liverpool; and here's a letter for you to look at. Fenton has captured a letter to that woman Hart, who, he found, was always wanting to go to the post—but he can't make it out; and I thought it was German, so I brought it to you. It looks as if old Lieschen—'

'No! no! it can't be,' cried Phœbe. 'I'll clear it up in a moment.'

But as she glanced at the letter the colour fled from her cheek.

'Well, what is it?' said Mervyn, impatiently.

'Oh, Mervyn!' and she put her hands before her face.

'Come, the fewer words the better. Out with it at once!'

'Mervyn! It is to Bertha!' She stood transfixed.

'What?' cried Mervyn.

'To Bertha,' repeated Phœbe, looking as if she could never shut her eyes.

'Bertha? What, a billet-doux; the little precocious pussycat!' and he laughed, to Phœbe's increased horror.

'If it could only be a mistake!' said she; 'but here is her name! It is not German, only English in German writing. Oh, Bertha! Bertha!'

'Well, but who is the fellow? Let me look,' said Mervyn.

'It is too foolish,' said Phœbe, guarding it, in the midst of her cold chills of dismay. 'There is no surname—only John. Ah! here's J. H. Oh! Mervyn, could it be Mr. Hastings?'

'No such thing! John! Why, my name's John—everybody's name is John! That's nothing.'

'But, Mervyn, I was warned,' said Phœbe, her eyes again dilating with dismay, 'that Mr. Hastings

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never was received into a house with women without there being cause to repent it.'

'Experience might have taught you how much slanderous gossip to believe by this time! I believe it is some trumpety curate she has been meeting at Miss Charlecote's school feasts.'

'For shame, Mervyn,' cried Phœbe, in real anger.

'Curates like thirty thousand as much as other men,' said Mervyn, sulkily.

'After all,' said Phœbe, controlling herself, 'what signifies most is, that poor Bertha should have been led to do such a dreadful thing.'

'If ever I take charge of a pack of women again! But let's hear what the rascal says to her.'

'I do not think it is fair to read it all,' said Phœbe, glancing over the tender passages. 'Poor child, how ashamed she will be! But listen—' and she read a portion, as if meant to restrain the girl's impatience, promising to offer a visit to Beauchamp, or, if that were refused till the captives were carried off, assuring her there would be ways and means at Acton Manor, where a little coldness from the baronet always secured the lady's good graces.

Acton Manor was in Mr. Hastings' neighbourhood, and Mervyn struck his own knee several times.

'Hum! ha! Was not some chaff going on one day about the heiresses boxed up in the west wing? Some one set you all down at a monstrous figure—a hundred thousand apiece. I wonder if he were green enough to believe it! Hastings! No, it can't be! Here, we'll have the impudent child down, and frighten it out of her. But first, how are we to put off that fellow Fenton? Make up something to tell him.'

'Making up would be of no use,' said Phœbe; 'he is too clever. Tell him it is a family matter.'

Mervyn left the room, and Phœbe hid her face in her hands, thunderstruck, and endeavouring to disentangle her thoughts, perturbed between shame, indignation, and the longing to shield and protect her sister. She had not fully realized her sister's offence, so new to her imagination, when she was roused by Mervyn's return, saying that he had sent for Bertha to have it over.

Starting up, she begged to go and prepare her sister, but he peremptorily detained her, and, 'Oh, be kind to her,' was all that she could say, before in tripped Bertha, looking restless and amazed, but her *retroussé* nose, round features, and wavy hair so childish that the accusation seemed absurd.

So Mervyn felt it, and in vain drew in his feet, made himself upright, and tried to look magisterial. 'Bertha,' he began, 'Bertha, I have sent for you, Bertha—it is not possible—What's that?' pointing to the letter, as though it had been a stain of ink which she had just perpetrated.

Alarmed perhaps, but certainly not confounded, Bertha put her hands before her, and demurely said—'What do you mean?'

'What do you mean, Bertha, by such a correspondence as this?'

'If you know that letter is for me, why did you meddle with it?' she coolly answered.

'Upon my word, this is assurance,' cried Mervyn.

'Give me my letter,' repeated Bertha, reaching out for it. 'No one else has a right to touch it.'

'If there be nothing amiss,' said Phœbe, coming to the relief of her brother, who was almost speechless at this audacity, 'why receive it under cover to a servant?'

'Because prejudice surrounds me,' stoutly replied Bertha, with barely a hitch in her speech, as if making a grand stroke; but seeing her brother smile, she added in an annihilating tone, 'practical tyranny is exercised in every family until education and intellect effect a moral emancipation.'

'What?' said Mervyn, 'education teaching you to write letters in German hand! Fine results! I tell you, if you were older, the disgrace of this would stick to you for life, but if you will tell the whole truth about this scoundrel, and put an end to it, we will do the best we can for you.'

She made up a disdainful mouth, and said, 'Thank you.'

'After all,' said Mervyn, turning to Phœbe, 'it is a joke! Look at her! She is a baby! You need not have made such a rout. This is only a toy-letter to a little girl; very good practice in German writing.'

'I am engaged to John Hastings heart and hand,' said Bertha in high dignity, little knowing that she thus first disclosed the name.

'Yes, people talk of children being their little wives,' said Mervyn, 'but you are getting too old for such nonsense, though he does not think you so.'

'It is the joint purpose of our lives,' said Bertha.

Mervyn gave his scoffing laugh, and again addressing Phœbe, said, 'If it were you, now, or any one with whom he was not in sport, it would be a serious matter. The fellow got himself expelled from Harrow, then was the proverb of even a German university, ran through his means before

he was five-and-twenty, is as much at home in the Queen's Bench as I am in this study, has been outlawed, lived on *rouge et noir* at Baden till he got whitewashed when his mother died, and since that has lived on betting, or making himself agreeable to whoever would ask him.'

'Many thanks on the part of your intimate friend,' said Bertha, with suppressed passion.

Mervyn stamped his foot, and Phœbe defended him with, 'Men may associate with those who are no companions for their sisters, Bertha.'

'Contracted minds always accept malignant reports,' was the reply.

'Report,' said Mervyn; 'I know it as well as I know myself!' then recollecting himself, 'but she does not understand, it is of no use to talk to children. Take her away, Phœbe, and keep her in the nursery till Mr. Crabbe comes to settle what is to be done with her.'

'I insist on having my letter,' said Bertha, with womanly grandeur.

'Let her have it. It is not worth bothering about a mere joke,' said Mervyn, leaning back, wearied of the struggle, in which, provoking as he was, he had received some home thrusts.

Phœbe felt bewildered, and as if she had a perfect stranger on her hands, though Bertha's high tone was, after all, chiefly from her extremity, and by way of reply to her brother's scornful incredulity of her exalted position. She was the first to speak on leaving the library. 'Pray, Phœbe, how came you to tamper with people's letters?'

Phœbe explained.

'From Mervyn and his spy one could expect no delicacy,' said Bertha, 'but in you it was treachery.'

'No, Bertha,' said Phœbe, 'I was grieved to expose you, but it was my duty to clear the innocent by examining the letter, and Mervyn had a right to know what concerned you when you were under his charge. It is our business to save you, and a letter sent in this way does not stand on the same ground as one coming openly under your own name. But I did not read it to him, Bertha—not all.'

'If you had,' said Bertha, more piqued than obliged by this reserve, 'he would have known it was in earnest and not childish nonsense. You saw that it was earnest, Phœbe?' and her defiant voice betrayed a semi-distrust.

'I am afraid it looked very much so,' said Phœbe; 'but, Bertha, that would be saddest of all. I am afraid he might be wicked enough to be trying to get your fortune, for indeed—don't be very much vexed, dearest, I am only saying it for your good—you are not old enough, nor formed, nor pretty enough, really to please a man that has seen so much of the world.'

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'He never met so fresh, or original, or so highly cultivated a mind,' said Bertha; 'besides, as to features, there may be different opinions!'

'But, Bertha, how could you ever see him or speak to him?'

'Hearts can find more ways than you dream of,' said Bertha, with a touch of sentiment; 'we had only to meet for the magnetism of mind to be felt!'

Argument was heartless work. Flattery and the glory of her conquest had entirely filled the child's mind, and she despised Mervyn and Phœbe far too much for the representations of the one or the persuasions of the other to have the smallest weight with her. Evidently, weariness of her studies, and impatience of discipline had led her to lend a willing ear to any distraction, and to give in to the intercourse that both gratified and amused herself and outwitted her governess, and thence the belief in the power of her own charms, and preference for their admirer, were steps easier than appeared credible to Phœbe. From listening in helpless amaze to a miserable round of pertness and philosophy, Phœbe was called down-stairs to hear that Mervyn had been examining Jane Hart, and had elicited from her that after having once surprised Mr. Hastings and Miss Bertha in conversation, she had several times conveyed notes between them, and since he had left Beauchamp, she had posted two letters to him from the young lady, but this was the first answer received, directed to herself, to be left at the post-office to be called for.

'Earnest enough on his part,' said Mervyn; 'a regular speculation to patch up his fortunes. Well, I knew enough of him, as I told you, but I was fool enough to pity him!'

He became silent, and so did Phœbe. She had been too much overset to look the subject fairly in the face, and his very calmness of voice and the absence of abusive epithets were a token that he was perfectly appalled at what he had brought on his sisters. They both sat still some minutes, when she saw him lean back with his hand to his head, and his eyes closed. 'There's a steeple chase!' he said, as Phœbe laid her cool hand on his burning brow, and felt the throbbing of the swollen veins of his temples. Both knew that this meant cupping, and they sent in haste for the Hiltonbury doctor, but he was out for the day, and would not return till evening. Phœbe felt dull and stunned, as if her decision had caused all the mischief, and more and more were following on, and her spirit almost died within her at Mervyn's interjection of rage and suffering.

'Though they curse, yet bless thou,' had of necessity been her rule while clinging to this brother; a mental ejaculation had become habitual, and this time it brought reaction from her forlorn despondency. She could do something. Twice she had assisted in cupping, and she believed she

could perform the operation. No failure could be as hurtful as delay, and she offered to make the attempt. Mervyn growled at her folly, yawned, groaned, looked at his watch, counted the heavy hours, and supposed she must do as she chose. p. 400

Her heart rivalled his temples in palpitation, but happily without affecting eye, voice, or hand, and with Lieschen's help the deed was successfully done, almost with equal benefit to the operator and the patient.

Success had put new life into her; the troubles had been forgotten for the moment, and recurred not as a shameful burthen, caused by her own imprudence, but as a possible turning-point, a subject for action, not for despair, and Phœbe was herself again.

'What's that you are writing?' asked Mervyn, starting from a doze on the sofa.

'A letter to Robert,' she answered reluctantly.

'I suppose you will put it in the *Times*. No woman can keep a thing to herself.'

'I would tell no one else, but I wanted his advice.'

'Oh, I dare say.'

Phœbe saw that to persist in her letter would utterly destroy the repose that was essential in Mervyn's state, and she laid aside her pen.

'Going to do it out of sight?' he petulantly said.

'No; but at any rate I will wait till Miss Fennimore has talked to Bertha. She will be more willing to listen to her.'

'Because this is the result of her emancipating education. Ha!'

'No; but Bertha will attend to her, and cannot say her notions are servile and contracted.'

'If you say any more, I shall get up and flog them both.'

'Miss Fennimore is very wise,' said Phœbe.

'Why, what has she taught you but the ologies and the Rights of Women?'

'The chief thing she teaches,' said Phœbe, 'is to attend to what we are doing.'

Mervyn laughed, but did not perceive how those words were the key of Phœbe's character.

'Sir John and Lady Raymond and Miss Raymond in the drawing-room.'

Unappreciating the benefit of changing the current of thought, Phœbe lamented their admission, and moved reluctantly to the great rooms, where the guests looked as if they belonged to a more easy and friendly region than to that world of mirrors, damask, and gilding.

Sir John shook hands like an old friend, but his wife was one of those homely ladies who never appear to advantage in strange houses, and Phœbe had not learnt the art of 'lady of the house' talk, besides feeling a certain chilliness towards Mervyn's detractors, which rendered her stiff and formal. To her amaze, however, the languishing talk was interrupted by his entrance; he who regarded Sir John as the cause of his disappointment; he who had last met Susan Raymond at the time of his rejection; he whom she had left prostrate among the sofa cushions; he had absolutely exerted himself to brush his hair and put on coat and boots, yet how horribly ill and nervous he looked, totally devoid of his usual cool assurance, uncertain whether to shake hands with the two ladies, and showing a strange restless eagerness as though entirely shaken off his balance. p. 401

Matters were mended by his entrance. Phœbe liked Lady Raymond from the moment she detected a sign to the vehement Sir John not to keep his host standing during the discussion of the robbery, and she ventured on expressing her gratitude for his escort on the day of the hunt. Then arose an entreaty to view the scene of the midnight adventure, and the guests were conducted to the gallery, shown where each party had stood, the gas-pipe, the mark of the pistol-shot, and the door was opened to display the cabinet, and the window of the escape. To the intense surprise of her brother and sister, Bertha was examining her emeralds.

She came forward quite at her ease, and if she had been ten years a woman could not more naturally have assumed the entertainment of Lady Raymond, talking so readily that Phœbe would have believed the morning's transactions a delusion, but for Mervyn's telegraph of astonishment.

The visitors had been at the Holt, and obtained a promise from Miss Charlecote to spend the ensuing Saturday week at Moorcroft. They begged the sisters to accompany her. Phœbe drew back, though Mervyn hurried out declarations of his not wanting her, and the others never going out, till she hardly knew how it had been decided; but as the guests departed she heard Mervyn severely observing to Bertha—'no, certainly I should not send you to keep company with any well-behaved young ladies.'

'Thank you, I have no desire to associate with commonplace girls,' said Bertha, marching off to the west wing.

'You will go, Phœbe,' said Mervyn.

'Indeed, if I did it would be partly for the sake of giving change to Bertha, and letting her see what nice people really are.'

'Are you crazy, Phœbe? I would not have Bertha with her impudence and her pedantry go among the Raymonds—no, not for the Bank of England.'

Those words darted into Phœbe's mind the perception why Mervyn was, in his strange way, promoting her intercourse with Moorcroft, not only as stamping her conduct with approval of people of their worth and weight, but as affording him some slight glimmering of hope. She could not but recollect that the extra recklessness of language which had pained her, ever since his rejection had diminished ever since her report of Sir John's notice of her at the justice room. Sister-like, she pitied and hoped; but the more immediate care extinguished all the rest, and she was longing for Miss Fennimore's sympathy, though grieving at the pain the disclosure must inflict. It could not be made till the girls were gone to bed, and at half-past nine, Phœbe sought the schoolroom, and told her tale. There was no answer, but an almost convulsive shudder; her hand was seized, and her finger guided to the line which Miss Fennimore had been reading in the Greek Testament—'By their fruits ye shall know them.'

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Rallying before Phœbe could trace what was passing in her mind, she shut the book, turned her chair to the fire, invited Phœbe to another, and was at once the clear-headed, metaphysical governess, ready to discuss this grievous marvel. She was too generous by nature not to have treated her pupils with implicit trust, and this trust had been abused. Looking back, she and Phœbe could recollect moments when Bertha had been unaccounted for, and must have held interviews with Mr. Hastings. She had professed a turn for twilight walks in the garden, and remained out of doors when the autumn evenings had sent the others in, and on the Sunday afternoons, when Phœbe and Maria had been at church, Miss Fennimore reproached herself exceedingly with having been too much absorbed in her own readings to concern herself about the proceedings of a pupil, whose time on that day was at her own disposal. She also thought that there had been communications by look and sign across the pew at church; and she had remarked, though Phœbe had been too much occupied with her brother to perceive the restlessness that had settled on Bertha from the time of the departure of Mervyn's guests, and had once reproved her for lingering, as she thought, to gossip with Jane Hart in her bedroom. 'And now,' said Miss Fennimore, 'she should have a thorough change. Send her to school, calling it punishment, if you please, but chiefly for the sake of placing her among laughing girlish girls of the same age, and, above all, under a thoroughly religious mistress of wide intelligence, and who has never doubted.'

'But we were all to keep together, dear Miss Fennimore—you—'

'One whose mind has always been balancing between aspects of truth may instruct, but cannot educate. Few minds can embrace the moral virtues unless they are based on an undoubted foundation, connected with present devotional warmth, and future hopes and fears. I see this now; I once thought excellence would approve itself, for its own sake, to others, as it did to myself. I regarded Bertha as a fair subject for a full experiment of my system, with good disposition, good abilities, and few counter influences. I meant to cultivate self-relying, unprejudiced, effective good sense, and see—with prejudices have been rooted up restraints!'

'Education seems to me to have little to do with what people turn out,' said Phœbe. 'Look at poor Miss Charlecote and the Sandbrooks.'

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'Depend upon it, Phœbe, that whatever harm may have ensued from her errors in detail, those young people will yet bless her for the principle she worked on. You can none of you bless me, for having guided the hands of the watch, and having left the mainspring untouched.'

Miss Fennimore had been, like Helvetius and the better class of encyclopædists, enamoured of the moral virtues, but unable to perceive that they could not be separated from the Christian faith, and she learnt like them that, when doctrine ceased to be prominent, practice went after it. Bertha was her Jacobin—and seemed doubly so the next morning, when an interview took place, in which the young lady gave her to understand that she, like Phœbe, was devoid of the experience that would enable them to comprehend the sacred mutual duty of souls that once had spoken. Woman was no longer the captive of the seraglio, nor the chronicler of small beer. Intellectual training conferred rights of choice superior to conventional ties; and, as to the infallible discernment of that fifteen year old judgment, had not she the sole premises to go upon, she who alone had been admitted to the innermost of that manly existence?

'I always knew Jack to be a clever dog,' said Mervyn, when this was reported to him, 'but his soft sawder to a priggish metaphysical baby must have been the best fun in the world?'

Mervyn's great desire was to keep Bertha's folly as great a secret as possible; and, by his decision, she was told that grace should be granted her till Mr. Crabbe's arrival, when, unless she had renounced what he called her silly child's fancy, stringent measures would be taken, and she would be exposed to the family censure.

'So,' said Bertha, 'you expect to destroy the attraction of souls by physical force!'

And Phœbe wrote to Robert a sorrowful letter, chiefly consisting of the utmost pleadings for Mervyn and Bertha that her loving heart could frame. She was happier when she had poured out her troubles, but grieved when no answer came by the next post. Robert's displeasure must be great—and indeed but too justly so—since all this mischief was the consequence of the disregard

of his wishes. Yet justice was hard between brothers and sisters, especially when Mervyn was in such a suffering state, threatened constantly by attacks of his complaint, which were only warded off by severe and weakening treatment. Phœbe was so necessary to his comfort in waiting on him, and trying to while away his tedious hours of inaction and oppression, that she had little time to bestow upon Bertha, nor, indeed, was talking of any use, as it only gave the young lady an occasion for pouring forth magniloquent sentiments, utterly heedless of the answers. Sad, lonely, and helpless were Phœbe's feelings, but she was patient, and still went on step by step through the strange tangle, attending to Mervyn hour by hour, always with a gentle cheerful word and smile, and never trusting herself, even when alone, to think of the turmoil and break up that must ensue on her guardian's arrival.

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All was darkness and perplexity before her, but submission and trust were her refuge, and each day of waiting before the crisis was to her feelings a gain.

CHAPTER XXI

O fy gar ride and fy gar rin
And haste ye to find these traitors agen,
For shees be burnt and hees been slein,
The wearifu gaberlunzie man.
Some rade upon horse, some ran afit,
The wife was wud and out of her wit,
She couldna gang, nor yet could she sit,
But aye did curse and ban.—KING JAMES V

Mervyn and Phœbe were playing at billiards, as a means of inducing him to take exercise enough to make him sleep. The governess and the two girls were gone to the dentist's at Elverslope. The winter's day was closing in, when there was a knock at the door, and they beheld Miss Fennimore, deadly white, and Maria, who flew up to Phœbe, crying—'Bertha's gone, Phœbe!'

'The next up-train stops at Elverslope at 8.30,' said the governess, staring in Mervyn's face, as though repeating a lesson. 'A carriage will be here by seven. I will bring her home, or never return.'

'Gone!'

'It was inexcusable in me, sir,' said Miss Fennimore, resting a hand on the table to support herself. 'I thought it needlessly galling to let her feel herself watched; and at her request, let her remain in the waiting-room while her sister was in the dentist's hands. When, after an hour, Maria was released, she was gone.'

'Alone?' cried Phœbe.

'Alone, I hope. I went to the station; the train had been ten minutes gone; but a young lady, alone, in mourning, and with no luggage but a little bag, had got in there for London. Happily, they did not know her; and it was the parliamentary train, which is five hours on the road. I telegraphed at once to your brother to meet her at the terminus.'

'I have no hope,' said Mervyn, doggedly, seating himself on the table, his feet dangling. 'He will be in the lowest gutter of Whittingtonia, where no one can find him. The fellow will meet that miserable child, go off to Ostend this very night, marry her before to-morrow morning. There's an end of it!'

'Where does Mr. Hastings lodge, sir?'

'Nowhere that I know of. There will be no end of time lost in tracing him! No train before 8.30! I'll go in at once, and have a special.'

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'They cannot put on one before nine, because of the excursion trains for the cattle-show. I should not have been in time had I driven to catch the express at W.,' said Miss Fennimore, in her clear voice of desperation. 'The 8.30 reaches town at 11.23. Will you give me the addresses where I may inquire, sir?'

'You! I am going myself. You would be of no use,' said Mervyn, in a stunned, mechanical way; and looking at his watch, he went to give orders.

'He should not go, Phœbe. In his state the mere journey is a fearful risk.'

'It can't be helped,' said Phœbe. 'I shall go with him. You stay to take care of Maria. There will be Robert to help us;' and as the governess would have spoken farther, she held up her hands in entreaty—'O pray don't say anything! I can't go on if I do anything but act.'

Yet in the endeavour to keep her brother quiet, and to husband his powers, Phœbe's movements and words had rather an additional gentleness and deliberation; and so free from bustle was her whole demeanour, that he never comprehended her intention of accompanying him till she stepped into the carriage beside him.

'What's this? You coming?'

'I will give you no trouble.'

'Well, you may help to manage the girl;' and he lay back, relieved to be off, but already spent by the hurry of the last two hours. Phœbe could sit and—no—not think, except that Robert was at the other end of the line.

The drive seemed to have lasted half the night ere the lamps of Elverslope made constellations in the valley, and the green and red lights of the station loomed out on the hill. They drove into the circle of gaslights, among the vaporous steeds of omnibuses and flies, and entered the station, Phœbe's veil down, and Mervyn shading his dazzled eyes from the glare. They were half an hour too soon; and while waiting, it occurred to Phœbe to inquire whether a telegram for Beauchamp had been received. Even so, and they must have crossed the express; but a duplicate was brought to them.

'Safe. We shall be at Elverslope at 10.20, P.M.'

Assuredly Phœbe did not faint, for she stood on her feet; and Mervyn never perceived the suspension of senses, which lasted till she found him for the second time asking whether she would go home or await the travellers at Elverslope.

'Home,' she said, instinctively, in her relief forgetting all the distress of what had taken place, so that her sensations were little short of felicity; and as she heard the 8.30 train roaring up, she shed tears of joy at having no concern therewith. The darkness and Mervyn's silence were comfortable, for she could wipe unseen her showers of tears at each gust of thankfulness that passed over her; and it was long before she could command her voice even to ask her companion whether he were tired. 'No,' he said; but the tone was more than half-sullen; and at the thought of the meeting between the brothers, poor Phœbe's heart seemed to die within her. Against their dark looks and curt sayings to one another she had no courage.

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When they reached home, she begged him to go at once to bed, hoping thus to defer the meeting; but he would not hear of doing so; and her only good augury was that his looks were pale, languid, and subdued, rather than flushed and excited. Miss Fennimore was in the hall, and he went towards her, saying, in a friendly tone, 'So, Miss Fennimore, you have heard that this unlucky child has given us a fright for nothing.'

The voice in which she assented was hoarse and scarcely audible, and she looked as if twenty years had passed over her head.

'It was all owing to your promptitude,' said Mervyn; 'a capital thought that telegram.'

'I am glad,' said Miss Fennimore; 'but I do not lose sight of my own negligence. It convinces me that I am utterly unfit for the charge I assumed. I shall leave your sisters as soon as new plans can be formed.'

'Why, I'll be bound none of your pupils ever played you such a trick before!'

Miss Fennimore only looked as if this convinced her the more; but it was no time for the argument, and Phœbe caressingly persuaded her to come into the library and drink coffee with them, judging rightly that she had tasted nothing since morning.

Afterwards Phœbe induced Mervyn to lie on the sofa, and having made every preparation for the travellers, she sat down to wait. She could not read, she could not work; she felt that tranquillity was needful for her brother, and had learnt already the soothing effect of absolute repose. Indeed, one of the first tokens by which Miss Fennimore had perceived character in Phœbe was her faculty of being still. Only that which has substance can be motionless. There she sat in the lamplight, her head drooping, her hands clasped on her knee, her eyes bent down, not drowsy, not abstracted, not rigid, but peaceful. Her brother lay in the shade, watching her with a half-fascinated gaze, as though a magnetic spell repressed all inclination to work himself into agitation.

The stillness became an effort at last, but it was resolutely preserved till the frost-bound gravel resounded with wheels. Phœbe rose, Mervyn started up, caught her hand and squeezed it hard. 'Do not let him be hard on me, Phœbe,' he said. 'I could not bear it.'

She had little expected this. Her answer was a mute caress, and she hurried out, but in a tumult of feeling, retreated behind the shelter of a pillar, and silently put her hand on Robert's arm as he stepped out of the carriage.

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'Wait,' he whispered, holding her back. 'Hush! I have promised that she shall see no one.'

Bertha descended, unassisted, her veil down, and neither turning to the right nor the left, crossed the hall and went upstairs. Robert took off his overcoat and hat, took a light and followed her, signing that Phœbe should remain behind. She found Mervyn at the library door, like herself rather appalled at the apparition that had swept past them. She put her hand into his, with a kind of common feeling that they were awaiting a strict judge.

Robert soon reappeared, and in a preoccupied way, kissed the one and shook hands with the other, saying, 'She has locked her door, and says she wants nothing. I will try again presently—not you, Phœbe; I could only get her home on condition she should see no one without her own consent. So you had my telegram?'

'We met it at the station. How did you find her?'

'Had the man been written to?' asked Robert.

'No,' said Mervyn; 'we thought it best to treat it as childish nonsense, not worth serious notice, or in fact—I was not equal to writing.'

The weary, dejected tone made Robert look up, contrary to the brothers' usual habit of avoiding one another's eye, and he exclaimed, 'I did not know! You were not going to London to-night?'

'Worse staying at home,' murmured Mervyn, as, leaning on a corner of the mantelshelf, he rested his head on his hand.

'I was coming with him,' said Phœbe; 'I thought if he gave directions, you could act.'

Robert continued to cast at him glances of dismay and compunction while pursuing the narrative. 'Hastings must have learnt by some means that the speculation was not what he had imagined; for though he met her at Paddington—'

'He did?'

'She had telegraphed to him while waiting at Swindon. He found her out before I did, but he felt himself in a predicament, and I believe I was a welcome sight to him. He begged me to do him the justice to acquit him of all participation in this rash step, and said he had only met Bertha with a view to replacing her in the hands of her family. How it would have been without me, I cannot tell, but I am inclined to believe that he did not know how to dispose of her. She clung to him and turned away from me so decidedly that I was almost grateful for the line he took; and he was obliged to tell her, with many fine speeches, that he could not expose her to share his poverty; and when the poor silly child declared she had enough for both, he told her plainly that it would not be available for six years, and he could not let her—tenderly nurtured, etc., etc. Then supposing me uninformed, he disclaimed all betrayal of your confidence, and represented all that had passed as sport with a child, which to his surprise she had taken as earnest.'

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'Poor Bertha!' exclaimed Phœbe.

'Pray where did this scene take place?' asked Mervyn.

'On the platform; but it was far too quiet to attract notice.'

'What! you had no fits nor struggles?'

'I should think not,' smiled Phœbe.

'She stood like a statue, when she understood him; and when he would audaciously have shaken hands with her, she made a distant courtesy, quite dignified. I took her to the waiting-room, and put back her veil. She was crimson, and nearly choking, but she repelled me, and never gave way. I asked if she would sleep at an inn and go home to-morrow; she said "No." I told her I could not take her to my place because of the curates. "I'll go to a sisterhood," she said; and when I told her she was in no mood to be received there, she answered, "I don't care." Then I proposed taking her to Augusta, but that was worse; and at last I got her to come home in the dark, on my promise that she should see no one till she chose. Not a word has she since uttered.'

'Could he really have meant it all in play?' said Phœbe; 'yet there was his letter.'

'I see it all,' said Mervyn. 'I was an ass to suppose such needy rogues could come near girls of fortune without running up the scent. As I told Phœbe, I know they had some monstrous ideas of the amount, which I never thought it worth my while to contradict. I imagine old Jack only intended a promising little flirtation, capable of being brought to bear if occasion served, but otherwise to be cast aside as child's play. Nobody could suspect such an inflammable nature with that baby face; but it seems she was ready to eat her fingers with dulness in the school-room, and had prodigious notions of the rights of woman; so she took all he said most seriously, and met him more than half-way. Then he goes to London, gets better information, looks at the will in Doctors' Commons, maybe, finds it a slowish speculation, and wants to let her down easy; whereof she has no notion, writes two letters to his one, as we know, gets desperate, and makes this excursion.'

Robert thoughtfully said 'Yes;' and Phœbe, though she did not like to betray it, mentally owned that the intercepted letter confirmed Mervyn's opinion, being evidently meant to pacify what was inconveniently ardent and impassioned, without making tangible promises or professions.

The silence was broken by Mervyn. 'There! I shall go to bed. Phœbe, when you see that poor child, tell her not to be afraid of me, for the scrape was of my making, so don't be sharp with her.'

'I hope not,' said Robert gravely; 'I am beginning to learn that severity is injustice, not justice. Good night, Mervyn; I hope this has not done you harm.'

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'I am glad not to be at Paddington this minute,' said Mervyn. 'You will stay and help us through this business. It is past us.'

'I will stay as long as I can, if you wish it.'

Phœbe's fervent 'Thank you!' was for both. She had never heard such friendly tones between those two, though Mervyn's were still half sullen, and chiefly softened by dejection and

weariness.

'Why, Phœbe,' cried Robert, as the door closed, 'how could you not tell me this?'

'I thought I had told you that he was very unwell.'

'Unwell! I never saw any one so much altered.'

'He is at his best when he is pale. The attacks are only kept off by reducing him, and he must be materially better to have no threatening after such a day as this.'

'Well, I am glad you have not had the letter that I posted only to-day!'

'I knew you were displeased,' said Phœbe, 'and you see you were quite right in not wishing us to stay here; but you forgive us now—Mervyn and me, I mean.'

'Don't couple yourself with him, Phœbe!'

'Yes, I must; for we both equally misjudged, and he blames himself more than any one.'

'His looks plead for him as effectually as you can do, Phœbe, and rebuke me for having fancied you weak and perverse in remaining after the remonstrance.'

'I do not wonder at it,' said Phœbe; 'but it is over now, and don't let us talk about it. I want nothing to spoil the comfort of knowing that I have you here.'

'I have a multitude of things to say, but you look sleepy.'

'Yes, I am afraid I am. I should like to sit up all night to make the most of you, but I could not keep awake.'

Childlike, she no sooner had some one on whom to repose her care than slumber claimed its due, and she went away to her thankful rest, treasuring the thought of Robert's presence, and resting in the ineffable blessing of being able to overlook the thorns in gratitude for the roses.

Bertha did not appear in the morning. Robert went to her door, and was told that she would see no one; and Phœbe's entreaties for admission were met with silence, till he forbade their repetition. 'It only hardens her,' he said; 'we must leave her to herself.'

'She will not eat, she will be ill!'

'If she do not yield at dinner-time, Lieschen shall carry food to her, but she shall not have the pleasure of disappointing you. Sullenness must be left to weary itself out.'

'Is not this more shame than sullenness?'

'True shame hides its face and confesses—sullen shame hides like Adam. If hers had not been stubborn, it would have melted at your voice. She must wait to hear it again, till she have learnt to crave for it.'

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He looked so resolute that Phœbe durst plead no longer, but her heart sank at the thought of the obstinate force of poor Bertha's nature. Persistence was innate in the Fulmorts, and it was likely to be a severe and lasting trial whether Robert or Bertha would hold out the longest. Since he had captured her, however, all were relieved tacitly to give her up to his management; and at dinner-time, on his stern assurance that unless she would accept food, the door would be forced, she admitted some sandwiches and tea, and desired to have her firing replenished, but would allow no one to enter.

Robert, at Mervyn's earnest entreaty, arranged to remain over the Sunday. The two brothers met shyly at first, using Phœbe as a medium of communication; but they drew nearer after a time, in the discussion of the robbery, and Robert presently found means of helping Mervyn, by letter-writing, and taking business off his hands to which Phœbe was unequal. Both concurred in insisting that Phœbe should keep her engagement to the Raymonds for the morrow, as the only means of preventing Bertha's escapade from making a sensation; and by night she became satisfied that not only would the brothers keep the peace in her absence, but that a day's *tête-à-tête* might rather promote their good understanding.

Still, she was in no mood to enjoy, when she had to leave Bertha's door still unopened, and the only comfort she could look to was in the conversation with Miss Charlecote on the way. From her, there was no concealing what had happened, and, to Phœbe's surprise, she was encouraging. From an external point of view, she could judge better than those more nearly concerned, and her elder years made her more conscious what time could do. She would not let the adventure be regarded as a lasting blight on Bertha's life. Had the girl been a few years older, she could never have held up her head again; but as it was, Honor foretold that, by the time she was twenty, the adventure would appear incredible. It was not to be lightly passed over, but she must not be allowed to lose her self-respect, nor despair of regaining a place in the family esteem.

Phœbe could not imagine her ever recovering the being thus cast off by her first love.

'My dear, believe me, it was not love at all, only mystery and the rights of woman. Her very demonstrativeness shows that it was not the heart, but the vanity.'

Phœbe tried to believe, and at least was refreshed by the sympathy, so as to be able, to her own surprise, to be pleased and happy at Moorcroft, where Sir John and his wife were full of kindness, and the bright household mirth of the sons and daughters showed Phœbe some of the benefit Miss Fennimore expected for Bertha from girl friends. One of the younger ones showed her a present in preparation for 'cousin Cecily,' and embarked in a list of the names of the cousinhood at Sutton; and though an elder sister decidedly closed young Harriet's mouth, yet afterwards Phœbe was favoured with a sight of a photograph of the dear cousin, and inferred from it that the young lady's looks were quite severe enough to account for her cruelty.

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The having been plunged into a new atmosphere was good for Phœbe, and she brought home so cheerful a face, that even the news of Bertha's continued obstinacy could not long sadden it, in the enjoyment of the sight of Robert making himself necessary to Mervyn, and Mervyn accepting his services as if there had never been anything but brotherly love between them. She could have blessed Bertha for having thus brought them together, and felt as if it were a dream too happy to last.

'What an accountant Robert is!' said Mervyn. 'It is a real sacrifice not to have him in the business! What a thing we should have made of it, and he would have taken all the bother!'

'We have done very well to-day,' was Robert's account; 'I don't know what can have been the matter before, except my propensity for making myself disagreeable.'

Phœbe went to bed revolving plans for softening Bertha, and was fast asleep when the lock of her door was turned. As she awoke, the terrors of the robbery were upon her far more strongly than at the actual moment of its occurrence; but the voice was familiar, though thin, weak, and gasping. 'O Phœbe, I've done it! I've starved myself. I am dying;' and the sound became a shrill cry. 'The dark! O save me!' There was a heavy fall, and Phœbe, springing to the spot where the white vision had sunk down, strove to lift a weight, cold as marble, without pulse or motion. She contrived to raise it, and drag it with her into her own bed, though in deadly terror at the icy touch and prone helplessness, and she was feeling in desperation for the bell-rope, when to her great relief, light and steps approached, and Robert spoke. Alas! his candle only served to show the ghastly, senseless face.

'She has starved herself!' said Phœbe, with affright.

'A swoon, don't be afraid,' said Robert, who was dressed, and had evidently been watching. 'Try to warm her; I will fetch something for her; we shall soon bring her round.'

'A swoon, only a swoon,' Phœbe was forced to reiterate to herself to keep her senses and check the sobbing screams that swelled in her throat during the hour-like moments of his absence. She rose, and partly dressed herself in haste, then strove to chafe the limbs; but her efforts only struck the deathly chill more deeply into her own heart.

He brought some brandy, with which they moistened her lips, but still in vain, and Phœbe's dismay was redoubled as she saw his terror. 'It *must* be fainting,' he repeated, 'but I had better send for Jackson. May God have mercy on us all—this is my fault!'

'Her lips move,' gasped Phœbe, as she rubbed the temples with the stimulant.

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'Thank God!' and again they put the spoon to her lips, as the nostrils expanded, the eyes opened, and she seemed to crave for the cordial. But vainly Robert raised her in his arms, and Phœbe steadied her own trembling hand to administer it, there were only choking, sobbing efforts for words, resulting in hoarse shrieks of anguish.

Mervyn and Miss Fennimore, entering nearly at the same moment, found Phœbe pale as death, urging composure with a voice of despair; and Robert with looks of horror that he could no longer control, holding up the sinking child, her face livid, her eyes strained. 'I can't, I can't,' she cried, with frightful catches of her breath; 'I shall die—' and the screams recurred.

Mervyn could not bear the spectacle for an instant, and fled only to return to listen outside. Miss Fennimore brought authority and presence of mind. 'Hysterical,' she said. 'There, lay her down; don't try again yet.'

'It is hunger,' whispered the trembling Phœbe; but Miss Fennimore only signed to be obeyed, and decidedly saying, 'Be quiet, Bertha, don't speak,' the habit of submission silenced all but the choking sobs. She sent Robert to warm a shawl, ordered away the frightened maids, and enforced stillness, which lasted till Bertha had recovered breath, when she sobbed out again, 'Robert! Where is he! I shall die! He must pray! I can't die!'

Miss Fennimore bade Robert compose his voice to pray aloud, and what he read tranquillized all except Mervyn, who understood this to mean the worst, and burst away to sit cowering in suspense over his fire. Miss Fennimore then offered Bertha a morsel of roll dipped in port wine, but fasting and agitation had really produced a contraction of the muscles of the throat, and the attempt failed. Bertha was dreadfully terrified, and Phœbe could hardly control herself, but she was the only person unbanished by Miss Fennimore. Even Robert's distress became too visible for the absolute calm by which the governess hoped to exhaust the hysteria while keeping up vitality by outward applications of warmth and stimulants, and from time to time renewing the endeavour to administer nourishment.

It was not till two terrible hours had passed that Phœbe came to the school-room, and announced

to her brothers that after ten minutes' doze, Bertha had waked, and swallowed a spoonful of arrowroot and wine without choking. She could not restrain her sobs, and wept uncontrollably as Mervyn put his arm round her. He was the most composed of the three, for her powers had been sorely strained, and Robert had suffered most of all.

He had on this day suspected that Bertha was burning the provisions forced on her, but he had kept silence, believing that she would thus reduce herself to a more amenable state than if she were angered by compulsion, and long before serious harm could ensue. Used to the sight of famine, he thought inanition would break the spirit without injuring the health. Many a time had he beheld those who professed to have tasted nothing for two days, trudge off tottering but cheerful, with a soup-ticket, and he had not calculated on the difference between the children of want and the delicately nurtured girl, full of overwrought feeling. Though he had been watching in loving intercession for the unhappy child, and had resolved on forcing his way to her in the morning, he felt as if he had played the part of the Archbishop of Pisa, and that, had she perished in her fearful determination, her blood would have been on himself. He was quite overcome, and forced to hurry to his own room to compose himself, ere he could return to inquire further; but there was little more to hear. Miss Fennimore desired to be alone with the patient; Phœbe allowed herself to be laid on the sofa and covered with shawls; Mervyn returned to his bed, and Robert still watched.

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There was a great calm after the storm, and Phœbe did not wake till the dim wintry dawn was struggling with the yellow candlelight, and a consultation was going on in low tones between Robert and the governess, both wan and haggard in the uncomfortable light, and their words not more cheering than their looks. Bertha had become feverish, passing from restless, talking sleep to startled, painful waking, and Miss Fennimore wished Dr. Martyn to be sent for. Phœbe shivered with a cold chill of disappointment as she gathered their meaning, and coming forward, entreated the watchers to lie down to rest, while she relieved guard; but nothing would persuade Miss Fennimore to relinquish her post; and soon Phœbe had enough to do elsewhere; for her own peculiar patient, Mervyn, was so ill throughout the morning, that she was constantly employed in his room, and Robert looking on and trying to aid her, hated himself doubly for his hasty judgments.

Maria alone could go to church on that Sunday morning, and her version of the state of affairs brought Miss Charlecote to Beauchamp to offer her assistance. She saw Dr. Martyn, and undertook the painful preliminary explanation, and she saw him again after his inspection of Bertha.

'That's a first-rate governess! Exactly so! An educational hot-bed. Why can't people let girls dress dolls and trundle hoops, as they used to do?'

'I have never thought Bertha oppressed by her lessons.'

'So much the worse! Those who can't learn, or won't learn, take care of themselves. Those who have a brain and use it are those that suffer! To hear that poor child blundering algebra in her sleep might be a caution to mothers!'

'Did you ever see her before, so as to observe the little hesitation in her speech?'

'No, they should have mentioned that.'

'It is generally very slight; but one of them—I think, Maria—told me that she always stammered more after lessons—'

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'The blindness of people! As if that had not been a sufficient thermometer to show when they were overworking her brain! Why, not one of these Fulmorts has a head that will bear liberties being taken with it!'

'Can you let us hope that this whole affair came from an affection of the brain?'

'The elopement! No; I can't flatter you that health or sanity were in fault there. Nor is it delirium now; the rambling is only in sleep. But the three days' fast—'

'Two days, was it not?'

'Three. She took nothing since breakfast on Thursday.'

'Have you made out how she passed the last two days?'

'I wrung out some account. I believe this would never have occurred to her if her brother had given her a sandwich at Paddington; but she came home exhausted into a distaste for food, which other feelings exaggerated into a fancy to die rather than face the family. She burnt the provisions in a rage at their being forced on her, and she slept most of the time—torpor without acute suffering. Last night in sleep she lost her hold of her resolution, and woke to the sense of self-preservation.'

'An infinite mercy!'

'Not that the spirit is broken; all her strength goes to sullenness, and I never saw a case needing greater judgment. Now that she is reduced, the previous overwork tells on her, and it will be a critical matter to bring her round. Who can be of use here? Not the married sisters, I suppose? Miss Fulmort is all that a girl can be at nineteen or twenty, but she wants age.'

'You think it will be a bad illness?'

'It may not assume an acute form, but it may last a good while; and if they wish her to have any health again, they must mind what they are about.'

Honora felt a task set to her. She must be Phœbe's experience as far as her fifty years could teach her to deal with a little precocious rationalist in a wild travestie of Thekla. *Ich habe geliebt und gelebet* was the farewell laid on Bertha's table. What a Thekla and what a Max! O profanation! But Honor felt Bertha a charge of her own, and her aid was the more thankfully accepted that the patient was quite beyond Phœbe. She had too long rebelled against her sister to find rest in her guardianship. Phœbe's voice disposed her to resistance, her advice to wrangling, and Miss Fennimore alone had power to enforce what was needful; and so devoted was she, that Honor could scarcely persuade her to lie down to rest for a few hours.

Honor was dismayed at the change from the childish *espiègle* roundness of feature to a withered, scathed countenance, singularly old, and mournfully contrasting with the mischievous-looking waves and rings of curly hair upon the brow. Premature playing at passion had been sport with edged tools. Sleeping, the talk was less, however, of the supposed love, than of science and metaphysics; waking, there was silence between weakness and sullenness.

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Thus passed day after day, always in the same feverish lethargic oppression which baffled medical skill, and kept the sick mind beyond the reach of human aid; and so uniform were the days, that her illness seemed to last for months instead of weeks.

Miss Fennimore insisted on the night-watching for her share. Phœbe divided with her and Lieschen the morning cares; and Miss Charlecote came in the forenoon and stayed till night, but slept at home, whither Maria was kindly invited; but Phœbe did not like to send her away without herself or Lieschen, and Robert undertook for her being inoffensive to Mervyn. In fact, she was obliging and unobtrusive, only speaking when addressed, and a willing messenger. Mervyn first forgot her presence, then tolerated her saucer eyes, then found her capable of running his errands, and lastly began to care to please her. Honora had devised employment for her, by putting a drawer of patchwork at her disposal, and suggesting that she should make a workbag for each of Robert's 139 school girls; and the occupation this afforded her was such a public benefit, that Robert was content to pay the tax of telling her the destination of each individual bag, and being always corrected if he twice mentioned the same name. When Mervyn dozed in his chair, she would require from Robert 'stories' of his scholars; and it even came to pass that Mervyn would recur to what had then passed, as though he had not been wholly asleep.

Mervyn was chiefly dependent on his brother for conversation, entertainment, and assistance in his affairs; and though not a word passed upon their differences and no professions were made, the common anxiety, and Mervyn's great need of help, had swept away all traces of unfriendliness. Not even when children in the nursery had they been so free from variance or bitterness as while waiting the issue of their sister's illness; both humbled, both feeling themselves in part the cause, each anxious to cheer and console the other—one, weak, subdued, dependent—the other, considerate, helpful, and eager to atone for past harshness. Strange for brothers to wait till the ages of twenty-nine and twenty-seven to find out that they really did prefer each other to every one else, in spite of the immense differences between their characters and habits!

'I say,' asked Mervyn, one day, when resting after having brought on giddiness and confusion by directing Robert how to answer a letter from the office, 'what would you do with this bore of a business, if it came to you?'

'Get rid of it,' said Robert, surveying him with startled eyes.

'Aye—sell it, and get the devilry, as you call it, multiplied to all infinity.'

'Close it.'

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'Boil soup in the coppers; bake loaves in the furnaces? It makes you look at me perilously—and a perilous game you would find it, most likely to swallow this place and all the rest. Why, you, who had the making of a man of business in you, might reflect that you can't annihilate property without damage to other folks.'

'I did not reflect,' said Robert, gravely; 'the matter never occurred to me.'

'What is the result of your reflection now?'

'Nothing at all,' was the somewhat impatient reply. 'I trust never to have to consider. Get it out of my hands at any sacrifice, so as it may do the least harm to others. Had I no other objection to that business, I should have no choice.'

'Your cloth? Well, that's a pity, for I see how it could be mitigated, so as to satisfy your scruples;' and Mervyn, whose head could work when it was not necessary, detailed a scheme for gradually contracting the most objectionable traffic, and adopting another branch of the trade.

'Excellent,' said Robert, assenting with delight at each pause. 'You will carry it out.'

'I? I'm only a reprobate distiller.'

There it ended, and Robert must have patience.

The guardian, Mr. Crabbe, came as soon as his gout would permit, and hemmed and grunted in reply to the strange narrative into which he had come to inquire. Acting was as yet impossible; Mervyn was forbidden to transact business, and Bertha was far too ill for the removal of the young ladies to be attempted. Miss Fennimore did indeed formally give in her resignation of her situation, but she was too necessary as a nurse for the time of her departure to be fixed, and Mr. Crabbe was unable to settle anything definitively. He found Robert—who previously had spurred him to strong measures—bent on persuading him to lenity, and especially on keeping Phœbe with Mervyn; and after a day and night of perplexity, the old gentleman took his leave, promising to come again on Bertha's recovery, and to pacify the two elder sisters by representing the condition of Beauchamp, and that for the present the Incumbent of St. Matthew's and Miss Charlecote might be considered as sufficient guardians for the inmates. 'Or if their Ladyships thought otherwise,' he said, with a twinkle in his eye, 'why did they not come down themselves?'

Mervyn made a gesture of horror, but all knew that there was little danger. Augusta was always 'so low' at the sight of illness, and unless Phœbe had been the patient out of sight, Juliana would not have brought her husband; obvious as would have been the coming of an elder sister when the sickness of the younger dragged on so slowly and wearily.

No one went through so much as Miss Fennimore. Each hour of her attendance on Bertha stamped the sense of her own failure, and of the fallacies to which her life had been dedicated. The sincerity, honour, and modesty that she had inculcated, had been founded on self-esteem alone; and when they had proved inadequate to prevent their breach, their outraged relics had prompted the victim to despair and die. Intellectual development and reasoning powers had not availed one moment against inclination and self-will, and only survived in the involuntary murmurs of a disordered nervous system. All this had utterly overthrown that satisfaction in herself and her own moral qualities in which Miss Fennimore had always lived; she had become sensible of the deep flaws in all that she had admired in her own conduct; and her reason being already prepared by her long and earnest study to accept the faith in its fulness, she had begun to crave after the Atoning Mercy of which she sorely felt the need. But if it be hard for one who has never questioned to take home individually the efficacy of the great Sacrifice, how much harder for one taught to deny the Godhead which rendered the Victim worthy to satisfy Eternal Justice? She accepted the truth, but the gracious words would not reach her spirit; they were to her as a feast in a hungry man's dream. Robert alone was aware of the struggles through which she was passing, and he could do little in direct aid of her; the books—even the passages of Scripture that he found for her—seemed to fall short; it was as though the sufferer in the wilderness lay in sight of the brazen serpent, but his eyes were holden that he could not see it.

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Only the governess's strong and untaxed health could have carried her through her distress and fatigue, for she continued to engross the most trying share of the nursing, anxious to shield Phœbe from even the knowledge of all the miseries of Bertha's nights, when the poor child would start on her pillow with a shriek, gaze wildly round, trembling in every limb, the dew starting on her brow, face well-nigh convulsed, teeth chattering, and strange, incoherent words—

'A dream, only a dream!' she murmured, recovering consciousness.

'What was only a dream?' asked Miss Fennimore, one night.

'Oh, nothing!' but she still shivered; then striving to catch hold of the broken threads of her philosophy, 'How one's imagination is a prey to—to—what is it? To—to old impressions—when one is weak.'

'What kind of impressions?' asked Miss Fennimore, resolved to probe the matter.

Bertha, whose defect of speech was greatly increased by weakness, was long in making her answer comprehensible; but Miss Fennimore gathered it at last, and it made her spirit quake, for it referred to the terrors beyond the grave. Yet she firmly answered—

'Such impressions may not always result from weakness.'

'I thought,' cried Bertha, rising on her elbow, 'I thought that an advanced state of civilization dispenses with sectarian—I mean superstitious—literal threats.'

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'No civilization can change those decrees, nor make them unmerited,' said Miss Fennimore, sadly.

'How?' repeated Bertha, frowning. 'You, too? You don't mean that? You are not one of the narrow minds that want to doom their fellow-creatures for ever.' Her eyes had grown large, round, and bright, and she clutched Miss Fennimore's hand, gasping, 'Say, not for ever!'

'My poor child! did I ever teach you it was not?'

'You thought so!' cried Bertha; 'enlightened people think so. O say—only say it does not last!'

'Bertha, I cannot. God forgive me for the falsehoods to which I led you, the realities I put aside from you.'

Bertha gave a cry of anguish, and sank back exhausted, damps of terror on her brow; but she presently cried out, 'If it would not last! I can't bear the thought! I can't bear to live, but I can't die! Oh! who will save me?'

To Miss Fennimore's lips rose the words of St. Paul to the jailer.

'Believe! believe!' cried Bertha, petulantly, 'believe what?'

'Believe that He gave His Life to purchase your safety and mine through that Eternity.'

And Miss Fennimore sank on her knees, weeping and hiding her face. The words which she had gazed at, and listened to, in vain longing, had—even as she imparted them—touched herself in their fulness. She had seen the face of Truth, when, at Mrs. Fulmort's death-bed, she had heard Phœbe speak of the Blood that cleanseth from all sin. Then it had been a moment's glimpse. She had sought it earnestly ever since, and at length it had come to nestle within her own bosom. It was not sight, it was touch—it was embracing and holding fast.

Alas! the sight was hidden from Bertha. She moodily turned aside in vexation, as though her last trust had failed her. In vain did Miss Fennimore, feeling that she had led her to the brink of an abyss of depth unknown, till she was tottering on the verge, lavish on her the most tender cares. They were requited with resentful gloom, that the governess felt to be so just towards herself that she would hardly have been able to lift up her head but for the new reliance that gave peace to deepening contrition.

That was a bad night, and the day was worse. Bertha had more strength, but more fever; and the much-enduring Phœbe could hardly be persuaded to leave her to Miss Charlecote at dusk, and air herself with her brothers in the garden. The weather was close and misty, and Honora set open the door to admit the air from the open passage window. A low, soft, lulling sound came in, so much softened by distance that the tune alone showed that it was an infant school ditty sung by Maria, while rocking herself in her low chair over the school-room fire. Turning to discover whether the invalid were annoyed by it, Honor beheld the hard, keen little eyes intently fixed, until presently they filled with tears; and with a heavy sigh, the words broke forth, 'Oh! to be as silly as she is!'

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'As *selig*, you mean,' said Honor, kindly.

'It is the same thing,' she said, with a bitter ring in her poor worn voice.

'No, it is not weakness that makes your sister happy. She was far less happy before she learnt to use her powers lovingly.'

With such earnestness that her stuttering was very painful to hear, she exclaimed, 'Miss Charlecote, I can't recollect things—I get puzzled—I don't say what I want to say. Tell me, is not my brain softening or weakening? You know Maria had water on the head once!' and her accents were pitifully full of hope.

'Indeed, my dear, you are not becoming like Maria.'

'If I were,' said Bertha, certainly showing no such resemblance, 'I suppose I should not know it. I wonder whether Maria be ever conscious of her *Ich*,' said she, with a weary sigh, as if this were a companion whence she could not escape.

'Dear child, your *Ich* would be set aside by living to others, who only seek to make you happier.'

'I wish they would let me alone. If they had, there would have been an end of it.'

'An end—no indeed, my poor child!'

'There!' cried Bertha; 'that's what it is to live! To be shuddered at!'

'No, Bertha, I did not shudder at the wild delusion and indiscretion, which may be lived down and redeemed, but at the fearful act that would have cut you off from all hope, and chained you to yourself, and such a self, for ever, never to part from the shame whence you sought to escape. Yes, surely there must have been pleading in Heaven to win for you that instant's relenting. Rescued twice over, there must be some work for you to do, something to cast into shade all that has passed.'

'It will not destroy memory!' she said, with hopeless indifference.

'No; but you may be so occupied with it as to rise above your present pain and humiliation, and remember them only to gather new force from your thankfulness.'

'What, that I was made a fool of?' cried Bertha, with sharpness in her thin voice.

'That you were brought back to the new life that is before you.'

Though Bertha made no answer, Honor trusted that a beginning had been made, but only to be disappointed, for the fever was higher the next day, and Bertha was too much oppressed for speech. The only good sign was that in the dusk she desired that the door should be left open, in case Maria should be singing. It was the first preference she had evinced. The brothers were ready to crown Maria, and she sang with such good-will that Phœbe was forced to take precautions, fearing lest the harmony should lose 'the modest charm of not too much.'

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There ensued a decided liking for Maria's company, partly no doubt from her envied deficiency, and her ignorance of the extent of Bertha's misdemeanour, partly because there was less effort of mind in intercourse with her. Her pleasure in waiting on her sister was likewise so warm and grateful, that Bertha felt herself conferring a favour, and took everything from her in a spirit very different from the dull submission towards Miss Fennimore or the peevish tyranny over Phœbe.

Towards no one else save Miss Charlecote did she show any favour, for though their conversation was never even alluded to, it had probably left a pleasant impression, and possibly she was entertained by Honor's systematic habit of talking of the world beyond to the other nurses in her presence.

But these likings were far more scantily shown than her dislikes, and it was hard for her attendants to acquiesce in the physician's exhortations to be patient till her spirits and nerves should have recovered the shock. Even the entrance of a new housemaid threw her into a trepidation which she was long in recovering, and any proposal of seeing any person beyond the few who had been with her from the first, occasioned trembling, entreaties, and tears.

Phœbe, after her brief heroineship, had lapsed into quite a secondary position. In the reaction of the brothers' feeling towards each other, they almost left her out. Both were too sure of her to be eager for her; and besides, as Bertha slowly improved, Mervyn's prime attention was lavished on the endeavour to find what would give her pleasure. And in the sick room, Miss Fennimore and Miss Charlecote could better rule; while Maria was preferred as a companion. Honor often admired to see how content Phœbe was to forego the privilege of waiting on her sister, preparing pleasures and comforts for her in the background, and committing them to the hands whence they would be most welcome, without a moment's grudge at her own distastefulness to the patient. She seemed to think it the natural consequence of the superiority of all the rest, and fully acquiesced. Sometimes a tear would rise for a moment at Bertha's rude petulance, but it was dashed off for a resolute smile, as if with the feeling of a child against tears, and she as plainly felt the background her natural position, as if she had never been prominent from circumstances. Whatever was to be done, she did it, and she was far more grateful to Mervyn for loving Robert and enduring Maria, than for any preference to herself. Always finding cause for thanks, she rejoiced even in the delay caused by Bertha's illness, and in Robert's stay in his brother's home, where she had scarcely dared to hope ever to have seen him again. Week after week he remained, constantly pressed by Mervyn to delay his departure, and not unwillingly yielding, since he felt that there was a long arrear of fraternal kindness to be made up, and that while St. Matthew's was in safe hands, he might justly consider that his paramount duty was to his brother and sisters in their present need. At length, however, the Lent services claimed him in London, and affairs at Beauchamp were so much mended, that Phœbe owned that they ought no longer to detain him from his parish, although Bertha was only able to be lifted to a couch, took little notice of any endeavour to interest her, and when he bade her farewell, hardly raised eye or hand in return.

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CHAPTER XXII

When all is done or said,
In th' end this shall you find,
He most of all doth bathe in bliss
That hath a quiet mind.—LORD VAUX

Robert had promised to return in the end of March to be present at the Assizes, when the burglars would be tried, and he did not come alone. Mr. Crabbe judged it time to inspect Beauchamp and decide for his wards; and Lady Bannerman, between Juliana's instigations, her own pride in being connected with a trial, and her desire to appropriate Phœbe, decided on coming down with the Admiral to see how matters stood, and to give her vote in the family council.

Commissions from Mervyn had pursued Robert since his arrival in town, all for Bertha's amusement, and he brought down, by special orders, a musical-box, all Leech's illustrations, and a small Maltese dog, like a spun-glass lion, which Augusta had in vain proposed to him to exchange for her pug, which was getting fat and wheezy, and 'would amuse Bertha just as well.' Lady Bannerman hardly contained her surprise when Maria, as well as Mervyn and Phœbe, met her in the hall, seemingly quite tame and at her ease. Mervyn looked better, and in answer to inquiries for Bertha, answered, 'Oh, getting on, decidedly; we have her in the garden. She might drive out, only she has such a horror of meeting any one; but her spirits are better, I really thought she would have laughed yesterday when Maria was playing with the kitten. Ha! the dog, have you got him, Robert. Well, if this does not amuse her, I do not know what will.'

And at the first possible moment, Mervyn, Maria, and the Maltese were off through the open window. Robert asked what Phœbe thought of Mervyn. She said he was much stronger, but the doctor was not satisfied that the mischief was removed, and feared that a little want of care or any excitement might bring on another attack. She dreaded the morrow on his account.

'Yes,' said the elder sister, 'I don't wonder! A most atrocious attempt! I declare I could hardly make up my mind to sleep in the house! Mind you swear to them all, my dear.'

'I only saw Smithson clearly.'

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'Oh, never mind; if they have not done that, they have done something quite as bad; and I should never sleep a night again in peace if they got off. Was it true that they had packed up all the liqueurs?'

Phœbe exonerated them from this aggravated guilt.

'I say, my dear, would you tell the butler to bring up some of the claret that was bought at Mr.

Rollestone's auction. I told Sir Nicholas that he should taste it, and I don't like to mention it to poor Mervyn, as he must not drink wine.'

'There is some up,' said Phœbe; 'Mervyn fancies that Bertha liked it.'

'My dear, you don't give Bertha that claret! you don't know what poor papa gave for it.'

'If Bertha would only enjoy anything, Mervyn would be overjoyed.'

'Yes, it is as Juliana says; it is nothing but spoiling that ails her,' said Augusta. 'Did you say she was in the garden? I may as well go and see her.'

This Phœbe withstood with entreating looks, and representations that Bertha had as yet seen no fresh face, and was easily startled; but her sister insisted that she was no stranger, and could do no harm, till Phœbe had no choice but to run on and announce her, in the hope that surprise might lessen the period of agitation.

In the sunniest and most sheltered walk was a wheeled chair over which Miss Fennimore held a parasol, while Mervyn and Maria were anxiously trying to win some token of pleasure from the languid, inanimate occupant to whom they were displaying the little dog. As the velvet-bordered silk, crimson shawl, and purple bonnet neared the dark group, a nervous tremor shot through the sick girl's frame, and partly starting up, she made a gesture of scared entreaty; but Lady Bannerman's portly embrace and kind inquiries were not to be averted. She assured the patient that all was well since she could get out of doors, the air would give her a famous appetite, and if she was able to drink claret, she would be strong enough in a day or two to come up to Juliana in London, where change and variety would set her up at once.

Bertha scarcely answered, but made an imperious sign to be drawn to the west wing, and as Phœbe succeeded in turning Augusta's attention to the hothouses Mervyn beckoned to Robert, rather injudiciously, for his patient was still tremulous from the first greeting. Her face had still the strangely old appearance, her complexion was nearly white, her hair thin and scanty, the almost imperceptible cast of the eye which had formerly only served to give character to her arch expression, had increased to a decided blemish; and her figure which had shot up to woman's height, seemed to bend like a reed as Mervyn supported her to the sofa in the school-room. With nervous fright she retained his hand, speaking with such long, helpless hesitation that Robert caught only the words 'Juliana—never—'

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'Never, never,' answered Mervyn; 'don't fear! We'll prevent that, Robert; tell her that she shall not fall into Juliana's hands—no, nor do anything against her will.'

Only after repeated assurances from both brothers that Augusta should not carry her off in her present state, did she rest tranquilly on the sofa, while Mervyn after waiting on her assiduously, with touching tenderness, as if constantly imploring her to be pleased, applied himself to playing with the dog, watching her face for some vestige of interest, and with so much gratification at the slightest sign of amusement as to show how melancholy must have been the state compared with which this was improvement.

After slowly attaining her present amount of convalescence, she had there stopped short, without progress in strength or spirits, and alarms constantly varying for her head, spine, and lungs, as if the slightest accidental cause might fix permanent disease in either quarter; and to those who daily watched her, and knew the miserable effects produced by the merest trifles, it was terrible to think that her destination was in the hands of a comparative stranger, urged on by the dull Augusta and the acid Juliana. Mervyn needed no severer penalty for having forfeited his right to protect his sisters; attached to them and devoted to Bertha as the anxieties of the spring had rendered him. The sight of Bertha had so far modified Lady Bannerman's scheme, that she proposed herself to conduct the three to Brighton, and there remain till the London season, when the two younger could be disposed of in some boarding-school, and Phœbe conducted to Albury-street. Mr. Crabbe did not appear averse to this offer, and there was a correctness about it which rendered it appalling to those who had not Phœbe's quiet trust that no part of it would be allowed to happen unless it were good for them. And she found her eldest brother so much subdued and less vituperative, that she thought him quite obliged by her experienced counsel on his housekeeping and cookery, breaking up his present establishment and letting the house for a year, during which she promised him all facilities for meeting a young widow, the wealth of whose stockbroking husband would be exactly what his business and estate required, and would pay off all his debts.

Phœbe saw indications on Mervyn's countenance which made it no surprise that he was in such a condition in the morning that only copious loss of blood and the most absolute rest to the last moment enabled him to go to W--- for the trial. Miss Charlecote had undertaken the care of Bertha, that Miss Fennimore might take charge of Maria, who was exceedingly eager to see her brother and sister give evidence.

There is no need to dwell on the proceedings. It was to Phœbe on a larger scale what she had previously gone through. She was too much occupied with the act before God and her neighbour to be self-conscious, or to think of the multitudes eagerly watching her young simple face, or listening to her grave clear tones. A dim perception crossed Lady Bannerman's mind that there really might be something in little Phœbe when she found the sheriff's wife, the *grande dame* of the hunting field, actually shedding tears of emotion.

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As soon as Mervyn's own evidence had been given he had been obliged to go to the inn and lie down; and Phœbe wished to join him there and go home at once. Both Robert and Sir John Raymond were waiting for her at the door of the witness-box, and the latter begged to introduce the sheriff, who pressed her to let him take her back into court to Lady Bannerman, his wife wished so much to see her there and at luncheon. And when Phœbe declared that she must return to her brother, she was told that it had been settled that she was to come with Sir Nicholas and Lady Bannerman to dine and sleep at the sheriff's next day, after the assize was over, to meet the judges.

Phœbe was almost desperate in her refusals, and was so little believed after all, that she charged Robert—when the sheriff had taken leave—to assure Augusta of the impossibility of her accepting the invitation. Sir John smiled, saying, 'Lady Caroline scarcely deserved her,' and added, 'Here is another who wishes to shake hands with you, and this time I promise that you shall not be persecuted—my brother.'

He was a thin, spare man, who might have been taken for the elder brother, with a gentle, dreamy expression and soft, tender voice, such as she could not imagine being able to cope with pupils. He asked after her brother's health, and she offered to ascertain whether Mervyn felt well enough to see him, but he thanked her, saying it was better not.

'It could not have been his doing,' thought Phœbe, as she went up-stairs. 'How strong-minded Cecily must be! I wonder whether she would have done Bertha good.'

'Whose voice was that?' exclaimed Mervyn, at his door above.

'Sir John Raymond and his brother.'

'Are they coming in?'

'No; they thought it might disturb you.'

Phœbe was glad that these answers fell to the share of the unconscious Robert. Mervyn sat down, and did not revert to the Raymonds through all the homeward journey. Indeed, he seemed unequal to speaking at all, went to his room immediately, and did not appear again when the others came home, bringing tidings that the verdict was guilty, and the sentence penal servitude. Lady Bannerman had further made a positive engagement with the sheriff's lady, and was at first incredulous, then highly displeased, at Phœbe's refusal to be included in it. She was sure it was only that Phœbe was bent on her own way, and thought she should get it when left at home with her guardian and her brothers.

Poor Phœbe, she did not so much as know what her own way was! She had never so much wished for her *wise* guardian, but in the meantime the only wisdom she could see was to wait patiently, and embrace whatever proposal would seem best for the others, though with little hope that any would not entail pain and separation from those who could spare her as ill as she could spare them.

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Dr. Martyn was to come over in the course of the ensuing day to examine Bertha, and give her guardian his opinion of her state. There was little danger of its being favourable to violent changes, for Augusta made a descent on the school-room after dinner, and the morbid agitation thus occasioned obliged Miss Fennimore to sit up with the patient till one o'clock. In the morning the languor was extreme, and the cough so frequent that the fear for the lungs was in the ascendant.

But Augusta, knowing of all this, believed her visit to have been most important, and immediately after breakfast summoned Robert to a conference, that he might be convinced that there must be no delay in taking measures for breaking up the present system.

'We must hear what Dr. Martyn says.'

'I never thought anything of Dr. Martyn since he advised me to leave off wine at supper. As Juliana says, a physician can always be taken in by an artful woman, and he is playing into her hands.'

'Into whose?' said Robert, unable to suppose it could be Phœbe's.

'Come, Robert, you ought not to let yourself be so blinded. I am sure it is more for your interest than my own, but I see you are as simple as ever. Juliana said any one could hoodwink you by talking of altar-cloths and Anglo-Saxons.'

'Anglo-Catholics, possibly.'

'Well, it is all the same! It is those nonsensical distinctions, rather than your own interests; but when you are cut out, and depend upon it, she will lose no time in his state of health—'

'Of whom or what are you talking?'

'I never thought well of her, pretending to drink nothing but water; and with that short, dry way, that I call impertinence; but I never thought she could be so lost till last night! Why, when I thought I would just go and see how the child was—there, after calling himself too ill to come in to dinner, there sat Mervyn, actually drinking tea. I promise you they looked disconcerted!'

'Well they might be! Bertha suffered half the night from that sudden visit.'

'And you believe that, Robert! Well! it is a convenient blind! But if you won't, we shall do our best to shame them, and if she dares it, we shall never visit her! That's all!'

Her drift here becoming revealed to Robert, his uncontrollable smile caused Augusta to swell with resentment. 'Aye! nothing on earth will make you own yourself mistaken, or take the advice of your elders, though you might have had enough of upholding Phœbe's wilfulness.'

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'Well, what do you want me to do?'

'To join us all in seeing that Miss Fennimore leaves the house before us. Then I will take the girls to Brighton, and you and the Actons might keep watch over him, and if he should persist in his infatuation—why, in the state of his head, it would almost come to a commission of lunacy. Juliana said so!'

'I have no doubt of it,' said Robert, gravely. 'I am obliged to you both, Augusta. As you observe, I am the party chiefly concerned, therefore I have a right to request that you will leave me to defend my interests as I shall see best, and that you will confide your surmise to no one else.'

Robert was not easily gainsaid when he spoke in that tone, and besides, Augusta really was uncertain whether he did not seriously adopt her advice; but though silenced towards him, she did not abstain from lamenting herself to Miss Charlecote, who had come by particular request to consult with Dr. Martyn, and enforce his opinion on Mr. Crabbe. Honora settled the question by a laugh, and an assurance that Mervyn had views in another direction; but Augusta knew of so many abortive schemes for him, and believed him to be the object of so many reports, that she treated this with disdain, and much amused Honora by her matronly superiority and London patronage.

Dr. Martyn came to luncheon, and she endeavoured to extort from him that indulgence hurt Bertha, and that Mervyn needed variety. Failing in this, she remembered his anti-supper advice, and privately warned Mr. Crabbe against him.

His advice threw a new light on the matter. He thought that in a few weeks' time, Bertha ought to be taken to Switzerland, and perhaps spend the winter in the south of France. Travelling gave the best hope of rousing her spirits or bracing her shattered constitution, but the utmost caution against fatigue and excitement would be requisite; she needed to be at once humoured and controlled, and her morbid repugnance to new attendants must be respected till it should wear off of its own accord.

Surely this might be contrived between sister, governess, and German nurse, and if Mr. Fulmort himself would go too, it would be the best thing for his health, which needed exemption from business and excitement.

Here was playing into the governess's hands! Mindful of Juliana's injunctions, Lady Bannerman announced her intention of calling heaven and earth together rather than sanction the impropriety, and set off for her party at the sheriff's in a mood which made Phœbe tremble lest the attractions of ortolans and Burgundy should instigate the 'tremendous sacrifice' of becoming chaperon.

Mervyn thought the doctor's sentence conclusive as to Miss Fennimore's plans, but to his consternation it made no change in them, except that she fixed the departure of the family as the moment of parting. Though her manner towards him had become open and friendly, she was deaf to all that he could urge, declaring that it was her duty to leave his sisters, and that the change, when once made, would be beneficial to Bertha, by removing old associations. In despair, he came to Miss Charlecote, begging her to try her powers of persuasion for the sake of poor Bertha, now his primary object, whom he treated with spoiling affection. He was quite powerless to withstand any fancy of Bertha in her present state, and not only helpless without Miss Fennimore, but having become so far used to her that for his own sake he could not endure the notion of a substitute. 'Find out the objection,' he said, 'that at least I may know whether to punch Augusta's head.'

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Honora gratified him by seeking an interview with the governess, though not clear herself as to the right course, and believing that her advice, had she any to give, would go for very little with the learned governess. Miss Fennimore was soft and sad, but decided, and begging to be spared useless arguments. Whether Lady Bannerman had insulted her by hinting her suspicions, Honor could not divine, for she was firmly entrenched within her previous motive, namely, that it would be wrong to remain in a family where first her system, and then her want of vigilance, had produced such results. And to the representation that for her own sake the present conjuncture was the worst in which she could depart, she replied that it mattered not, since she saw her own deficiencies too plainly ever to undertake again the charge of young ladies, and only intended to find employment as a teacher in a school.

'Say no more,' she entreated; 'and above all do not let Phœbe persuade me,' and there were tears on either cheek.

'Indeed, I believe her not having done so is a most unselfish act of deference to your judgment.'

'I know it for a sign of true affection! You, who know what she is, can guess what it costs me to leave her above all, now that I am one in faith with her, and could talk to her more openly than I ever dared to do; she whose example first showed me that faith is a living substance! Yes, Miss Charlecote, I am to be received into the Church at St. Wulstan's, where I shall be staying, as soon

as I have left Beauchamp.'

Overcome with feeling, Honora hastily rose and kissed the governess's forehead, her tears choking her utterance. 'But—but,' she presently said, 'that removes all possible doubt. Does not Robert say so?'

'He does,' said Miss Fennimore; 'but I cannot think so. After having miserably infused my own temper of rationalism, how could I, as a novice and learner, fitly train that poor child? Besides, others of the family justly complain of me, and I *will* not be forced on them. No, nor let my newly-won blessing be alloyed by bringing me any present advantage.'

'I honour you—I agree with you,' said Miss Charlecote, sadly; 'but it makes me the more sorry for those poor girls. I do not see what is to be done! A stranger will be worse than no one to both the invalids; Lieschen has neither head nor nerve; and though I do not believe Phœbe will ever give way, Bertha behaves very ill to her, and the strain of anxiety may be too much for such a mere girl, barely twenty! She may suffer for it afterwards, if not at the time.'

'I feel it all,' sighed Miss Fennimore; 'but it would not justify me in letting myself be thrust on a family whose confidence in me has been deceived. Nobody could go with them but you, Miss Charlecote.'

'Me! how much obliged Mervyn would be,' laughed Honora.

'It was a wild wish, such as crosses the mind in moments of perplexity and distress; but no one else could be so welcome to my poor Bertha, nor be the motherly friend they all require. Forgive me, Miss Charlecote; but I have seen what you made of Phœbe, in spite of me and my system.'

So Honor returned to announce the ill-success of her mission.

'There!' said Mervyn; 'goodness knows what will become of us! Bertha would go into fits at the sight of any stranger; and such a hideous old catamaran as Juliana will be sure to have in pickle, will be the death of her outright. I think Miss Charlecote had better take pity on us!'

'Oh, Mervyn, impossible!' cried Phœbe, shocked at his audacity.

'I protest,' said Mervyn, 'nothing else can save you from some nasty, half-bred companion! Faugh! Now, Miss Charlecote would enjoy the trip, put Maria and Bertha to bed, and take you to operas, and pictures, and churches, and you would all be off my hands!'

'For shame, Mervyn,' cried Phœbe, crimson at his cavalier manner.

'It is the second such compliment I have received, Phœbe,' said Honor. 'Miss Fennimore does me the honour to tell me to be her substitute.'

'Then if she says so,' said Mervyn, 'it is our only rescue!'

If Honor laughed it was not that she did not think. As she crossed the park, she felt that each bud of spring beauty, each promised crop, each lamb, each village child, made the proposal the more unwelcome; yet that the sense of being rooted, and hating to move, ought to be combated. It might hardly be treating Humfrey's 'goodly heritage' aright, to make it an excuse for abstaining from an act of love; and since Brooks attended to her so little when at home, he could very well go on without her. Not that she believed that she should be called on to decide. She did not think Mervyn in earnest, nor suppose that he would encumber himself with a companion who could not be set aside like a governess, and was of an age more 'proper' and efficient than agreeable. His unceremonious manner proved sufficiently that it was a mere joke, and he would probably laugh his loud, scoffing laugh at the old maid taking him in earnest. Yet she could not rid herself of the thought of Phœbe's difficulties, and in poor Bertha, she had the keen interest of nurse towards patient.

'Once before,' she thought, 'have I gone out of the beaten track upon impulse. Cruel consequences! Yet do I repent? Not of the act, but of the error that ensued. Then I was eager, young, romantic. Now I would rather abstain: I am old and sluggish. If it is to be, it will be made plain. I do not distrust my feeling for Phœbe—it is not the jealous, hungering love of old; and I hope to be able to discern whether this be an act of charity! At least, I will not take the initiative. I did so last time.'

Honor's thoughts and speculations were all at Beauchamp throughout the evening and the early morning, till her avocations drove it out of her mind. She was busy, trying hard to get her own way with her bailiff as to the crops, when she was interrupted by tidings that Mr. Fulmort was in the drawing-room; and concluding it to be Robert, she did not hurry her argument upon guano. On entering the room, however, she was amazed at beholding not Robert, but his brother, cast down in an armchair, and looking thoroughly tired out.

'Mervyn! I did not expect to see you!'

'Yes, I just walked over. I thought I would report progress. I had no notion it was so far.'

And in fact he had not been at the Holt since, as a pert boy, he had found it 'slow.' Honor was rather alarmed at his fatigue, and offered varieties of sustenance, which he declined, returning with eager nervousness to the subject in hand.

The Bannermans, he said, had offered to go with Bertha and Phœbe, but only on condition that

Maria was left at a boarding-house, and a responsible governess taken for Bertha. Moreover, Augusta had told Bertha herself what was impending, and the poor child had laid a clinging, trembling grasp on his arm, and hoarsely whispered that if a stranger came to hear her story, she would die. Alas! it might be easier than before. He had promised never to consent. 'But what can I do?' he said, with a hand upon either temple; 'they heed me no more than Maria!'

Robert had absolutely half consented to leave his cure in the charge of another, and conduct his brother and sisters, but this plan did not satisfy the guardian, who could not send out his wards without some reliable female.

He swung the tassel of the sofa-cushion violently as he spoke, and looked imploringly at Honora, but she, though much moved, felt obliged to keep her resolution of not beginning.

'Very hard,' he said, 'that when there are but two women in the world that that poor child likes, she can have neither!' and then, gaining hope from something in her face, he exclaimed, 'After all, I do believe you will take pity on her!'

'I thought you in joke yesterday.'

'I thought it too good to be true! I am not so cool as Phœbe thought me. But really,' he said, assuming an earnest, rational, gentlemanly manner, 'you have done so much for us that perhaps it makes us presume, and though I know it is preposterous, yet if it were possible to you to be long enough with poor Bertha to bring her round again, I do believe it would make an infinite difference.'

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'What does Phœbe say?' asked Honor.

'Phœbe, poor child, she does not know I am come. She looks as white as death, and got up a smile that was enough to make one cry, but she told me not to mind, for something would be sure to bring it right; and so it will, if you will come.'

'But, Mervyn, you don't consider what a nuisance I shall be to you.'

Mervyn looked more gallant than Robert ever could have done, and said something rather foolish; but anxiety quickly made him natural again, and he proceeded, 'After all, they need not bother you much. Phœbe is of your own sort, and Maria is inoffensive, and Bertha will have Lieschen, and I—I'll take my own line, and be as little of a bore as I can. You'll go?'

'If—if it will do.'

That odd answer was enough. Mervyn, already leaning forward with his arms on his knees, held out one hand, and shaded his eyes with the other, as, half with a sob, he said, 'There, then, it is all right! Miss Charlecote, you can't guess what it is to a man not to be trusted with his own sisters!'

These words made that *bête noire*, John Mervyn Fulmort, nearly as much a child of her own as his brother and sister; for they were in a tone of self-blame—not of resentment.

She was sufficiently afraid of him to respect his reserve; moreover, he looked so ill and harassed that she dreaded his having an attack, and heartily wished for Phœbe, so she only begged him to rest till after her early dinner, when she would convey him back to Beauchamp; and then left him alone, while she went to look her undertaking in the face, rather amused to find herself his last resource, and surprised to find her spirit of enterprise rising, her memories of Alps, lakes, cathedrals, and pictures fast assuming the old charm that had erst made her long to see them again. And with Phœbe! Really it would be almost a disappointment if the scheme failed.

When she again met her unwonted guest he plunged into plans, routes, and couriers, treating her as far more completely pledged than she chose to allow; and eating as heartily as he dared, and more so than she thought Phœbe would approve. She was glad to have him safe at his own door, where Phœbe ran to meet them, greatly relieved, for she had been much disturbed by his absence at luncheon.

'Miss Charlecote! Did you meet him?'

'I went after her'—and Mervyn boyishly caught his sister round the waist, and pushed her down into a curtsey—'make your obedience; she is going to look after you all.'

'Going with us!' cried Phœbe, with clasped hands.

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'To see about it,' began Honor, but the words were strangled in a transported embrace.

'Dearest, dearest Miss Charlecote! Oh, I knew it would all come right if we were patient; but, oh! that it should be so right! Oh! Mervyn, how could you?'

'Ah! you see what it is not to be faint-hearted.' And Phœbe, whose fault was certainly not a faint heart, laughed at this poor jest, as she had seldom laughed before, with an *abandon* of gaiety and joyousness. The quiet girl was absolutely thrown off her balance, laughed and cried, thanked and exclaimed, moved restlessly, and spoke incoherently.

'Oh! may I tell Bertha?' she asked.

'No, I'll do that,' said Mervyn. 'It is all my doing.'

'Run after him, Phœbe,' said Honor. 'Don't let Bertha think it settled!'

And Bertha was, of course, disappointingly indifferent.

Lady Bannerman's nature was not capable of great surprise, but Miss Charlecote's proposal was not unwelcome. 'I did not want to go,' she said; 'though dear Sir Nicholas would have made any sacrifice, and it would have looked so for them to have gone alone. Travelling with an invalid is so trying, and Phœbe made such a rout about Maria, that Mr. Crabbe insisted on her going. But you like the kind of thing.'

Honor undertook for her own taste for the kind of thing, and her ladyship continued, 'Yes, you must find it uncommonly dull to be so much alone. Where did Juliana tell me she had heard of Lucy Sandbrook?'

'She is in Staffordshire,' answered Honor, gravely.

'Ah, yes, with Mrs. Willis Beaumont; I remember. Juliana made a point of letting her know all about it, and how you were obliged to give her up.'

'I hope not,' exclaimed Honor, alarmed. 'I never gave her up! There is no cause but her own spirit of independence that she should not return to me to-morrow.'

'Oh, indeed,' said Augusta, carelessly letting the subject drop, after having implanted anxiety too painful to be quelled by the hope that Lady Acton's neighbourhood might have learnt how to rate her words.

Mr. Crabbe was satisfied and complimentary; Robert, rejoiced and grateful; and Bertha, for the first time, set her will upon recovering, and made daily experiments on her strength, thus quickly amending, though still her weakness and petulance needed the tenderest management, and once when a doubt arose as to Miss Charlecote's being able to leave home, she suddenly withered up again, with such a recurrence of unfavourable symptoms as proved how precarious was her state.

It was this evidence of the necessity of the arrangement that chiefly contributed to bring it to pass. When the pressure of difficulty lessened, Mervyn was half ashamed of his own conquest, disliked the obligation, and expected to be bored by 'the old girl,' as, to Phœbe's intense disgust, he *would* speak of Miss Charlecote. Still, in essentials he was civil and considerate, and Honor carefully made it evident that she did not mean to obtrude herself, and expected him to sit loose to the female part of the company. Divining that he would prefer the start from home not to be simultaneous, and also favouring poor Bertha's shuddering horror of the direct line of railway to London, she proposed that the ladies should work their way by easy journeys on cross lines to Southampton, whilst Mervyn settled his affairs at the office, and then should come to them with Robert, who had made it possible to take an Easter holiday in which to see them safe to their destination in Switzerland.

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Phœbe tried to acquiesce in Miss Charlecote's advice to trust Mervyn's head to Robert's charge, and not tease him with solicitude; but the being debarred from going to London was a great disappointment. She longed for a sight of St. Matthew's; and what would it not have been to see the two brothers there like brothers indeed? But she must be content with knowing that so it was. Mervyn's opposition was entirely withdrawn, and though he did not in the least comprehend and was far from admiring his brother's aims, still his name and his means were no longer withheld from supporting Robert's purposes, 'because he was such a good fellow, it was a shame to stand in his way.' She knew, too, rather by implication than confession, that Mervyn imagined his chief regrets for the enormous extravagance of the former year, were because he had thus deprived himself of the power of buying a living for his brother, as compensation for having kept him out of his father's will. Whether Mervyn would ever have made the purchase, and still more whether Robert would have accepted it, was highly doubtful, but the intention was a step for which to be thankful; and Phœbe watched the growing friendliness of the long estranged pair with constantly new delight, and anticipated much from Mervyn's sight of St. Matthew's with eyes no longer jaundiced.

She would gladly, too, have delayed the parting with Miss Fennimore, who had made all her arrangements for a short stay with her relatives in London, and then for giving lessons at a school. To Phœbe's loyal spirit, it seemed hard that even Miss Charlecote's care should be regarded as compensating for the loss of the home friend of the last seven years, and the closer, dearer link was made known as she sat late over the fire with the governess on Easter Sunday evening, their last at Beauchamp. Silent hitherto, Miss Fennimore held her peace no longer, but begged Phœbe to think of one who on another Sunday would no longer turn aside from the Altar. Phœbe lifted her eyes, full of hope and inquiry, and as she understood, exclaimed, 'O, I am glad! I knew you must have some deep earnest reason for not being with us.'

'You never guessed?'

'I never tried. I saw that Robert knew, so I hoped.'

'And prayed?'

'Yes, you belonged to me.'

'Do I belong to you now?'

'Nay, more than ever now.'

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‘Then, my child, you never traced my unsettled faith?—my habit of testing mystery by reason never perplexed you?’

Phœbe thought a moment, and said, ‘I knew that Robert distrusted, though I never asked why. There was a time when I used to try to sift the evidence and logic of all I learnt, and I was puzzled where faith’s province began and reasoning ended. But when our first sorrow came, all the puzzles melted, and it was not worth while to argue on realities that I felt. Since that, I have read more, and seen where my own ignorance made my difficulties, and I have prized—yes, adored, the truths all the more because you had taught me to appreciate in some degree their perfect foundation on reasoning.’

‘Strange,’ said Miss Fennimore, ‘that we should have lived together so long, acting on each other, yet each unconscious of the other’s thoughts. I see now. What to you was not doubt, but desire for a reason for your hope, became in poor Bertha, not disbelief, but contempt and carelessness of what she did not feel. I shall never have a sense of rest, till you can tell me that she enters into your faith. I am chiefly reconciled to leaving her, because I trust that in her enfeebled, dependent state, she may become influenced by Miss Charlecote and by you.’

‘I cannot argue with her,’ said Phœbe. ‘When she is well, she can always puzzle me; I lose her when she gets to her *ego*. You are the only one who can cope with that.’

‘The very reason for keeping away. Don’t argue. Live and act. That was your lesson to me.’

Phœbe did not perceive, and Miss Fennimore loved her freedom from self-consciousness too well even for gratitude’s sake to molest her belief that the conversion was solely owing to Robert’s powers of controversy.

That one fleeting glimpse of inner life was the true farewell. The actual parting was a practical matter of hurry of trains, and separation of parcels, with Maria too busy with the Maltese dog to shed tears, or even to perceive that this was a final leave-taking with one of those whom she best loved.

CHAPTER XXIII

Tak down, tak down the mast of gowd,
Set up the mast of tree,
It sets not a forsaken lady
To sail so gallantly.—*Annie of Lochroyan*

‘Quaint little white-capped objects! The St. Wulstan’s girls marching to St. Paul’s! Ah! the banner I helped to work! How well I remember the contriving that crozier upon it! How well it has worn! Sweet Honey must be in London; it was the sight she most grudged missing!’

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So thought Lucilla Sandbrook as a cab conveyed her through the Whittingtonian intricacies.

Her residence with Mrs. Willis Beaumont was not a passage in her life on which she loved to dwell. Neither party had been well content with the other, though deference to Mrs. Prendergast had held them together. The lady herself was worthy and kind-hearted, but dull and tedious; and Lucilla, used to animation and intellect, had wearied excessively of the platitudes which were meant as friendly conversation, while her keen remarks and power of drollery and repartee were just sufficiently perceived to be dreaded and disliked. The children were like their mother, and were frightened and distressed by her quickness and unreasonable expectations. Their meek, demure heaviness and complacency, even at their sports, made her positively dislike them, all but one scapegrace boy, in favour with no one, and whom she liked more from perverseness and compassion than from any merits of his own. Lady Acton’s good offices gave the widow a tangible cause, such as was an absolute satisfaction, for her antipathy, and shook the implicit trust in Mrs. Prendergast’s recommendation that had hitherto overridden her private sentiments; yet still, habitual awe of her sister-in-law, and her own easiness and dread of change, left things in the same state until a crisis caused by a grand disturbance among the children. In the nice matter of meting out blame, mamma’s partiality and the children’s ungenerosity left an undue share upon the scapegrace; his indignant partisan fought his battles ‘not wisely but too well,’ lost temper, and uttered sarcastic home truths which startled and stung the lady into the request for which she could hardly have nerved herself in cooler moments, namely, that they might part.

This settled, each secretly felt that there was something to be regretted, and both equally wished that a new engagement should be made before the termination of the present should be made known at Southminster. For this purpose, every facility had been given for Miss Sandbrook’s coming to town personally to answer two ladies to whom she had been mentioned. A family in the neighbourhood had already been tried, but had declined her, and Mrs. Beaumont had shown her the note; ‘so stylish, such strange stories afloat.’ Lucilla felt it best to break upon new ground, and wounded and depressed, had yet resentment enough to bear her through boldly. She wished to inspect Owen’s child, and wrote to ask Mrs. Murrell to give her a bed for a couple of nights, venturing on this measure because, in the old woman’s monthly report, she had mentioned that Mr. Fulmort had gone abroad for a fortnight.

It had not been an exhilarating evening. Small children were not much to Lucilla’s taste, and her nephew was not a flattering specimen. He had the whitened drawn-up appearance of a child who had spent most of his life in a London cellar, with a pinched little visage and preternatural-

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looking black eyes, a squeaky little fretful voice, and all the language he had yet acquired decidedly cockney. Moreover, he had the habits of a spoilt child, and that a vulgar one, and his grandmother expected his aunt to think him a prodigy. There was a vacant room where Lucilla passed as much of her time as she could without an assumption of superiority, but she was obliged to spend the evening in the small furniture-encumbered parlour, and hear by turns of her nephew's traits of genius, of the merits of the preachers in Cat-alley, and the histories of the lodgers. The motherly Mrs. Murrell had invited any of the young men whose 'hearts might be touched' to attend her 'simple family worship;' and to Lucilla's discomfiture and her triumph, a youth appeared in the evening, and the young lady had her doubts whether the expounding were the attraction.

It was a relief to quit the close, underground atmosphere even for a cab; and 'an inspecting lady must be better than that old woman,' thought poor Lucy, as, heartily weary of Mrs. Murrell's tongue and her own graciousness, she rattled through the streets. Those long ranks of charity children renewed many an association of old. The festival which had been the annual event of Honor Charlecote's youth, she had made the same to her children, and Cilla had not despised it till recently. Thoughts of better days, of home-feelings, of tenderness, began to soften her. She had spent nearly two years without the touch of a kindred hand, and for many months past had been learning what it was to be looked at by no loving eye. She was on her way to still greater strangers! No wonder her heart yearned to the gentle voice that she had once spurned, and well-nigh in spite of herself, she muttered,

'Really I do think a kiss of poor Honor's would do me good! I have a great mind to go to her when I come back from Kensington. If I have taken a situation she cannot suppose that I want anything from her. It would be very comfortable; I should hear of Owen! I will go! Even if she be not in town, I could talk to Mrs. Jones, and sit a quarter of an hour in the cedar room! It would be like meeting Owen; it would be rest and home!'

She felt quite happy and pleased with herself under this resolution, but it was late before she could put it in practice. The lady at Kensington rather started on entering the room where she had been waiting nearly an hour. 'I thought—' she said, apologetically, 'Did my servant say Miss Sandbrook?'

Lucilla assented, and the lady, a little discomposed, asked a few questions, furtively surveying her all the time, seemed confused, then begged her to take some luncheon. It was so long since Mrs. Murrell's not very tempting breakfast, that the invitation was welcome, even though the presence of a gentleman and an elderly lady showed that it was a pretext for a family inspection, and again she detected the same start of surprise, and a glance passing round the circle, such as made her glad when afterwards an excuse was made for leaving her alone, that she might apply to the glass to see whether anything were amiss in her dress.

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Then first she remarked that hers was not the governess air. She had long felt very virtuous for having spent almost nothing on her clothes, eking out her former wardrobe to the utmost; and the loose, dove-coloured jacket over her black silk skirt betrayed Parisian make, as did the exquisite rose, once worn in her hair, and now enlivening the white ribbon and black lace of the cheap straw bonnet, far back upon the rippling hair turned back from her temples, and falling in profuse ringlets. It was her ordinary unpremeditated appearance, but she perceived that to these good people it was startlingly stylish, and she was prepared for the confused intimation that there was no need for entering upon the discussion of terms.

She had been detained too late to make her other call, and the processions of tired children showed her that the service at St. Paul's was over. The depression of disappointment inclined her the more to the loving old face; and she caused herself to be set down at the end of Woolstone-lane, feeling as if drawn by a magnet as she passed the well known warehouse walls, and as if it were home indeed when she reached the court door.

It would not yield to her intimate manipulation of the old latch—a bad sign, and the bell re-echoed in vacancy. Again and again she rang, each moment of exclusion awakening a fresh yearning towards the cedar fragrance, every stare of passer-by making her long for the safe shelter of the bay-windowed parlour. At last a step approached, and a greeting for the friendly old servant was on her tongue's end. Alas! a strange face met her eye, elderly, respectable, but guarded. Miss Charlecote was not at home, not in town, not at Hiltonbury—gone abroad, whither was not known. Mrs. Jones? Dead more than a year ago. Every reply was followed by an attempt to close the door, and it needed all Lucy's native hardihood, all her ardent craving for her former home, to venture on an entreaty to be admitted for a few minutes. She was answered, that the house might be shown to no one without orders from Mr. Parsons.

Her heart absolutely fainted within her, as the heavy door was closed on her, making her thoroughly realize her voluntary renunciation of home and protection, and the dreariness of the world on which she had cast herself. Anxiety on Honor's behalf began to awaken. Nothing but illness could have induced her to leave her beloved Holt, and in the thought of her sick, lonely, and untended by the children she had fostered, Cilla forgave her adoption, forgave her forgiveness, forgave everything, in the impulse to hasten to her to requite the obligation by the tenderest care.

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She had actually set off to the parsonage in quest of intelligence, when she recollected that she might appear there as a discarded governess in quest of her offended patroness; and her pride impelled her to turn back, but she despatched Mrs. Murrell's little maid with a note, saying that,

being in town for a day, and hearing of Miss Charlecote's absence on the continent, she could not help begging to be certified that illness was not the cause. The reply was brief and formal, and it only altered Lucilla's uneasiness, for Mrs. Parsons merely assured her of Miss Charlecote's perfect health, and said she was gone abroad with the Fulmort family, where there had been a good deal of illness.

In her displeasure and desire to guard Honora from becoming a prey to the unworthy Sandbrooks, Mrs. Parsons never guessed at the cruelty of her own words, and at the conclusion drawn from them. Robert Fulmort likewise absent! No doubt his health had broken down, and Honor was taking Phœbe to be with him! She examined Mrs. Murrell, and heard of his activity, indeed, but of his recent absences from his parish, and by and by the good woman bethought her of a report that Mr. Fulmort was from home on account of his health. Oh, the misery of not daring to make direct inquiry!

But the hard practical world was before her, and the new situation was no longer a matter of wilful choice, but of dire necessity. She would not be hastily thrust from her present post, and would be lovingly received at Southminster in case of need, but she had no dependence save on her own exertions, and perverse romance had died away into desolateness. With strange, desperate vehemence, and determination not again to fail, she bought the plainest of cap-fronts, reduced her bonnet to the severest dowdiness, hid, straightened, tightened the waving pale gold of her hair, folded her travelling-shawl old-womanishly, cast aside all the merely ornamental, and glancing at herself, muttered, 'I did not know I could be so insignificant!' Little Owen stared as if his beautiful aunt had lost her identity, and Mrs. Murrell was ready to embrace her as a convert to last night's exposition.

Perhaps the trouble was wasted, for the lady, Mrs. Bostock, did not seem to be particular. She was quite young, easily satisfied, and only eager to be rid of an embarrassing interview of a kind new to her; the terms were fixed, and before many weeks had passed Lucilla was settled at a cottage of gentility, in sight of her Thames, but on the Essex side, where he was not the same river to her, and she found herself as often thinking that those tainted waters had passed the garden in Woolstone-lane as that they had sparkled under Wrapworth Bridge.

It was the greatest change she had yet undergone. She was entirely the governess, never the companion of the elders. Her employers were mercantile, wrapped up in each other, busy, and gay. The husband was all day in London, and, when the evenings were not given to society, preferred spending them alone with his wife and children. In his absence, the nursery absorbed nearly all the time the mother could spare from her company and her household. The children, who were too old for playthings, were consigned to the first-rate governess, and only appeared in the evening. Lucilla never left her schoolroom but for a walk, or on a formal request to appear in the drawing-room at a party; a solitude which she at first thought preferable to Mrs. Willis Beaumont's continued small chatter, especially as the children were pleasant, brisk, and lovable, having been well broken in by their Swiss *bonne*.

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Necessity had trained Cilly in self-restraint, and the want of surveillance made her generous nature the more scrupulous in her treatment of her pupils; she taught them diligently, kept good order, won their affection and gave them some of her own, but nothing could obviate her growing weariness of holding intercourse with no mind above eleven years old. Trouble and anxiety she had known before, and even the terrible heartache that she carried about with her might have failed to wear down a being constituted as she was, without the long solitary evenings, and the total want of companionship. The first shock had been borne by the help of bustle and change, and it was only as weeks passed on, that care and depression grew upon her. Lessons, walks, children's games were oppressive in turn, and though the last good-night was a welcome sound, yet the solitude that ensued was unspeakably forlorn. Reading she had never loved, even had this been a house of books; the children were too young to need exertion on her part to keep in advance of them, and their routine lessons wore out her energies too much for her to turn to her own resources. She did little but repair her wardrobe, work for the boy in Whittington-street, and let thoughts drift through her mind. That death-bed scene at Hyères, which had so often risen unbidden to her mind as she lay on her crib, was revived again, but it was not her father whose ebbing life she watched. It was one for whom she durst not ask, save by an inquiry from her brother, who had never dropped his correspondence with Honora; but Owen was actively employed, and his locality and habits were so uncertain that his letters were often astray for long together. His third year of apprenticeship had begun, and Lucilla's sole hope of a change from her present dreary captivity was in his either returning with Mr. Currie, or finding employment and sending for her and his child to Canada. 'By that time,' she thought, 'Europe will contain nothing to me. Nay, what does it contain that I have a right to care for now? I don't delude myself. I know his look and manner. His last thought will be for his flock at St. Matthew's, not for her who drove him to the work that has been killing him. Oh, no, he won't even forgive me, for he will think it the greatest service I could have done him.' Her eyes were hot and dry; what a relief would tears have been!

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CHAPTER XXIV

Enid, my early and my only love,
I thought, but that your father came between,
In former days you saw me favourably,
And if it were so, do not keep it back,

The foreign tour proved a great success. The summer in the Alps was delightful. The complete change gave Bertha new life, bodily strength first returning, and then mental activity. The glacier system was a happy exchange for her *ego*, and she observed and enjoyed with all the force of her acute intelligence and spirit of inquiry, while Phœbe was happy in doing her duty by profiting by all opportunities of observation, in taking care of Maria and listening to Mervyn, and Miss Charlecote enjoyed scenery, poetry, art, and natural objects with relish keener than even that of her young friends, who were less impressible to beauty in every shape.

Mervyn behaved very well to her, knowing himself bound to make the journey agreeable to her; he was constantly kind to Bertha, and in the pleasure of her revival submitted to a wonderful amount of history and science. All his grumbling was reserved for the private ear of Phœbe, whose privilege it always was to be his murmuring block, and who was only too thankful to keep to herself his discontents whenever his route was not chosen (and often when it was), his disgusts with inns, railroads, and sights and his impatience of all pursuits save Bertha's. Many a time she was permitted to see and hear nothing but how much he was bored, but on the whole the growls were so mitigated compared with what she had known, that it was almost contentment; and that he did not absolutely dislike their habits was plain from his adherence to the ladies, though he might have been quite independent of them.

Bertha's distortion of eye and hesitation of speech, though much modified, always recurred from fatigue, excitement, or meeting with strangers, or—still worse—with acquaintance. The difficulty of utterance distressed her far more than if she had been subject thereto from infancy, and increased her exceeding repugnance to any sort of society beyond her own party. The question whether she were fit to return home for the winter was under debate, when at Geneva, early in September, tidings reached the travellers that produced such a shock as to settle the point.

Juliana Acton was dead! It had been a very short attack of actual illness, but disease had long been secretly preying on her—and her asperity of disposition might be accounted for by constant unavowed suffering. It was a great blow. Her unpleasant qualities were all forgiven in the dismay of learning what their excuse had been; for those who have so lived as to make themselves least missed, are perhaps at the first moment the more mourned by good hearts for that very cause.

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Augusta was so much terrified on her own account, that she might almost have been made a hydropathist on the spot; and Robert wrote that poor Sir Bevil was perfectly overwhelmed with grief and self-reproach, giving himself no credit for his exemplary patience and forbearance, but bitterly accusing himself of hardness and neglect. These feelings were shared in some degree by all the others, and Mervyn was especially affected. There had been much to soften him since his parents' death, and the sudden loss of the sister with whom he had always been on terms of scorn and dislike, shocked him excessively, and drew him closer to the survivors, sobering him, and silencing his murmurs for the time in real grief and awe. Bertha likewise was thoroughly overcome, not so much by these feelings, as by the mere effect of the sudden tidings on her nervous temperament, and the overclouding of the cheerfulness that had hitherto surrounded her. This, added to a day of over-fatigue and exposure, brought back such a recurrence of unfavourable symptoms, that a return to an English winter was not to be thought of. The south of France was decided upon at once, and as Lucilla had truly divined, Honor Charlecote's impulse led them to Hyères, that she might cast at least one look at the grave in the Stranger's corner of the cypress-grown burial-ground, where rested the beloved of her early days, the father of the darlings of her widowed heart—loved and lost.

She endured her absence from home far better than she had expected, so much easier was it to stay away than to set off, and so completely was she bound up with her companions, loving Phœbe like a parent, and the other two like a nurse, and really liking the brother. All took delight in the winter paradise of Hyères, that fragment of the East set down upon the French coast, and periodically peopled with a motley multitude of visitors from all the lands of Europe, all invalids, or else attendants on invalids.

Bertha still shrank from all contact with society, and the ladies, for her sake, lived entirely apart; but Mervyn made acquaintance, and sometimes went out on short expeditions with other gentlemen, or to visit his mercantile correspondents at Marseilles, or other places on the coast.

It was while he was thus absent that the three sisters stood one afternoon on the paved terrace of the *Hotel des Isles d'Or*, which rose behind them, in light coloured stone, of a kind of Italian-looking architecture, commanding a lovely prospect, the mountains on the Toulon side, though near, melting into vivid blue, and white cloud wreaths hanging on their slopes. In front lay the plain, covered with the peculiar gray-tinted olive foliage, overtopped by date palms, and sloping up into rounded hills covered with dark pines, the nearest to the sea bearing on its crest the Church *de l'Ermitage*. The sea itself was visible beyond the olives, bordered by a line of *étangs* or pools, and white heaps of salt, and broken by a peninsula and the three Isles d'Or. It was a view of which Bertha seemed never able to have enough, and she was always to be found gazing at it when the first ready for a walk.

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'What are you going to sketch, Phœbe?' she said, as the sisters joined her. 'How can you, on such a day as this, with the air, as it were, loaded with cheiranthus smell? It makes one lazy to think of it!'

'It seems to be a duty to preserve some remembrance of this beautiful place.'

'It may be a pity to miss it, but as for the duty!'

'What, not to give pleasure at home, and profit by opportunities?'

'It is too hard to carry about an embodiment of Miss Fennimore's rules! Why, have you no individuality, Phœbe?'

'Must I not sketch, then?' said Phœbe, smiling.

'You are very welcome, if you would do it for your pleasure, not as an act of bondage.'

'Not as bondage,' said Phœbe; 'it is only because I ought that I care to do so at all.'

'And that's the reason you only make maps of the landscape.'

It was quite true that Phœbe had no accomplished turn, and what had been taught her she only practised as a duty to the care and cost expended on it, and these were things where 'all her might' was no equivalent for a spark of talent. 'Ought' alone gave her the zest that Bertha would still have found in 'ought not.'

'It is all I can do,' she said, 'and Miss Fennimore may like to see them; so, Bertha, I shall continue to carry the sketchbook by which the English woman is known like the man by his "Murray." Miss Charlecote has letters to write, so we must go out by ourselves.'

The Provençal natives of Hyères had little liking for the foreigners who thronged their town, but did not molest them, and ladies walked about freely in the lovely neighbourhood, so that Honor had no scruple in sending out her charges, unaccompanied except by Lieschen, in case the two others might wish to dispose of Maria, while they engaged in some pursuit beyond her powers.

Poor Lieschen, a plump Prussian, grown portly on Beauchamp good living, had little sympathy with the mountain tastes of her frauleins, and would have wished all Hyères like the shelf on the side of the hill where stood their hotel, whence the party set forth for the Place des Palmiers, so called from six actual palms bearing, but not often ripening, dates. Two sides were enclosed by houses, on a third an orange garden sloped down the descent; the fourth, where the old town climbed straight up the hill, was regarded by poor Lieschen with dread, and she vainly persuaded Maria at least to content herself with joining the collection of natives resting on the benches beneath the palms. How willingly would the good German have produced her knitting, and sought a compatriot among the nurses who sat gossiping and embroidering, while Maria might have played among their charges, who were shovelling about, or pelting each other with the tiny white sea-washed pebbles that thickly strewed the place.

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But Maria, with the little Maltese dog in her arms, to guard him from a hailstorm of the pebbles, was inexorably bent on following her sisters; and Bertha had hurried nervously across from the strangers, so that Lieschen must pursue those light steps through the winding staircase streets, sometimes consisting of broad shallow steps, sometimes of actual flights of steep stairs hewn out in the rock, leading to a length of level terrace, where, through garden gates, orange trees looked out, dividing the vantage ground with houses and rocks—up farther, past the almost desolate old church of St. Paul—farther again—till, beyond all the houses, they came forth on the open mountainside, with a crest of rock far above, surmounted by the ruins of a castle, said to have been fortified by the Saracens, and taken from them by Charles Martel. It was to this castle that Phœbe's sketching duty was to be paid, and Maria and Bertha expressed their determination of climbing up to it, in hopes, as the latter said, of finding Charles Martel's original hammer. Lieschen, puffing and panting already, looked horrified, and laughingly they bade her sit down and knit, whilst they set out on their adventure. Phœbe smiled as she looked up, and uttered a prognostic that made Bertha the more defiant, exhilarated as she was by the delicious compound of sea and mountain breeze, and by the exquisite view, the roofs of the town sloping rapidly down, and the hills stretching round, clothed in pine woods, into which the gray olivettes came stealing up, while beyond lay the sea, intensely blue, and bearing on its bosom the three Isles d'Or flushed with radiant colour.

The sisters bravely set themselves to scramble among the rocks, each surface turned to the sea-breeze exquisitely and fantastically tinted by coloured lichens, and all interspersed with the classical acanthus' noble leaves, the juniper, and the wormwood. On they went, winding upwards as Bertha hoped, but also sideways, and their circuit had lasted a weary while, and made them exhausted and breathless, when looking round for their bearings, they found themselves in an enchanted maze of gray rocks, half hidden in myrtle, beset by the bristly battledores of prickly pear, and shaded by cork trees. Above was the castle, perched up, and apparently as high above them as when they began their enterprise; below was a steep descent, clothed with pines and adorned with white heaths. The place was altogether strange; they had lost themselves; Bertha began to repent of her adventure, and Maria was much disposed to cry.

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'Never mind, Maria,' said Bertha, 'we will not try to go any higher. See, here is the dry bed of a torrent that will make a famous path down. There, that's right. What a picture it is! what an exquisite peep of the sea between the boughs! What now, what frightens you?'

'The old woman, she looks so horrid.'

'The witch for the lost children? No, no, Maria, she is only gathering fir cones, and completing

the picture in her red *basquine*, brown jacket, and great hat. I would ask her the way, but that we could not understand her Provençal.'

'Oh, dear! I wish Phœbe was here! I wish we were safe!'

'If I ever come mountain-climbing again with you at my heels! Take care, there's no danger if you mind your feet, and we must come out somewhere.'

The somewhere, when the slope became less violent, was among vineyards and olivettes, no vestige of a path through them, only a very small cottage, picturesquely planted among the rocks, whence proceeded the sounds of a *cornet-à-piston*. As Bertha stood considering which way to take, a dog flew out of the house and began barking. This brought out a man, who rudely shouted to the terrified pair that they were trespassing. They would have fled at once up the torrent-bed, bad as it was for ascent, but there was a derisive exclamation and laugh, and half-a-dozen men, half-tipsy, came pouring out of the cottage, bawling to Colibri, the rough, shaggy white dog, that seemed disposed to spring at the Maltese in Bertha's arms.

The foremost, shouting in French for the sisters to stop, pointed to what he called the way, and Bertha drew Maria in that direction, trusting that they should escape by submission, but after going a little distance, she found herself at the edge of a bare, deep, dry ravine, steep on each side, almost so as to be impassable. The path only ran on the other side. There was another shout of exultation and laughter at the English girls' consternation. At this evident trick of the surly peasants, Maria shook all over, and burst into tears, and Bertha, gathering courage, turned to expostulate and offer a reward, but her horrible stammer coming on worse than ever, produced nothing but inarticulate sounds.

'Monsieur, there is surely some mistake,' said a clear voice in good French from the path on the other side, and looking across, the sisters were cheered by an unmistakable English brown hat. The peasants drew back a little, believing that the young ladies were not so unprotected as they had supposed, and the first speaker, with something like apology, declared that this was really the path, and descending where the sides were least steep, held out his hand to help Bertha. The lady, whose bank was more practicable, came down to meet them, saying in French, with much emphasis, that she would summon 'those gentlemen' to their assistance if desired; words that had considerable effect upon the enemy.

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Poor Maria was in such terror that she could hardly keep her footing, and the hands both of Bertha and the unknown friend were needed to keep her from affording still more diversion to the peasants by falling prostrate. The lady seemed intuitively to understand what was best for both, and between them they contrived to hush her sobs, and repress her inclination to scream for Phœbe, and thus to lead her on, each holding a hand till they were at a safe distance; and Bertha, whose terror had been far greater than at the robbery at home, felt that she could let herself speak, when she quivered out an agony of trembling thanks. 'I am glad you are safe from these vile men,' said the lady, kindly, 'though they could hardly have done anything really to hurt you!'

'Frenchmen should not laugh at English girls,' cried Bertha. 'Oh, I wish my brothers were here,' and she turned round with a fierce gesture.

'Phœbe, Phœbe; I want Phœbe and Lieschen!' was Maria's cry.

'Can I help you find your party?' was the next question; and the voice had a gentle, winning tone that reassured Maria, who clung tight to her hand, exclaiming, 'Don't go away;' and though for months past the bare proposal of encountering a stranger would have made Bertha almost speechless, she felt a soothing influence that enabled her to reply with scarcely a hesitation. On comparing notes, it was discovered that the girls had wandered so far away from their sister that they could only rejoin her by re-entering the town and mounting again; and their new friend, seeing how nervous and agitated both still were, offered to escort them, only giving notice to her own party what had become of her.

She had come up with some sketching acquaintance, and not drawing herself, had, like the sisters, been exploring among the rocks, when she had suddenly come on them in the distress which had so much shaken them, that, reluctant to lose sight of their guardian, they accompanied her till she saw one of her friends, and then waited while she ran down with the announcement. 'How ridiculous it is in me,' muttered Bertha to herself, discontentedly; 'she will think us wild creatures. I wish we were not both so tall.'

And embarrassment, together with the desire to explain, deprived her so entirely of utterance, that Maria volunteered, 'Bertha always speaks so funnily since she was ill.' Rather a perplexing speech for the lady to hear; but instead of replying, she asked which was their hotel; and Bertha answering, she turned with a start of surprise and interest, as if to see their faces better, adding, 'I have not seen you at the *table d'hôte*;' and under the strange influence of her voice and face, Bertha was able to answer, 'No. As Maria says, I have been very silly since my illness in the winter, and—and they have given way to me, and let me see no one.'

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'But we shall see *you*; you are in our hotel,' cried Maria. 'Do come and let me show you all my Swiss costumes.'

'Thank you; if—' and she paused, perhaps a little perplexed by Maria; and Bertha added, in the most womanly voice that she could muster, 'My sister and Miss Charlecote will be very glad to

see you—very much obliged to you.’

Then Maria, who was unusually demonstrative, put another question—

‘Are you ill? Bertha says everybody here is ill. I hope you are not.’

‘No, thank you,’ was the reply. ‘I am here with my uncle and aunt. It is my uncle who has been unwell.’

Bertha, afraid that Maria might blunder into a history of her malady, began to talk fast of the landscape and its beauties. The stranger seemed to understand her desire to lead away from herself, and readily responded, with a manner that gave sweetness to all she said. She was not very young-looking, and Maria’s notion might be justified that she was at Hyères on her own account, for there was hardly a tint of colour on her cheek; she was exceedingly spare and slender, and there was a wasted, worn look about the lower part of her face, and something subdued in her expression, as if some great, lasting sorrow had passed over her. Her eyes were large, brown, soft, and full of the same tender, pensive kindness as her voice and smile; and perhaps it was this air of patient suffering that above all attracted Bertha, in the soreness of her wounded spirit, just as the affectionateness gained Maria, with the instinct of a child.

However it might be, Phœbe, who had become uneasy at their absence, and only did not go to seek them from the conviction that nothing would set them so completely astray as not finding her at her post, was exceedingly amazed to be hailed by them from beneath instead of above, and to see them so amicably accompanied by a stranger. Maria went on in advance to greet the newly-recovered sister, and tell their adventure; and Bertha, as she saw Phœbe’s pretty, grateful, self-possessed greeting, rejoiced that their friend should see that one of the three, at least, knew what to say, and could say it. As they all crept down together through the rugged streets, Phœbe felt the same strange attraction as her sisters, accompanied by a puzzling idea that she had seen the young lady before, or some one very like her. Phœbe was famous for seeing likenesses; and never forgetting a face she had once seen, her recognitions were rather a proverb in the family; and she felt her credit almost at stake in making out the countenance before her; but it was all in vain, and she was obliged to resign herself to discuss the Pyrenees, where it appeared that their new friend had been spending the summer.

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At the inn-door they parted, she going along a corridor to her aunt’s rooms, and the three Fulmorts hurrying simultaneously to Miss Charlecote to narrate their adventure. She was as eager as they to know the name of their rescuer, and to go to thank her; and ringing for the courier, sent him to make inquiries. ‘Major and Mrs. Holmby, and their niece,’ was the result; and the next measure was Miss Charlecote’s setting forth to call on them in their apartments, and all the three young ladies wishing to accompany her—even Bertha! What could this encounter have done to her? Phœbe withdrew her claim at once, and persuaded Maria to remain, with the promise that her new friend should be invited to enjoy the exhibition of the book of Swiss costumes; and very soon she was admiring them, after having received an explanation sufficient to show her how to deal with Maria’s peculiarities. Mrs. Holmby, a commonplace, good-natured woman, evidently knew who all the other party were, and readily made acquaintance with Miss Charlecote, who had, on her side, the same strange impression of knowing the name as Phœbe had of knowing the face.

Bertha, who slept in the same room with Phœbe, awoke her in the morning with the question, ‘What do you think is Miss Holmby’s name?’

‘I did not hear it mentioned.’

‘No, but you ought to guess. Do you not see how names impress their own individuality? You need not laugh; I know they do. Could you possibly have been called Augusta, and did not Katherine quite pervade Miss Fennimore?’

‘Well, according to your theory, what is her name?’

‘It is either Eleanor or Cecily.’

‘Indeed!’ cried Phœbe; ‘what put that into your head?’

‘Her expression—no, her entire *Wesen*. Something homely, simple, a little old-fashioned, and yet refined.’

‘It is odd,’ said Phœbe, pausing.

‘What is odd?’

‘You have explained the likeness I could not make out. I once saw a photograph of a Cecily, with exactly the character you mention. It was that of which she reminded me.’

‘Cecily? Who could it have been?’

‘One of the Raymond cousinhood. What o’clock is it?’

‘Oh, don’t get up yet, Phœbe; I want to tell you Miss Holmby’s history, as I make it out. She said she was not ill, but I am convinced that her uncle and aunt took her abroad to give her change, not after illness, but sorrow.’

‘Yes, I am sure she has known trouble.’

'And,' said Bertha, stifling her voice, so that her sister could hardly hear, 'that sorrow could have been only of one kind. Patient waiting is stamped on her brow. She is trying to lift up her head after cruel disappointment. Oh, I hope he is dead!'

And, to Phœbe's surprise and alarm, the poor little fortune-teller burst into tears, and sobbed violently. There could be no doubt that her own disappointment, rather than that which she ascribed to a stranger, prompted this gush of feeling; but it was strange, for in all the past months the poor child's sorrow and shame had been coldly, hardly, silently borne. The new scenes had thrust it into abeyance, and spirits and strength had forced trouble aside, but this was the only allusion to it since her conversation with Miss Charlecote on her sick bed, and the first sign of softening. Phœbe durst not enter into the subject, but soothed and composed her by caresses and cheerfulness; but either the tears, or perhaps their original cause—the fatigue and terror of the previous day—had entirely unhinged her, and she was in such a nervous, trembling state, and had so severe a headache, that she was left lying down, under Lieschen's charge, when the others went to the English chapel. Her urgent entreaty was that they would bring Miss Holmby to her on their return. She had conceived almost a passion for this young lady. Secluded as she had been, no intercourse beyond her own family had made known to her the pleasure of a friendship; and her mind, in its revival from its long exhaustion, was full of ardour, in the enthusiasm of a girl's adoration of a full-grown woman. The new and softening sensation was infinite gain, even by merely lessening her horror of society; and when the three churchgoers joined the Holmby party on their way back from the chapel, they begged, as a kindness to an invalid, for a visit to Bertha.

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It was granted most readily, as if equally pleasant to the giver of the kindness and to the receiver, and the two young maidens walked home together. Phœbe could not but explain their gratitude to any one who could rouse Bertha, saying that her spirits had received a great shock, and that the effects of her illness on her speech and her eyes had made her painfully bashful.

'I am so glad,' was the hurried, rather quivering answer. 'I am glad if I can be of any use.'

Phœbe was surprised, while gratified, by the eager tenderness of her meeting with Bertha, who, quite revived, was in the sitting-room to greet her, and seemed to expand like a plant in the sunshine, under the influence of those sweet brown eyes. Her liveliness and drollery awoke, and her sister was proud that her new friend should see her cleverness and intelligence; but all the time the likeness to that photograph continued to haunt Phœbe's mind, as she continued to discover more resemblances, and to decide that if such were impressed by the Christian name, Bertha was a little witch to detect it.

Afternoon came, and as usual they all walked seawards. As Bertha said, they had had enough of the heights, and tried going towards the sea, as their new friend wished, although warned by the Fulmorts that it was a long walk, the *étangs*, or great salt-pools, spoiling the coast as a beach. But all were brave walkers, and exercise always did Bertha good. They had lovely views of the town as they wound about the hills, and admired its old streets creeping up the hill, and the two long wings stretching on either side. An iron cross stood up before the old church, relieved by the exquisite radiance of the sunset sky. 'Ah!' said Honor, 'I always choose to believe that is the cross to which the legend belongs.' 'Tell it, please, Miss Charlecote,' cried Maria.

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And Honor told a veritable legend of Hyères:—A Moorish princess, who had been secretly baptized and educated as a Christian by her nurse, a Christian slave, was beloved by a genie. She regarded him with horror, pined away, and grew thin and pale. Her father thought to raise her spirits by marrying her, and bestowed her on the son of a neighbouring king, sending her off in full procession to his dominions. On the way, however, lay a desert, where the genie had power to raise a sand-storm, with which he overwhelmed the suite, and flew away with the princess. But he could not approach her; she kept him at bay with the sign of the cross, until, enraged, he drove her about on a whirlwind for three days, and finally dashed her dead upon this coast. There she lay, fair as an almond blossom, and royally robed, and the people of Hyères took her up and gave her honourable burial. When the king her father heard of it, he offered to reward them with a cross of gold of the same weight as his daughter; but, said the townsmen, 'Oh, king, if we have a cross of gold, the Moors will come and slay us for its sake, therefore give us the gold in coin, and let the cross be of iron.'

'And there it stands,' said the guest, looking up.

'I hope it does,' said Honor, confronting, as usual, the common-sense led pupils of Miss Fennimore, with her willing demi-credulity.

'It is a beautiful story!' was the comment; 'and, like other traditions, full of unconscious meaning.'

A speech this, as if it had been made to delight Honor, whose eyes were met by a congratulatory glance from Phœbe. At the farther words, 'It is very striking—the evil spirit's power ending with the slaying the body, never harming the soul, nor bending the will—'

'Bending the will is harming the soul,' said Phœbe.

'Nay,' was her companion's answer, 'the fatal evil is, when both wills are bent.'

Phœbe was too single-minded, too single-willed, at once to understand this, till Miss Charlecote whispered a reference to St. Paul's words of deep experience, 'To will is present with me.'

'I see,' she said; 'she might even have preferred the genie, but as long as her principle and better will resisted, she was safe from herself as well as from him.'

'Liked the nasty genie?' said Maria, who had listened only as to a fairy tale. 'Why, Phœbe, genies come out of bottles, and go away in smoke, Lieschen told me.' p. 449

'No, indeed,' said Bertha, in a low voice of feeling, piteous in one of her years, 'if so, it needed no outward whirlwind to fling her dead on the coast!'

'And there she found peace,' answered the guest, with a suppressed, but still visible sign of weariness. 'Oh! it was worth the whirlwind!'

Phœbe was forced to attend to Maria, whose imagination had been a good deal impressed, and who was anxious to make another attempt on a pilgrimage to castle and cross.

'When Mervyn comes back, Maria, we may try.'

The guest, who was speaking, stopped short in the midst. Had she been infected by Bertha's hesitation? She began again, and seemed to have forgotten what she meant to have said. However, she recovered herself; and there was nothing remarkable through the rest of the walk, but, on coming indoors, she managed to detain Phœbe behind the others, saying, lightly, 'Miss Fulmort, you have not seen the view from my window.' Phœbe followed to her little bed-room, and gazed out at the lovely isles, bathed in light so as to be almost transparent, and the ship of war in the bay, all shadowy and phantom-like. She spoke her admiration warmly, but met with but a half assent. The owner of the room was leaning her head against the glass, and, with an effort for indifference said, 'Did I hear that—that you were expecting your brother?'

'You are Cecily!' exclaimed Phœbe, instead of answering.

And Cecily, turning away from the window, leant against the wall for support, and her pale face crimsoning, said, 'I thought you did not know.'

'My sisters do not,' said Phœbe; 'but he told me, when—when he hoped—'

'And now you will help me?' said Cecily, hurrying out her words, as if overpowering one of her wills. 'You will, I know! I have promised my father and uncle to have nothing to do with him. Do not let me be taken by surprise. Give me notice, that I may get Aunt Holmby away before he comes.'

'Oh! must it be so?' cried Phœbe. 'He is not like what he used to be.'

'I have promised,' repeated Cecily; and grasping Phœbe's wrist, she added, 'you will help me to keep my promise.'

'I will,' said Phœbe, in her grave, reliable voice, and Cecily drew a long breath.

There were five minutes of silence, while Phœbe stood studying Cecily, and thinking how much injustice she had done to her, how little she had expected a being so soft and feeling in her firmness, and grieving the more at Mervyn's loss. Cecily at last spoke, 'When will he come?'

'We cannot tell; most likely not for a week, perhaps not for a fortnight. It depends on how he likes Corsica.'

'I think my aunt will be willing to go,' said Cecily. 'My uncle has been talking of Nice.'

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'Then must we lose you,' said Phœbe, 'when you are doing Bertha so much good?'

'I should like to be with you while I can, if I may,' said Cecily, her eyes full of tears.

'Did you know us at first?' said Phœbe.

'I knew you were in this hotel; and after your sisters had spoken, and I saw Bertha's face, I was sure who she was. I thought no one was with you but Miss Charlecote, and that no one knew, so that I might safely indulge myself.' The word was out before she could recall it, and trying, as it were, to hide it, she said, 'But how, if you knew what had passed, did you not sooner know it was I?'

'Because we thought your name was Holmby.'

'Did you, indeed. You did not know that my aunt Holmby is my mother's sister? She kindly took me when my uncle was ordered to spend this winter abroad.'

'You were ill and tried. Bertha read that in your face. Oh! when you see how much difference—'

'I must not see. Do not talk of it, or we must not be together; and indeed it is very precious to me.' She rested her head on Phœbe's shoulder, and put an arm round her waist. 'Only one thing I must ask,' she said, presently; 'is he well?'

'Quite well,' said Phœbe. 'He has been getting better ever since we left home. Then you did not know he was with us?'

'No. It is not right for me to dwell on those things, and they never mention any of you to me.'

'But you will write to us now? You will not desert Bertha? You do not know how much you are doing for her.'

'Dear child! She is so like what he was when first he came.'

'If you could guess what she has suffered, and how fond he is of her, you would not turn away from her. You will let her be your friend?'

'If it be right,' said Cecily, with tearful eyes, but her mouth set into a steadfast expression, as resolute as sweetly sad.

'You know better what is right than I do,' said Phœbe; 'I who feel for him and Bertha. But if you have not heard from him for so long, I think there are things you ought to know.'

'At home, at home,' said Cecily; 'there it may be right to listen. Here I am trusted alone, and I have only to keep my promise. Tell me when I am at home, and it will make me happy. Though, nonsense! my wizened old face is enough to cure him,' and she tried to laugh. Phœbe regretted what she had said of Bertha's impression, and believed that the gentle, worn face ought to be far more touching than the most radiant charms, but when she strove to say that it was not beauty that Mervyn loved, she was hushed at once, and by the same mild authority turned out of the room.

Well for her that she could tell her story to Miss Charlecote without breach of confidence! Honor's first impulse was displeasure with the aunt, who she was sure had let her speak *of*, though not *to*, Miss Holmby without correcting her, and must purposely have kept the whole Raymond connection out of sight. 'Depend upon it, Phœbe,' she said, 'she will keep her niece here.'

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'Poor Cecily, what will she do? I wish they would go, for I feel sure that she will think it her duty to hold out against him, till she has her father's sanction; she will seem hard, and he—'

'Do not reckon too much on him, Phœbe. Yes, it is a hard saying, but men care so much for youth and beauty, that he may find her less attractive. He may not understand how superior she must have become to what she was when he first knew her. Take care how you plead his cause without being sure of his sentiments.'

In fact, Honor thought Cecily Raymond so infinitely above Mervyn Fulmort, at his very best, that she could not regard the affair as hopeful under any aspect; and the parties concerned being just at the time of life when a woman becomes much the elder of a man of the same years, she fully expected that Cecily's loss of bloom would entirely take away his desire to pursue his courtship.

The next event was a diplomatic call from Mrs. Holmby, to sound Miss Charlecote, whose name she knew as a friend both of the Fulmorts and Moorcroft Raymonds, and who, she had feared, would use her influence against so unequal a match for the wealthy young squire. When convinced of her admiration of Cecily, the good aunt proceeded to condemn the Raymond pride. They called it religion, but she was not so taken in. What reasonable person heeded what a young man might have done when he was sowing his wild oats? No, it was only that the Baronet blighted the distillery, whereas the Fulmorts represented that good old family, the Mervyns, and it was a very fine estate, was not it? She had no patience with such nonsense, not she! All Sir John's doing; for, between themselves, poor dear George Raymond had no spirit at all, and was quite under his brother's thumb. Such a family, and such a thing as it would be for them to have that girl so well married. *She* would not take her away. The place agreed with the Major, and she had told Cecily she could not think of leaving it.

Phœbe saw how close a guard Cecily must have learnt to keep on herself, for not a tone nor look betrayed that she was suffering unusual emotion. She occupied herself quietly, and was most tenderly kind to Bertha and Maria, exerting herself to converse with Bertha, and to enter into her pursuits as cheerfully as if her mind was disengaged. Sometimes Phœbe fancied that the exceeding gentleness of her voice indicated when she was most tried, but she attempted no more *tête-à-têtes*, and Miss Charlecote's conjecture that in the recesses of her heart she was rejoiced to be detained by no fault of her own, remained unverified. Phœbe resigned Cecily for the present to Bertha's exclusive friendship. Competition would have been unwise, even if the forbidden subject had not been a restraint where the secret was known, while to soothe and cherish Bertha and settle her mind to begin life again was a welcome and fitting mission for Cecily, and inclination as well as discretion therefore held Phœbe aloof, preventing Maria from interfering, and trusting that Cecily was becoming Bertha's Mr. Charlecote.

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Mervyn came back sooner than she had expected him, having soon tired of Corsica. His year of ill-health and of her attendance had made him dependent on her; he did not enter into novelty or beauty without Bertha; and his old restless demon of discontent made him impatient to return to his ladies. So he took Phœbe by surprise, walking in as she was finishing a letter to Augusta before joining the others in the olivettes.

'Well, Phœbe, how's Bertha? Ready to leave this hot-vapour-bath of a hole?'

'I don't know what you will say to it now,' she answered looking down, and a little tremulous. 'Who do you think is here?'

'Not Hastings? If he dares to show his nose here, I'll get him hissed out of the place.'

'No, no, something very different.'

'Well, make haste,' he said, in the grim voice of a tired man.

'She is here—Cecily Raymond.'

'What of that?' He sat down, folded his arms, and crossed his ankles, the picture of dogged indifference.

'Mervyn!'

'What does it matter to me who comes or goes? Don't stop to rehearse arrivals, but ring for something to eat. An atrocious *mistral*! My throat is like a turnpike road? Call it January? It is a mockery!'

Phœbe obeyed him; but she was in a ferment of wrath and consternation, and clear of nothing save that Cecily must be prepared for his appearance. She was leaving the room when he called her to ask what she was doing.

'I am going to tell the others that you are come.'

'Where are they?'

'In the olive yards behind the hotel.'

'Don't be in such a hurry, and I'll come.'

'Thank you, but I had better go on before. Miss Raymond is with them.'

'It makes no odds to her. Stop a minute, I tell you. What is the matter with her?' (Said with some uneasiness, hidden by gruffness.)

'She is not here for her own health, but Major Holmby is rheumatic.'

'Oh! that intolerable woman is here, is she? Then you may give Miss Charlecote notice to pack up her traps, and we'll set off to-morrow!'

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If a desire to box a man's ears ever tingled in Phœbe's fingers, it was at that moment. Not trusting herself to utter a word, she went up-stairs, put on her hat, and walked forth, feeling as if the earth had suddenly turned topsy-turvy with her, and as if she could look no one in the face. Set off to-morrow! He might tell Miss Charlecote himself, she would not! Yet, after all, he had been rejected. His departure might not torture Cecily like the sight of his indifference. But what despair for Bertha, thought Phœbe, as she saw the friends pacing the paths between the rows of olives, while Miss Charlecote and Maria were gathering magnificent blue violets. At the first hint, Miss Charlecote called to Bertha, who came reluctantly, while Phœbe, with almost sickening pity, murmured her tidings to Cecily—adding, 'I do not think he is coming out. He is having something to eat,' in hopes that this tardiness might be a preparation. She was relieved that Bertha rushed back again to monopolize Miss Raymond, and overwhelm her with schemes for walks under Mervyn's escort. Cecily let her talk, but made no promises, and the soft gentleness of those replies thrilled as pangs of pain on Phœbe's pitying heart.

As they walked homewards, Mervyn himself appeared, slowly sauntering towards them. The younger sisters sprang to meet him, Cecily fell back to Miss Charlecote. Phœbe held her breath, and scarcely durst look. There was a touch of the hand, a greeting, then Bertha pounced on her brother to tell the adventure of the ravine; and Cecily began to set Maria off about the flowers in her nosegay. Phœbe could only come close to Miss Charlecote and squeeze her hand vehemently.

The inn-door was reached, and Mervyn waiting till Cecily came up, said with grave formality, 'I hear my sisters are indebted to you for your assistance in a very unpleasant predicament.'

She bowed, and he bowed. That was all, and they were in their several apartments. Phœbe had never felt in such a fever. She could discern character, but love was but an external experience to her, and she could not read the riddle of Mervyn's repudiation of intercourse with their fellow-inmates, and his restlessness through the evening, checking Bertha for boring about her friend, and then encouraging her to go on with what she had been saying. At last, however, Bertha voluntarily ceased her communications and could be drawn out no farther; and when the candle was put out at night, she electrified Phœbe with the remark, 'It is Mervyn, and you know it; so you may as well tell me all about it.'

Phœbe had no choice but compliance; advising Bertha not to betray her knowledge, and anxious to know the conclusions which this acute young woman would draw from the present conjuncture. But Bertha was too fond of both parties not to be full of unmitigated hope. 'Oh, Phœbe!' she said, 'with Cecily there, I shall not mind going home, I shall not mind anything.'

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'If only she will be there.'

'Stuff, Phœbe! The more Mervyn sulks, the more it shows that he cares for her; and if she cares for him, of course it will come right.'

'Do you remember what she said about the two wills contending?'

'Well, if she ever *did* think Mervyn the genie, she has crossed him once, twice, thrice, till she may turn him from Urgan into Ethert Brand.'

'She thinks it her duty not to hear that she has.'

'Oh, oh! from you who know all about it; but didn't I tell her plenty about Mervyn's kindness to me? Yes, indeed I did. I couldn't help it, you know. It did not seem true to let anybody begin to be my friend unless she knew—all *that*. So I told her—and oh! Phœbe, she was so dear and nice, better than ever after that,' continued Bertha, with what sounded like sobs; 'and then you know she could not help hearing how good and patient he was with me—only growing kinder and kinder the more tiresome I was. She must feel that, Phœbe, must not she? And then she asked about Robert, and I told her how Mervyn has let him get a chaplain to look after the distillery people, and the Institute that that old gin-palace is to be made into.'

'Those were just the things I was longing to tell her.'

'She could not stop *me*, you know, because I knew nothing,' cried Bertha, triumphantly. 'Are not you satisfied, Phœbe?'

'I ought to be, if I were sure of his feelings. Don't plunge about so, Bertha,—and I am not sure either that she will believe him yet to be a religious man.'

'Don't say that, Phœbe. I was just going to begin to like religion, and think it the only true key to metaphysics and explanation of existence, but if it sticks between those two, I shall only see it as a weak, rigid superstition, parting those who were meant for one another.'

Phœbe was strongly tempted to answer, but the little travelling clock struck, and thus acted as a warning that to let Bertha pursue an exciting discussion at this time of night would be ruinous to her nerves the next day. So with a good-night, the elder sister closed her ears, and lay pondering on the newly disclosed stage in Bertha's mind, which touched her almost as closely as the fate of her brother's attachment.

The ensuing were days of suppressed excitement, chiefly manifested by the yawning fits that seized on Bertha whenever no scene in the drama was passing before her. In fact, the scenes presented little. Cecily was not allowed to shut herself up, and did nothing remarkable, though avoiding the walks that she would otherwise have taken with the Fulmort party; and when she found that Bertha was aware of her position, firmly making silence on that head the condition of their interviews. Mervyn let her alone, and might have seemed absolutely indifferent, but for the cessation of all complaints of Hyères, and for the noteworthy brightness, obligingness, and good humour of his manners. Even in her absence, though often restless and strangely watchful, he was always placable and good-tempered, never even scolding Phœbe; and in her presence, though he might not exchange three words, or offer the smallest service, there was a repose and content on his countenance that gave his whole expression a new reading. He was looking particularly well, fined down into alertness by his disciplined life and hill climbing, his complexion cleared and tanned by mountain air, and the habits and society of the last year leaving an unconscious impress unlike that which he used to bring from his former haunts. Phœbe wondered if Cecily remarked it. She was not aware that Cecily did not know him without that restful look.

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Phœbe came to the conclusion that Cecily was persuaded of the cessation of his attachment, and was endeavouring to be thankful, and to accustom herself to it. After the first, she did not hide herself to any marked degree; and, probably to silence her aunt, allowed that lady to take her on one of the grand Monday expeditions, when all the tolerably sound visiting population of Hyères were wont to meet, to the number of thirty or forty, and explore the scenery. Exquisite as were the views, these were not romantic excursions, the numbers conducing to gossip and chatter, but there were some who enjoyed them the more in consequence; and Mervyn, who had been loudest in vituperation of his first, found the present perfectly delightful, although the chief of his time was spent in preventing Mrs. Holmby's cross-grained donkey from lying down to roll, and administering to the lady the chocolate drops that he carried for Bertha's sustenance; Cecily, meantime, being far before with his sisters, where Mrs. Holmby would gladly have sent him if bodily terror would have permitted her to dismiss her cavalier.

Miss Charlecote and Phœbe, being among the best and briskest of the female walkers, were the first to enter the town, and there, in the *Place des Palmiers*, looking about him as if he were greatly amazed at himself, they beheld no other than the well-known figure of Sir John Raymond, standing beside the Major, who was sunning himself under the palm-trees.

'Miss Charlecote, how are you? How d'ye do, Miss Fulmort? Is your sister quite well again? Where's my little niece?'

'Only a little way behind with Bertha.'

'Well, we never thought to meet in such a place, did we? What a country of stones I have come over to-day, enough to break the heart of a farmer; and the very sheep are no better than goats! Vineyards? What they call vineyards are old black stumps that ought to be grubbed up for firewood!'

'Nay, I was struck by the wonderful cultivation of every available inch of ground. It speaks well for the Provençals, if we judge by the proverb, "*Autant vaut l'homme que vaut sa terre.*"'

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'Ah! there she comes;' and he hastened to join Cecily, while the deserted Bertha, coming up to her sister, muttered, 'Wretched girl! I hear she had written to him to fetch her home. That was what made her stay so quietly, was it?'

No one could accuse Mervyn of indifference who saw the blank look that overspread his face on

hearing of Sir John's arrival, but he said not a word, only hurried away to dress for the *table d'hôte*. The first notice the anxious ladies had that the tedious dinner was broken up, was a knock at their door, and Cecily's entrance, looking exceedingly white, and speaking very low. 'I am come to wish you good-bye,' she said. 'Uncle John has been so kind as to come for me, and I believe we shall set out to-morrow.'

Maria alone could dare to shriek out, 'Oh! but you promised to show me how to make a crown of my pink heaths, and I have been out with Lieschen, and gathered such beauties!'

'If you will come with me to my room I will show you while I pack up,' said Cecily, reducing Bertha to despair by this most effectual barrier to confidence; but she entreated leave to follow, since seeing Cecily playing with Maria was better than not seeing her at all.

After some time, Mervyn came in, flushed and breathless, and Honor kindly made an excuse for leaving him alone with Phœbe. After diligently tossing a book from one hand to the other for some minutes, he observed, *sotto voce*, 'That's a more decent old fellow than I gave him credit for.'

'Who, Sir John?'

'Aye.'

And that was the whole result of the *tête-à-tête*. He was in no mood for questions, and marched out of the room for a moonlight cigar. Phœbe only remained with the conviction that something had happened.

Miss Charlecote was more fortunate. She had met the Baronet in the passage, and was accosted by him with, 'Do you ever do such a thing as take a turn on that terrace?'

It was a welcome invitation, and in no more time than it took to fetch a shawl, the two old friends were pacing the paved terrace together.

'Well, what do you think of him?' began Sir John. 'There must be more good in him than I thought.'

'Much more than I thought.'

'He has been speaking to me, and I can't say but that I was sorry for him, though why it should have gone so hard with so sensible and good a girl as Cecily to give up such a scamp, I never could guess! I told George that seeing what I saw of him, and knowing what I knew, I could think it nothing better than a sacrifice to give her to him!'

'Exactly what I thought!'

'After the way he had used her, too—talking nonsense to her, and then playing fast and loose, trying his luck with half the young ladies in London, and then fancying she would be thankful to him as soon as he wanted a wife to keep house! Poor child, that would not have weighed with her a moment though—it puts me out of patience to know how fond she is of him—but for his scampishness, which made it a clear duty to refuse him. Very well she behaved, poor thing, but you see how she pined away—though her mother tells me that not a fretful word was ever heard from her, as active and patient and cheerful as ever. Then the Holmbys took her abroad, the only thing to save her health, but I never trusted the woman, and when by and by she writes to her father that Fulmort was coming, and her aunt would not take her away, "George," I said, "never mind; I'll go at once, and bring her home—she shall not be kept there to be torn to pieces between her feelings and her duty." And now I am come, I declare I don't know what to be at—I should think nothing of it if the lad only talked of reforming—but he looks so downcast, and owns so honestly that we were quite right, and then that excellent little sister of his is so fond of him, and you have stood his company this whole year—that I declare I think he must be good for something! Now you who have looked on all his life, just say what you think of him—such a way as he went on in last year, too—the crew that he got about him—'

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'Phœbe thinks that was the consequence of his disappointment.'

'A man that could bring such a lot into the same house with that sister of his, had no business to think of Cecily.'

'He has suffered for it, and pretty severely, and I do think it has done him good. You must remember that he had great disadvantages.'

'Which didn't hinder his brother from turning out well.'

'Robert went to a public school—' and there she perceived she was saying something awkward, but Sir John half laughed, and assented.

'Quite right, Miss Charlecote; private pupils are a delusion? George never had one without a screw loose about him. Parish priests were never meant for tutors—and I've told my boy, Charlie, that the one thing I'll never consent to is his marrying on pupils—and doing two good things by halves. It has well nigh worried his uncle to death, and Cecily into the bargain.'

'Robert was younger, and the elders were all worse managed. Besides, Mervyn's position, as it was treated, made him discontented and uncomfortable; and this attachment, which he was too—too—I can find no word for it but contemptible—to avow, must have preyed on his temper and

spirits all the time he was trying to shake it off. He was brought up to selfishness, and nothing but what he underwent last year could have shaken him out of it.'

'Then you think he is shaken out of it?'

'Where Bertha is concerned I see that he is—therefore I should hope it with his wife.'

p. 458

'Well, well, I suppose what must be must be. Not that I have the least authority to say anything, but I could not help telling the poor fellow thus much—that if he went on steadily for a year or so, and continued in the same mind, I did not see why he should not ask my brother and Cecily to reconsider it. Then it will be for them to decide, you know.'

For them! As if Sir John were not in character as well as name the guiding head of the family.

'And now,' he added, 'you will let me come to your rooms this evening, for Mrs. Holmby is in such displeasure with me, that I shall get nothing but black looks. Besides, I want to see a little more of that nice girl, his sister.'

'Ah! Sir John, if ever you do consent, it will be more than half for love of Phœbe!'

'Well, for a girl like that to be so devoted to him—her brother though he be—shows there must be more in him than meets the eye. That's just the girl that I would not mind John's marrying.'

CHAPTER XXV

Turn again, Whittington!—*Bow Bells*

May had come round again before Robert Fulmort stood waiting at the Waterloo Station to welcome the travellers, who had been prohibited from putting Bertha's restored health to the test of east winds. It was a vista of happy faces that he encountered as he looked into the carriage window, yet the first questions and answers were grave and mournful.

'Is Mr. Henderson still alive?' asked Honora.

'No, he sank rapidly, and died on Sunday week. I was at the funeral on Saturday.'

'Right; I am glad you went. I am sorry I was away.'

'It was deeply felt. Nearly all the clergy in the archdeaconry, and the entire parish, were present.'

'Who is taking care of the parish?'

'Charlecote Raymond has been coming over for the Sundays, and giving great satisfaction.'

'I say, Robert, where's the Bannerman carriage? Phœbe is to be victimized there—more's the pity,' interposed Mervyn.

'There is their brougham. I meant to drive to Albury-street with her,' said Robert, gazing at his brother as if he scarcely knew him without the characteristic knitting of the brow under a grievance, the scowl, or the half-sneering smile; and with the cleared and lightened air that he had worn ever since that little spark of hope had been left to burn and shine undamped by dissipation or worldly policy. Bertha also was changed. She had grown tall and womanly, her looks beyond her age, and if her childish vivacity were gone, the softened gravity became her much better. It was Phœbe's report, however, for which he chiefly longed, and he was soon seated beside her on the way to Albury-street, while the others betook themselves Citywards.

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'So, Phœbe, it is all right, and you are satisfied?'

'Satisfied, grateful, thankful to the utmost,' said Phœbe, fervently. 'I think I never was so happy as all through the latter part of the journey.'

'You think well of Bertha?'

'I cannot call her restored, for she is far more than she was before. That meeting with Cecily Raymond did for her what we could not do, and she is growing to be more than we knew how to wish for.'

'Her spirits?'

'Never high, and easily shaken. Her nerves are not strong yet, and she will never, I fear, be quite girlishly careless and merry, but she is grave and sweet. She does not shrink from people now, and when I saw her among other girls at Paris, she seemed older, much deeper, and altogether superior.'

'Does she think seriously?'

'She thinks and reads, but it is not easy to guess what she thinks, for she keeps silence, and has happily quite left off arguing with Miss Charlecote. I believe Cecily has great influence over her, and I think she will talk a great deal to Miss Fennimore. Robin, do you think we could have dear Miss Fennimore again?'

'I do not know what Mr. Parsons would say to you. As you know, she told him that she wanted to

do the most useful work he could trust to her, so he has made her second mistress at the day-school for his tradesmen's daughters; and what they would do without her I cannot think!

'She must have very insufficient pay.'

'Yes, but I think she is glad of that, and she had saved a good deal.'

'I give you notice that I shall try hard to get her, if Mr. Crabbe will only let us be as we were before. Do you think there is any hope for us?'

'I cannot tell. I suspect that he will not consent to your going home till Mervyn is married; and Augusta wants very much to have you, for the season at least.'

'Mervyn and Miss Charlecote both say I ought to see a little of the London world, and she promises to keep Maria and Bertha till we see our way. I should not like them to be without me anywhere else. You have not told me of poor Bevil. You must have seen him often.'

'Yes, he clings very much to me, poor fellow, and is nearly as much cast down as at first. He has persuaded himself that poor Juliana always continued what he thought her when they met in their youth. Perhaps she had the germs of it in her, but I sometimes hardly know which way to look when he is talking about her, and then I take shame to myself for the hard judgments I cannot put away even now!'

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'Poor Juliana!' said Phœbe, saddened by her own sense that the difficulties of her present position were lessened by the removal of this sister. 'And little Elizabeth?'

'She is a nice little thing, and her father hardly lets her out of his sight. I have sometimes speculated whether he might not ask you to keep house for him, but last time I saw him, I fancied that he was inclined to hold aloof from you.'

'I had rather he did not ask us,' said Phœbe.

'Why so?'

'Because I am afraid Bertha would not look up to him if she lived with him,' said Phœbe.

Robert smiled, having himself become conscious of that weakness in his good brother-in-law which Phœbe felt, but did not name.

'And now, Phœbe,' said Robert, suddenly changing the subject, 'I have something for you to do; I want you to call on Miss Sandbrook.'

On her astonished look, he explained that he had made it his business frequently to see Owen Sandbrook's child, and of late to give it some religious teaching. While thus engaged, he had been surprised by the entrance of Lucilla, looking wretchedly ill and exhausted, and though she had rallied her spirits after the first moment, talked of having come up from Essex for a day's holiday of shopping and seeing her nephew, and had inquired eagerly and warmly for Miss Charlecote, he had been sufficiently uneasy about her to go afterwards to Mrs. Murrell, from whom he had learnt that she had avowed having consulted a physician in the morning, and had procured her address.

'And now,' said Robert, 'I want you, with whom she has never quarrelled, to call on her as an old friend just come into her neighbourhood, and find out what was the doctor's opinion. I am sure she is destroying herself.'

The whole was said with perfect simplicity, without shrinking from Phœbe's eye, as though he had absolutely forgotten what sentiments he had once entertained; and Phœbe could, neither in kindness nor humanity, refuse to be the means of reopening communication with the voluntary exile. She proposed to write and offer a call, but Robert, fearing to rouse the old perverse pride, recommended that there should be no preparation. Indeed, the chances of an independent expedition seemed likely to be scanty, for Lady Bannerman pounced on her sister as a truant bond-slave, who, when captured, was to be useful all day, and go to parties all night.

'I have told all my friends that I was going to introduce my sister, and what expectations you have,' she said. 'See, here are two cards for to-morrow night, Lady Jane Hewett and Mrs. Gosling, the young widow that I want Mervyn to meet, you know. Clear £5000 a year, and such a charming house. Real first-rate suppers; not like Lady Jane's bread-and-butter and cat-lap, as Sir Nicholas says, just handed round. We would never go near the place, but as I said to Sir Nicholas, any sacrifice for my sister; and she has a son, you know, a fine young man; and if we manage well, we shall be in time for Carrie Gosling's supper. So mind that, Phœbe, and don't get engaged to too many dances.'

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'Is there to be dancing?'

'Most likely. I hope you have something to wear.'

'I provided myself at Paris, thank you.'

'Not mourning, I trust! That will never do! Nobody thinks of mourning for a sister more than six months, and it makes me so low to think of poor Juliana, and this horrid complaint being in the family. It is quite a duty to keep one's spirits up. But there's Robert always so lugubrious; and poor Sir Bevil looks as deplorable, and comes up to town with that poor little girl all in crape, and

won't eat any luncheon! I declare it gave me such a turn that I was obliged to have my little cordial before I could swallow a mouthful! And now you come in black! It is quite provoking! You must and shall get some colours to-morrow.'

'Thank you, what I have is white and lilac.'

On which neutral ground Phœbe took her stand, and the French style and fashion so impressed Augusta's maid, that she forced her ladyship to accept even simplicity as 'the thing,' and to sink back rebuked for the barbarism of hinting at the enlivenment of pink ribbons or scarlet flowers.

Though thus fortified against shopping on her own account, liberty even to go to see her sisters was denied her, in Augusta's infinite disgust at the locality, and consideration for the horses. She was forced to be contented with the report of Mervyn, who came to dinner and to go to the evening parties, and who spoke of the girls as well and happy; Maria 'in her native element' at the infant school, and both in a perfect rapture at receiving Miss Fennimore, whom their hostess had asked to spend the evening in Woolstone-lane.

Mervyn professed that he came entirely to see Phœbe's debut in her Parisian costume, and amused himself maliciously with endeavouring to delay the start from Lady Jane's till too late for Mrs. Gosling's supper; but Phœbe, who did not wish to enhance the sacrifice, would not abet him, and positively, as he declared, aided Augusta in her wild goose chase.

He contrived to have a good deal of conversation with Phœbe in the course of the evening, and she heard from him that old Crabbe was more crusty than ever, and would not hear of his taking his sisters home, but, said he, that mattered the less, considering that now they would be able to be at the parsonage.

'The parsonage?'

'What! did you not know the living was in Miss Charlecote's gift?'

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'Do you mean that she has offered it to Robert?'

'Yes—no—at least she has told me of her intentions. Highly proper in the old girl, isn't it? They will settle it to-night, of course. I'll have the grounds laid out, and make quite a pretty modern place of it. It has quite taken a weight off my mind to know he is so well provided for.'

'It will make us all very happy; but I think he will be sorry for St. Matthew's, too.'

'Oh! parsons think nothing of changes. He can appoint his own successor, and I'll not let things die away. And now, Phœbe, is there anything you want to do? I will not have Augusta tie you by the leg. I will look out a lady's horse to-morrow, and come to ride with you; or if you want to do anything, you can have the brougham any day.'

'Thank you; there is one thing I want very much to do,' and she explained.

'Ha!' said Mervyn, 'a romantic meeting. If I remember right, Mr. Robin used to be much smitten with that little thing. Don't reckon too much on the parsonage, Phœbe.'

'What are we to do if both brothers turn us out?' smiled Phœbe.

'Don't talk of that. I should be glad enough to get you in—and I am far enough from *the other thing* yet.'

So Phœbe obtained the use of the brougham for the next day and set off for her long Essex drive, much against Augusta's will, and greatly wondering what it would produce; compassionate of course for poor Lucilla, yet not entirely able to wish that Robert should resign the charge for which he was so eminently fitted, even for the sake of Hiltonbury and home. Lucy must be altered, indeed, if he would not be happier without her.

Phœbe had written a few lines, saying that hearing that Lucy was so near, she could not help begging to see her. This she sent in with her card, and after a little delay, was invited to come in. Lucilla met her at the top of the stairs, and at first Phœbe only felt herself, clasped, clung to, kissed, fondled with a sudden gasping, tearful eagerness. Then as if striving to recall the ordinary tone, Lucilla exclaimed—'There—I beg your pardon for such an obstreperous greeting, but I am a famished creature here, you see, and I did not expect such kindness. Luckily some of my pupils are driving out with their mamma, and I have sent the others to the nurse. Now then, take off your bonnet, let me see you; I want to look at a home face, and you are as fresh and as innocent as if not a year had passed over you.'

Lucilla fervently kissed her again, and then holding her hand, gazed at her as if unwilling that either should break the happy silence. Meantime Phœbe was shocked to see how completely Robert's alarms were justified by Lucy's appearance. The mere absence of the coquettish ringlets made a considerable difference, and the pale colour of the hair, as it was plainly braided, increased the wanness of her appearance. The transparent complexion had lost the lovely carnation of the cheek, but the meandering veins of the temples and eyelids were painfully apparent; and with the eyes so large and clear as to be more like veronicas than ever, made the effect almost ghastly, together with excessive fragility of the form, and the shadowy thinness of the hand that held Phœbe's. Bertha's fingers, at her weakest, had been more substantial than these small things, which had, however, as much character and force in their grasp as ever.

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'Lucy, I am sure you are ill! How thin you are!'

'Well, then, cod-liver oil is a base deception! Never mind that—let me hear of Honor—are you with her?'

'No, my sisters are, but I am with Augusta.'

'Then you do not come from her?'

'No; she does not know.'

'You excellent Phœbe; what have you done to keep that bonny honest face all this time to refresh weary eyes—being a little heroine, too. Well, but the Honor—the old sweet Honey—is she her very self?'

'Indeed, I hope so; she has been so very kind to us.'

'And found subjects in you not too cross-grained for her kindness to be palatable! Ah! a good hard plunge into the world teaches one what one left in the friendly ship! Not that mine has been a hard one. I am not one of the pathetic governesses of fiction. Every one has been kinder to me than I am worth—But, oh! to hear myself called Lucy again!'—and she hid her face on Phœbe's shoulder in another access of emotion.

'You used not to like it.'

'My Cilly days were over long ago. Only one person ever used to call me Cilla;' and she paused, and went on afresh—'So it was for Bertha's sake and Mervyn's that Honor escorted you abroad. So much Robert told me; but I don't understand it yet. It had haunted me the whole winter that Robert was the only Mr. Fulmort *she* could nurse; and if he told you I was upset, it was that I did not quite know whether he were ghost or body when I saw him there in the old place.'

'No, he only told me you were looking very ill; and indeed—'

'I could not ask him what concatenation made Honor take Mervyn under her wing, like a hen hovering a vulture.'

'It would be a long story,' said Phœbe; 'but Bertha was very ill, and Mervyn much out of health; and we were in great distress for an escort. I think it was the kindest thing ever done, and the most successful.'

'Has it been a comfort to her? Owen's letters must be, I am sure. He will come home this autumn, as soon as he has done laying out his railway, and then I shall get him to beg leave for me to make a little visit to Hiltonbury before we go out to Canada. I could not go out without a good word from her. She and Mr. Prendergast are all that remains of the old life. I say, Phœbe, did you hear of those cousins of mine!'

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'It was one of the reasons I wished to see you. I thought you might like to hear of them.'

'You saw them!'

'Miss Charteris called on us at Nice. She—oh, Lucy! you will be surprised—she is a Plymouth sister!'

'Rashe!—old Rashe! We reverse the old transformation, butterflies into grubs!' cried Lucy, with somewhat spasmodic laughter. 'Tell me how the wonder came about.'

'I know little about it,' said Phœbe. 'Miss Charlecote thought most likely it was the first earnest kind of religion that presented itself when she was craving for some such help.'

'Did Honor make such a liberal remark? There, I am sorry I said it; but let me hear of dear old Rashe. Has it made her very grim?'

'You know it is not an embellishing dress, and she did look gaunt and haggard; but still somehow we liked her better than ever before; and she is so very good and charitable.'

'Ha! Nice is a grand place for colporteurs and tracts. She would be a shining specimen there, and dissipation, religious or otherwise, old Rashe *must* have.'

'Not only in that line,' said Phœbe, suppressing a smile at the truth of the surmise, 'but she is all kindness to sick English—'

'She tried to convert you all!—confess it. Rashe converting dear old Honor! Oh! of all comical conjunctions!'

'Miss Charlecote hushed it down,' said Phœbe; 'and, indeed, nobody could be with her and think that she needed rousing to religious thoughts.'

'By this attempt on Honor, I fear she has not succeeded with Lolly, whom poor Owen used to call an Eastern woman with no soul.'

'She does everything for Mrs. Charteris—dresses her, works for her—I do believe cooks for her. They live a strange, rambling life.'

'I have heard Lolly plays as deeply as Charles, does not she? All Castle Blanch mortgaged—would be sold, but that Uncle Kit is in the entail! It breaks one's heart to hear it! They all live on generous old Ratia, I suppose.'

'I believe she pays the bills when they move. We were told that it was a beautiful thing to see how patiently and resolutely she goes on bearing with them and helping them, always in hopes that at last they may turn to better things.'

Lucy was much touched. 'Poor Rashe!' she said; 'there was something great in her. I have a great mind to write to her.'

They diverged into other subjects, but every minute she became more open and confidential; and as the guarded reserve wore off, Phœbe contrived to lead to the question of her spirits and health, and obtained a fuller answer.

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'Till you try, Phœbe, you can't guess the wear of living with minds that have got nothing in them but what you have put in yourself. There seems to be a fur growing over one's intellects for want of something to rub against.'

'Miss Fennimore must often have felt that with us.'

'No, you were older and besides, you have some originality in a sober way; and don't imagine Miss Fennimore had the sore heart at the bottom—the foolishness that took to moaning after home as soon as it had cast it off past recall!'

'Oh, Lucy! not past recall!'

'Not past pardon, I am trying to hope. At least, there are some people who, the more unpardonable one is, pardon the more readily. When Owen comes home, I mean to try.'

'Ah! I saw you had been going through a great deal.'

'No, no, don't charge my looks on sentiment,' said Cilla, hastily; 'there's plenty to account for them besides. One never falls into those foibles when one is quite strong.'

'Then you have been unwell?'

'Not to the point of giving in. Oh, no! "Never say die" was always my motto, you know.'

'To what point, dear Lucy?'

'To that of feeling as if the entire creation was out of joint—not one child here and there, but everybody was cross; and I could not walk with the children, and my bones ached, and all that sort of thing.'

'You had advice?'

'Yes, I thought it economical to patch myself up in time; so I asked for a holiday to go to the doctor.'

'Well?'

'He did after the nature of doctors; poked me about, and asked if there were decline in the family;' and in spite of the smile, the great blue eyes looked ghastly; 'and he forbade exertion, and ordered good living and cod-liver oil.'

'Then surely you should be taking care.'

'So I am. These are very good-natured people, and I'm a treasure of a governess, you know. I have refectations ten times a day, and might swim in port wine, and the little Swiss *bonne* walks the children, and gives them an awful accent, which their mamma thinks the correct thing.'

'Change—rest—you should have them.'

'I shall, when Owen comes. It is summer-time, and I shall hold on till then, when it will be plenty of time to see whether this is nonsense.'

'Whether what is?'

'About my lungs. Don't look horrified. He could only trace the remains of a stupid old cold, and if it were more, I know of no fact of so little moment to anybody.'

'You should not say that, Lucy; it is wrong and cruel.'

'It is your fault; I did not want to have talked of it, and in good time here comes half my flock. Edie, Reggie, Flo, come and show Miss Fulmort what my torments are.'

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They ran in, apparently on excellent terms with her, and greeted her guest without shyness; but after a little whispering and shoving the youngest spoke. 'Edie and Reggie want to know if she is the lady that put out the light?'

'Ah! you heroine,' said Lucy, 'you don't know how often I have told of your doughty deeds! Ay, look at her, she is the robber-baffler; though now I look at her I don't quite believe it myself.'

'But it is true?' asked the little girl, puzzled.

'Tell us all the story,' added the boy.

'Yes; tell us,' said Lucilla. 'I read all your evidence, so like yourself as it was, but I want to know where you were sleeping.'

Phœbe found her present audience strangely more embarrassing than the whole assize court, perhaps because there the solemn purpose swallowed up the sense of admiration; but she laughed at last at the boy's disappointment at the escape of the thieves; 'he would have fired a pistol through the keyhole and shot them!' When she rose to go, the children entreated her to stay and be seen by the others, but this she was glad to escape, though Lucilla clung to her with a sort of anguish of longing, yet stifled affection, that would have been most painful to witness, but for the hopes for her relief.

Phœbe ordered her brother's carriage in time to take her to breakfast in Woolstone-lane the next morning, and before ten o'clock Honor had heard the account of the visit in Essex. Tearfully she thanked the trusty reconnoitrer as for a kindness to herself, dwelling on the tokens of relenting, yet trembling at the tidings of the malady. To write and recall her child to her motherly nursing was the foremost thought in her strange medley of grief and joy, hope and fear.

'Poor Robert,' she said, when she understood that he had organized Phœbe's mission; 'I am glad I told him to give no answer for a week.'

'Mervyn told me how kind you were about Hiltonbury.'

'Kind to myself, my dear. It seems like a crime when I look at St. Matthew's; but when I think of you all, and of home, I believe it is right that he should have the alternative. And now, if poor Lucy come, and it be not too late—'

'Did he say anything?' said Phœbe.

'I only wrote to him; I thought he had rather not let me see his first impulse, so I told him to let me hear nothing till Thursday evening. I doubted before, now I feel sure he will take it.'

'Lucy has the oldest claim,' said Phœbe, thoughtfully, wishing she could feel equally desirous of success in this affair as in that of Mervyn and Cecily.

'Yes, she was his first love, before Whittingtonia. Did you mention the vacancy at Hiltonbury?'

'No; there was so much besides to talk of.'

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'That is well; for perhaps if she knew, that spirit of hers might keep her aloof. I feel like Padre Cristoforo dispensing Lucia from her vow! If she will only get well! And a little happiness will do more than all the cods in Hammerfest! Phœbe, we will have a chapel-school at the hamlet, and a model kitchen at the school: and Robert will get hold of all the big boys. His London experience is exactly what we want to brighten Hiltonbury, and all our clergy.'

Hiltonbury had a right to stand first with Honora, and Whittingtonia had sunk into a mere training-school for her pattern parson. If there were a sigh to think that Owen was exactly of the right age to have been ordained to Hiltonbury, she put it away, for this was next best.

Her note to Lucilla was penned with trembling caution, and each word was reconsidered day and night, in case the perverse temper might take umbrage. The answer came.

'MY DEAR HONOR,

'It is beyond my deserts to be so kindly taken home. I have learnt what that means now. I can be spared for a fortnight; and as Mr. Bostock dines in town the day after to-morrow, he will set me down. Your affectionate

L. SANDBROOK.'

'Miss Charlecote is like a person ten years younger,' observed Bertha to Phœbe, when she came with the rest to 'quite a family party,' at Albury-street. Robert alone was absent, it being what Augusta called 'a fast or something;' *i.e.* a meeting of St. Wulstan's Young Men's Institute. Bertha heartily wished she could call herself a young man, for her morbid sense of disgrace always recurred with those whom she knew to be cognizant of her escapade. However, this evening made a change in her ladyship's views, or rather she had found Phœbe no longer the mere submissive handmaid of schoolroom days, but a young woman accustomed to liberty of action and independence of judgment; and though perfectly obliging and unselfish, never admitting Augusta's claims on her time to the exclusion of those of others of the family, and quietly but decidedly carrying out her intentions. Bertha's shrinking silence and meekness of demeanour persuaded her sister that she would be more comfortable, and her womanly appearance not only rendered the notion of school ridiculous, but inspired the desire of bringing her out. Phœbe might dedicate herself to Maria if she pleased; Bertha should shine through the season under her sister's patronage.

Not since the adventure with the Hyères peasants had Bertha's tongue been so unmanageable, as when she tried to protest against going into society; and when Mervyn came to her help, Augusta owned that such hesitation was indeed an objection, but it might easily be cured by good management; cordials would prevent nervousness, and, after all, no one would care when a girl had such a fortune. Poor Bertha crept away, feeling as if she could never open her mouth again.

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Meanwhile Mervyn and Augusta amicably agreed on the excellence of Hiltonbury parsonage as a home for the girls, the latter only regretting what Robert had sunk on his fancies at Whittingtonia. 'I don't know that,' returned Mervyn; 'all I regret is, that we never took our share. It is a different thing now, I assure you, to see the turn out from the distillery since the

lads have come under his teaching! I only hope his successor may do as well!

'Well, I don't understand about such things,' said Augusta, crossly. 'Poor papa never made such a rout about the hands. It would not have been thought good taste to bring them forward.'

'If you wish to understand,' said Mervyn, maliciously, 'you had better come and see. Robert would be very glad of your advice for the kitchen he is setting going—sick cookery and cheap dinners.'

'And pray who pays for them? Robert has made himself a beggar. Is it you?'

'No; those who eat. It is to be self-supporting. I do nothing but lend the house. You don't remember it. It is the palace at the corner of Richard Alley.'

'It is no concern of mine, I know; but what is to become of the business if you go giving away the houses?'

'Oh! I am getting into the foreign and exportation line. It is infinitely less bother.'

'Ah, well! I am glad my poor father does not see it. He would have said the business was going to the dogs!'

'No; he was fast coming into Robert's views, and I heartily wish I had not hindered him.'

Augusta told her admiral that evening that there was no hope for the family, since Robert had got hold of Mervyn as well as of the rest of them. People in society actually asked her about the schools and playground at Mr. Fulmort's distillery; there had been an educational report about them. Quite disgusting!

There passed a day of conflicting hope and fear, soothed by the pleasure of preparation, and at seven in the evening there came the ring at the house door, and Lucilla was once more in Honora's arms. It was for a moment a convulsive embrace, but it was not the same lingering clinging as when she met Phœbe, nor did she look so much changed as then, for there was a vivid tint of rose on either cheek; she had restored her hair to the familiar fashion, and her eyes were bright with excitement. The presence of Maria and Bertha, which Miss Charlecote had regretted, was probably a relief; for Lucilla, as she threw off her bonnet, and sat down to the 'severe tea' awaiting her, talked much to them, observed upon their growth, noticed the little Maltese dog, and compared her continental experiences with Bertha's. To Honor she scarcely spoke voluntarily, and cast down her eyes as she did so, making brief work of answers to inquiries, and showing herself altogether disappointingly the old Cilly. Robert's absence was also a disappointment to Honor, though she satisfied herself that it was out of consideration.

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Lucy would not go up to her room till bed-time; and when Honor, accompanying her thither, asked tender and anxious questions about her health, she answered them, not indeed petulantly, as of old, but with a strange, absent manner, as if it were duty alone that made her speak. Only when Honor spoke of her again seeing the physician whom she had consulted, she at first sharply refused, then, as if recollecting herself, meekly said: 'As you think fit, but I had rather it was not the same.'

'I thought he was your own preference,' said Honor, 'otherwise I should have preferred Dr. F.'

'Very well, let it be,' said Lucy, hastily.

The good-nights, the kisses past, and Honor went away, with a heavy load of thwarted hopes and baffled yearning at her heart—yearnings which could be stilled only in one way.

A knock. She started up, and called 'Come in,' and a small, white, ghostly figure glided in, the hands tightly clasped together.

'Lucy, dear child, you are ill!'

'I don't know what is the matter with me,' said a husky, stifled voice; 'I meant it—I wanted it. I longed after it when it was out of reach, but now—'

'What, my dear?' asked Honor, appalled at the effort with which she spoke.

'Your pardon!' and with a pressure of hands and contraction of the brow as of physical agony, she exclaimed, 'Honor, Honor, forgive me!'

Honor held out her arms, she flung herself prone into them, and wept. Tears were with her an affection as violent as rare, and her sobs were fearful, heaving her little fragile frame as though they would rend it, and issuing in short cries and gasps of anguish. Honor held her in her arms all the time, much alarmed, but soothing and caressing, and in the midst, Lucilla had not lost all self-control, and though unable to prevent the paroxysm, restrained it as much as possible, and never attempted to speak; but when her friend laid her down, her whole person still quivering with the long swell of the last uncontrollable sobbing, she looked up with the sweetest smile ever seen by Honor, who could not help thinking that such a sight might have met the eyes of the mother who found the devil gone out and her daughter laid on the bed.

The peace was such that neither could bear to speak for many seconds. At last Lucy said, 'Dear Honor.'

'My dearest'

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'Lie down by me; please put your arms round me. There! Oh! it is so comfortable. Why did I never find it out before? I wish I could be a little child, and begin again from the time my father made me over to you.'

'Lucy, we all would begin again if we could. I have come to the perception how often I exasperated you.'

'An angel who did his duty by me would have exasperated me in your place.'

'Yes, that was one error of mine. I thrust myself in against the wishes of your nearest relative.'

'My thanklessness has made you feel that.'

'Don't talk on, dear one—you are exhausting yourself.'

'A little more I must say before I can sleep under your roof in peace, then I will obey you in all things. Honor, these few years have shown me what your education did for me against my will. What would have become of me if I had been left to the poor Castle Blanch people? Nothing could have saved me but my spirit of contradiction! No; all that saved my father's teaching from dying out in me—all that kept me at my worst from the Charteris standard, all that has served me in my recent life, was what you did for me! There! I have told you only the truth.'

Honor could only kiss her and whisper something of unlooked-for happiness, and Lucilla's tears flowed again at the tenderness for which she had learnt to hunger; but it was a gentle shower this time, and she let herself be hushed into calmness, till she slept peacefully on Honor's bed, in Honor's arms, as she had never done, even as a young child. Honor watched her long, in quiet gladness and thankfulness, then likewise slept; and when awakened at last by a suppressed cough, looked up to see the two stars of blue eyes, soft and gentle under their swollen lids, gazing on her full of affection.

'I have wakened you,' Lucy said.

'Have you been awake long?'

'Not very; but to lie and look at the old windows, and smell the cedar fragrance, and see you, is better than sleep.'

Still the low morning cough and the pallor of the face filled Honor with anxiety; and though Lucilla attributed much to the night's agitation, she was thoroughly languid and unhinged, and fain to lie on the sofa in the cedar parlour, owning that no one but a governess could know the full charm of doing nothing.

The physician was the same who had been consulted by her father, and well remembered the flaxen-haired child whom he had so cruelly detached from his side. He declared her to be in much the same reduced and enfeebled condition as that in which her father brought on his malady by reckless neglect and exposure, and though he found no positive disease in progress, he considered that all would depend upon anxious care, and complete rest for the autumn and winter, and he thought her constitution far too delicate for governess life, positively forbidding her going back to her situation for another day.

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Honor had left the room with him. She found Lucilla with her face hidden in the sofa cushions, but the next moment met a tremulous half-spasmodic smile.

'Am I humbled enough?' she said. 'Failed, failed, failed! One by my flirting, two by my temper, three by my health! I can't get my own living, and necessity sends me home, without the grace of voluntary submission.'

'Nay, my child, the very calling it home shows that it need not humble you to return.'

'It is very odd that I should like it so much!' said Lucy; 'and now,' turning away as usual from sentiment, 'what shall I say to Mrs. Bostock? What a wretch she will think me! I must go over and see all those children once more. I hope I shall have a worthy successor, poor little rogues. I must rouse myself to write!'

'Not yet, my dear.'

'Not while you can sit and talk. I have so much to hear of at home! I have never inquired after Mr. Henderson! Not dead?'

'You have not heard? It was a very long, gradual decay. He died on the 12th.'

'Indeed! he was a kind old man, and home will not be itself without his white head in the reading-desk. Have you filled up the living.'

'I have offered it—and there was a pause—to Robert Fulmort.'

'I thought so! He won't have it.'

Honor durst not ask the grounds of this prediction, and the rest of that family were discussed. It was embarrassing to be asked about the reports of last winter, and Lucy's keen penetration soon led to full confidence.

'Ah! I was sure that a great flood had passed over that poor child! I was desperate when I wrote

to Phœbe, for it seemed incredible that it should be either of the others, but I might have trusted her. I wonder what will become of her. I have not yet seen the man good enough for her.'

'I have seen one—and so have you—but I could not have spared him to her, even if she had been in his time.'

Truly Lucilla was taken home when Honor was moved to speak thus.

For her sake Honor had regretted that the return dinner to the Albury-street household and the brothers was for this day, but she revived towards evening, and joined the party, looking far less pretty and piquante, and her dress so quiet as to be only just appropriate, but still a fair bright object, and fitting so naturally into her old place, that Lady Bannerman was scandalized at her presumption and Miss Charlecote's weakness. Honor and Phœbe both watched the greeting between her and Robert, but could infer nothing, either from it or from their deportment at dinner, both were so entirely unembarrassed and easy. Afterwards Robert sought out Phœbe, and beguiled her into the window where his affairs had so often been canvassed.

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'Phœbe,' he said, 'I must do what I fear will distress you, and I want to prepare you.'

Was it coming? But how could he have guessed that she had rather not?

'I feel deeply your present homeless condition. I wish earnestly that I could make a home for you. But, Phœbe, once you told me you were content to be sacrificed to my foremost duty—'

'I am,' she said.

'Well, then, I love this smoky old black wife of mine, and don't want to leave her even for my sisters.'

'I never thought of your leaving her for your sisters, but—' and as Lucilla's music effectually veiled all words—'I had thought that there might be other considerations.' Her eyes spoke the rest.

'I thought you knew that folly had passed away,' he said, somewhat sternly. 'I trust that no one else has thought of it!' and he indicated Miss Charlecote.

'Not when the offer was made to you, but since she heard of my mission.'

'Then I am glad that on other grounds my mind was made up. No,' after a pause, 'there is a great change. She is far superior to what she was in the days of my madness, but it is over, and never could be renewed. She herself does not desire it.'

Phœbe was called to the piano, not sorry that such should be Robert's conviction, and glad that he should not be disturbed in work that suited him so well as did St. Matthew's, but thinking him far too valuable for Lucy not to suffer in losing her power over him.

And did she?

She was alone in the cedar parlour with Honor the next day, when the note was brought in announcing his refusal on the ground that while he found his strength and health equal to the calls of his present cure, and his connection with the Fulmort firm gave him unusual facilities in dealing with the workmen, he did not think he ought to resign his charge for another for which many better men might be found.

'Quite right; I knew it,' said Lucilla, when Honor had with some attempt at preparation shown her the note.

'How could you know it?'

'Because I saw a man in his vocation.'

A long silence, during which Cilly caught a pitying glance.

'Please to put that out of your head!' she exclaimed. 'There's no pity, no ill-usage in the case. I wilfully did what I was warned that he would not bear, and there was an end of it.'

'I had hoped not past recall.'

'Well, if you will have the truth, when it was done and not to be helped, we were both very sorry; I can answer at least for one, but he had bound himself heart and soul to his work, and does not care any longer for me. What, you, the preacher of sacrifice, wishing to see your best pupil throw up your pet work for the sake of a little trumpety crushed fire-fly?'

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'Convict me out of my own mouth,' said Honor, sadly, 'it will not make me like to see my fire-fly crushed.'

'When the poor fire-fly has lit the lamp of learning for six idle children, no other cause for dimness need be sought. No, I was well and wicked in the height of the pain, and long after it wore out—for wear out it did—and I am glad he is too wise to set it going again. I don't like emotions. I only want to be let alone. Besides, he has got into such a region of goodness, that his wife ought to be super-excellent. I know no one good enough for him unless you would have him!'

As usual, Honor was balked by bestowing sympathy, and could only wonder whether this were

reserve, levity, or resignation, and if she must accept it as a fact that in the one the attachment had been lost in the duties of his calling, in the other had died out for want of requital. For the present, in spite of herself, her feeling towards Robert verged more on distant rather piqued admiration than on affection, although he nearly approached the ideal of her own first love, and Owen Sandbrook's teaching was, through her, bearing good fruit in him, even while recoiling on her woman's heart through Owen's daughter.

Mervyn was easily reconciled to the decision, not only because his brother was even more valuable to him in London than in the country, but because Miss Charlecote's next alternative was Charlecote Raymond, Sir John's second son, a fine, open-tempered young man of thirty, who had made proof of vigour and judgment in the curacy that he had just left, and who had the farther recommendation of bearing the name of the former squire, his godfather. Anything called Raymond was at present so welcome to Mervyn that he felt himself under absolute obligations to Robert for having left the field clear. When no longer prejudiced, the sight of Robert's practical labours struck him more and more, and his attachment grew with his admiration.

'I'll tell you what, Phœbe,' he said, when riding with her. 'I have a notion of pleasing the parson. Yesterday we got obstructed by an interminable procession of school children going out for a lark in the country by an excursion train, and he began envying their keepers for being able to give them such a bath of country air. Could we not let him do the same by his lot at Beauchamp?'

'Oh, Mervyn, what a mass of happiness you would produce!'

'Mass of humbug! I only want to please Robin and have no trouble. I shan't come near it. You only tell me what it will cost, carriage, provender, and all, and let me hear no more of it.'

He was destined to hear a good deal more. The proposal caused the utmost gratitude and satisfaction, except that Honor and Robert doubted whether it were a proper moment for merry-making at Hiltonbury. They were in full consultation when in walked Sir John Raymond, who could not help coming to town at once to express his thanks at having his son settled so near him. Ere long, he learnt what was under discussion, and made the amendment that the place should be the Forest, the occasion the Horticultural Show. He knew of a capital spot for the whole troop to dine in, even including the Wulstonians proper, whom Honor, wondering she had never thought of it before, begged to include in the treat at her own expense. But conveyance from the station for nearly two thousand?

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'Never mind,' said Sir John; 'I'll undertake for that! We'll make it a county concern, and get the farmers to lend their wagons, borrow all the breaks we can, and I know of some old stage-coaches in dock. If there's not room for all, they must ride and tye. It is only three miles from the little Forest station, and we'll make the train stop there. Only, young ladies, you must work Whittington's cat upon all the banners for your kittens.'

Lucilla clapped her hands, and undertook that the Whittingtonians should be marshalled under such an array of banners as never were seen before. Maria was in ecstasies, and Bertha was, in the excitement, forgetting her dread of confronting the county.

'But where's Miss Phœbe?' asked Sir John, who had sat half an hour waiting in vain for her to appear; and when he heard, he declared his intention of calling on her. And where was Mervyn himself? He was at the office, whither Robert offered to conduct the Baronet, and where Mervyn heard more of his proposal than he had bargained for; though, perhaps, not more than he liked. He was going to an evening party at the Bannermans', and seeing Sir John's inclination to see Phœbe, proposed to call for him and take him there.

'What is the use, Phœbe,' demanded Lady Bannerman, after the party was over, 'of my getting all these young men on purpose to dance with you, if you get up in a corner all the evening to talk to nobody but Mervyn and old Sir John? It can be nothing but perverseness, for you are not a bit shy, and you are looking as delighted as possible to have put me out.'

'Not to have put you out, Augusta, but I am delighted.'

'Well, at what?'

'We are asked to stay at Moorcroft, that's one thing.'

'Stupid place. No wines, no dinners,' said Augusta; 'and so ridiculous as you are! If the son is at home you'll do nothing but talk to Sir John. And if ever a girl ought to get married off I am sure it is you.'

'How do you know what good use I may make of my opportunities?'

Phœbe positively danced up-stairs, and indulged in a private polka round her bedroom. She had been told not only of the Forest plan, but that Sir John was going to 'run down' to his brother's at Sutton the next day, and that he had asked Mervyn to come with him.

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Mervyn had not this time promised to send her a blank cover. He thought he had very little present hope, for the talk had been of a year's probation—of his showing himself a changed character, etc. And not only was this only half that space, but less than a month had been spent in England. This time he was not setting off as one about to confer a favour.

Phœbe heard no more for two days. At last, as she was finishing her toilette to go out with Augusta, a hasty knock came to her door, and Mervyn entreated to be let in. His face told more

than his tongue could utter. He had little guessed the intensity of the happiness of which he had so long deprived himself, and Cecily's acceptance had filled him with a flood of bliss, tintured, however, by the sense of his own unworthiness of her constant affection, and increasing compunction for what he had made her endure.

'I don't know how she could do it, or why she cared for such a miserable scamp, breaking her heart all this time!' he exclaimed.

'You will make up for it now.'

'I wish I may; but, bless me, Phœbe, she is a perfect little nun, and what is she to do with a graceless dog like me?'

'You will see,' said Phœbe, smiling.

'What do you think, then?' he demanded, in some alarm. 'You know I can't take to the pious tack. Will nothing else satisfy her?'

'You are not the same as you were. You don't know what will happen to you yet,' said Phœbe, playfully.

'The carriage is ready, ma'am; my lady is waiting,' said a warning voice.

'I say,' quoth Mervyn, intercepting her, 'not a word to my lady. It is all conditional, you understand—only that I may ask again, in a year, or some such infernal time, if I am I don't know what—but they do, I suppose.'

'Perhaps you will by that time. Dear Mervyn, I am sorry, but I must go, or Augusta will be coming here.'

He made a ludicrous gesture of shrinking horror, but still detained her to whisper, 'You'll meet her at Moorcroft; they will have her for the Forest to-do.'

Phœbe signed her extreme satisfaction, and ran away.

'I am surprised at you, Phœbe; you have kept me five minutes.'

'Some young ladies do worse,' said the Admiral, who was very fond of her; 'and her time was not lost. I never saw her look better.'

'I don't like such a pair of milkmaid's cheeks, looking so ridiculously delighted, too,' said Lady Bannerman, crossly. 'Really, Phœbe, one would think you were but just come up from the country, and had never been to a concert before. Those stupid little white marabouts in your hair again, too!'

'Well,' said Sir Nicholas, 'I take them as a compliment—Phœbe knows I think they become her.'

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'I don't say they are amiss in themselves, but it is all obstinacy, because I desire her to buy that magnificent ruby bandeau! How is any one to believe in her fortune if she dresses in that twopenny-halfpenny fashion? I declare I have a great mind to leave her behind.'

Phœbe could almost have said 'pray do,' so much did she long to join the party in Woolstone-lane, where the only alloy was, that poor Maria's incapacity for secrecy forbade her hearing the good news.

Miss Charlecote, likewise, was secretly a little scandalized at the facility with which the Raymonds had consented to the match; she thought Mervyn improved, but neither religious nor repentant, and could not think Cecily or her family justified in accepting him. Something of the kind became perceptible to Robert when they first talked over the matter together.

'It may be so,' he said, 'but I really believe that Mervyn will be more susceptible of real repentance when he has imperceptibly been led to different habits and ways of thinking. In many cases, I have seen that the mind has to clear itself, and leave old things behind before it has the capacity of perceiving its errors.'

'Repentance must precede amendment.'

'*Some* repentance must, but even the sense of the inexpedience and inconvenience of evil habits may be the first step above them, and in time the power of genuine repentance may be attained.'

'Still, glad as I am for all your sakes, I cannot understand it on Cecily's part, or how a girl of her tone of mind can marry where there can as yet be no communion of the highest kind. You would be sorry to see Phœbe do so.'

'Very sorry. It is no example, but there may be claims from the mere length of the attachment, which seems to mark her as the appointed instrument for his good. Besides, she has not fully accepted him; and after such change as he has made, she might not have been justified in denying all encouragement.'

'She did not seek such justification,' said Honor laughing, but surprised to find Robert thus lenient in his brother's case, after having acted so stern a part in his own.

CHAPTER XXVI

Then Robin Hood took them both by the hands,
And danced about the oak tree,
For three merry men, and three merry men,
And three merry men we be.—*Old Ballad*

The case of the three sisters remained a difficulty. The Bannermans professed to have 'washed their hands of them,' their advice not being taken, and Mr. Crabbe could not think himself justified in letting them return to the protection that had so egregiously failed. Bertha was fretted by the uncertainty, and became nervous, and annoyed with Phœbe for not showing more distress—but going on from day to day in the confidence that matters would arrange themselves.

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Phœbe, who had come of age during her foreign tour, had a long conference with her guardian when he put her property into her hands. The result was that she obtained his permission to inhabit with her sisters the Underwood, a sort of dowager-house belonging to Beauchamp, provided some elderly lady could be found to chaperon them—Miss Fennimore, if they preferred her.

Miss Fennimore was greatly touched with the earnestness of the united entreaties of her pupils, and though regretting the field of usefulness in which she had begun to work, could not resist the pleasure of keeping house with Phœbe, and resuming her studies with Bertha on safer ground. She could not, however, quit her employment without a half-year's notice, and when Mervyn went down for a day to Beauchamp, he found the Underwood in such a woful state of disrepair, that turn in as many masons, carpenters, and paperers as he would, there was no hope of its being habitable before Martinmas. Therefore the intermediate time must be spent in visiting, and though the head-quarters were at the Holt, the Raymonds of Moorcroft claimed the first month, and the promise of Cecily's presence allured Bertha thither, though the Fulmort mind had always imagined the house highly religious and dull. Little had she expected to find it ringing with the wild noise and nonsense of a joyous home party of all ages, full of freaks and frolics, laughter and merriment. Her ready wit would have made her shine brilliantly if her speech had been constantly at command, but she often broke down in the midst of a repartee, and was always in danger of suffering from over-excitement. Maria, too, needed much watching and tenderness. Every one was very kind to her, but not exactly knowing the boundary of her powers, the young people would sometimes have brought her into situations to which she was unequal, if Phœbe had not been constantly watching over her.

Between the two sisters, Phœbe's visit was no sinecure. She was always keeping a motherly eye and hand over one or the other, sometimes over both, and not unseldom incurring Bertha's resistance under the petulance of overwrought spirits, or anger at troublesome precautions. After Cecily's arrival, however, the task became easier. Cecily took Bertha off her hands, soothing and repressing those variable spirits, and making a wise and gentle use of the adoration that Bertha lavished on her, keeping her cousins in order, and obviating the fast and furious fun that was too great a change for girls brought up like the Fulmorts. Maria was safe whenever Cecily was in the room, and Phœbe was able to relax her care and enjoy herself doubly for feeling all the value of the future sister.

She thought Miss Charlecote and Lucilla both looked worn and dispirited, when one day she rode with Sir John to see them and inspect the Underwood, as well as to make arrangements for the Forest Show. Poor Honora was seriously discomposed at having nothing to show there. It was the first time that the Holt had failed to shine in its produce, but old Brooks had allowed the whole country round to excel so palpably in all farm crops, and the gardener had taken things so easily in her absence, that everything was mediocre, and she was displeased and ashamed. Moreover, Brooks had controverted her strictest instructions against harbouring tenants of bad character; he had mismanaged the cattle, and his accounts were in confusion. He was a thoroughly faithful servant, but like Ponto and the pony, he had grown masterful with age. Honor found that her presiding eye had certainly done some good, since going away had made things so much worse, and she took Sir John with her to the study to consult him on her difficulties. Phœbe and Lucilla were left together.

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'I am afraid you are not much better,' said Phœbe, looking at the languid fragile little being, and her depressed air.

'Yes, I am,' she answered, 'in essentials—but, oh! Phœbe, if you could only teach me to get on with Honor.'

'Oh,' said Phœbe, with a tone of disappointment, 'I hoped all was comfortable now.'

'So it ought to be! I am a wretch that it is not; but somehow I get tired to death. I should like it to be my own fault, but with her I always have a sense of *fluffiness*. There is so much figurativeness and dreamy sentiment that one never gets to the firm, clear surface.'

'I thought that her great charm,' said Phœbe. 'It is a pity to be so dull and unimaginative as I am.'

'I like you best as you are! I know what to be at.'

'Besides, her sensibility and poetry are a fund of happy youthfulness. Abroad, her enjoyment was multiplied, because every place was full of associations, lighted up by her fancy.'

'Made unsubstantial by her fluff! No, I cannot like mutton with the wool on! It is a shame,

though, good creature as she is! I only wanted to make out the philosophy of the wearied, worried condition that her conversation is so apt to bring on in me. I can't think it pure wickedness on my own part, for I esteem, and love, and venerate the good soul with all my heart. I say, Phœbe, were you never in an inward rage when she would say she would not *let* some fact be true, for the sake of some mythical, romantic figment? You smile. Own that you have felt it.'

'I have thought of Miss Fennimore's theory, that legends are more veritable exponents of human nature than bare facts.'

'Say it again, Phœbe. It sounds very grand. Whipped cream is a truer exponent of milk than cheese, especially when it tastes of soap-suds. Is that it?'

'It is a much prettier thing, and not near so hard and dry,' said Phœbe; 'but, you see, you are talking in figures after all.'

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'The effect of example. Look here, my dear, the last generation was that of mediævalism, ecclesiology, chivalry, symbolism, whatever you may call it. Married women have worked out of it. It is the middle-aged maids that monopolize it. Ours is that of common sense.'

'I don't know that it is better or prettier,' said Phœbe.

'And it may be worse! But how are the two to live together when there is no natural conformity—only undeserved benefits on one side and gratitude on the other?'

'You will be more at ease when you are stronger and better,' said Phœbe. 'Your brother will make you feel more natural with her.'

'Don't talk of it, Phœbe. Think of the scene those two will get up! And the showing him that terrible little Cockney, Hoeing, as the old woman calls him. If I could only break the neck of his h's before poor Owen hears them.'

'Miss Charlecote did say something of having him here, but she thought you were not strong enough.'

'Justly judged! I shall have enough of him by and by, if I take him out to Canada. Once I used to think that would be deliverance; now it has become nothing but a gigantic trouble!'

'If you are really equal to it, you will not feel it so, when the time comes. Bertha was miserable at the thought of moving, till just when she had come to the right point, and then she grew eager for it.'

It was wonderful how much freshened Lucy was by this brief contact with Phœbe's clear, practical mind; but only for the time. Ever since her arrival at the Holt she had sadly flagged, though making every effort against her depression. There was something almost piteous in her obedience and submission. All the employments once pressed upon her and then spurned, were solicitously resumed; or if Honor remonstrated against them as over-fatiguing, were relinquished in the same spirit of resigned meekness. Her too visible desire to make an onerous atonement pressed with equal weight on both, and the essential want of sympathy rendered the confidences of the one mysteries to the other.

Honora was grieved that her child had only returned to pine and droop, charging much of her melancholy lassitude upon Robert, and waiting on her with solicitude and tenderness that were unhappily only an additional oppression; and all Lucilla's aversion to solitude did not prevent her friend's absence from being a relief. It was all that she could at present desire to be released from the effort of being companionable, and be able to indulge her languor without remark, her wayward appetite without causing distress, and her dejection without caresses, commiseration, or secret imputations on Robert.

Tidings came from Vancouver's Land of her uncle's death by an accident. Long as it was since she had seen him, the loss was deeply felt. She better appreciated what his care of her father had been, and knew better what gratitude he deserved, and it was a sore disappointment that he should not live to see her prove her repentance for all her flightiness and self-will. Moreover, his death, without a son, would enable his nephew to alienate the family estate; and Lucy looked on this as direful shame and humiliation. Still there was something soothing in having a sorrow that could be shared with Miss Charlecote; and the tangible cause for depression and retirement was a positive comfort.

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'Trouble' was the chief dread of her wearied spirit; and though she had exerted herself to devise and work the banners, she could not attempt being present at the grand Forest show, and marvelled to see Honor set off, with twice her years and more than twice her sorrows, yet full of the fresh eagerness of youthful anticipation, and youthful regrets at leaving her behind, and at having nothing to figure at the show!

But vegetables were not the order of that day, the most memorable the Forest had perhaps ever known, since six bold Lancastrian outlaws had there been hung, on the very knoll where the flag of England was always hoisted, superior to the flags of all the villages.

The country population and the exhibitors were all early in the field, and on the watch for the great feature of the day—the Londoners. What cheering rent the air as the first vehicle from the little Forest station appeared, an old stage-coach, clustered within and without by white bibs, tippets, and caps, blue frocks, and grave, demure faces, uncertain whether to be charmed or

frightened at their elevation and reception, and almost dazzled by the bright sunshine and pure air, to their perception absolutely thin, though heavy laden with the scents of new-mown hay and trodden ferns.

The horses are stopped, down springs Mr. Parsons from the box, releases the staid mistress from within, lifts or jumps down the twenty girls, and watches them form in well-accustomed file, their banner at their head, just pausing to be joined by the freight of a rattling omnibus, the very roof laden with the like little Puritan damsels. The conveyances turn back for another load, the procession is conducted slowly away, through the road lined by troops of country children, regarding the costume as the latest London fashion, and holding out many an eager gift of nosegays of foxgloves, marigolds, southernwood, and white pinks. Meanwhile break, cart, fly, van, barouche, gig, cart, and wagon continue in turn to discharge successive loads, twenty children to each responsible keeper. White caps are over! Behold the parish school of St. Wulstan's. Here *is* fashion! Here are hats, polkas, and full short skirts, but pale faces and small limbs. The country mothers cry 'Oh!' and 'Poor little dears, they look very tuly,' and complacently regard their own sturdy, sunburnt offspring, at whose staring eyes and ponderous boots the city mice glance with disdain.

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Endless stream! Here waves a proud blue banner, wrought with a noble tortoiseshell cat; and behind it, each class led by a cat-flag, marches the Whittingtonian line, for once no ragged regiment, but arrayed by their incumbent's three sisters in lilac cotton and straw bonnets, not concealing, however, the pinched and squalid looks of the denizens of the over-crowded lanes and alleys.

That complaint cannot be made of these sixteen wearers of gray frocks and checked jackets. Stunted indeed they are, several with the expressionless, almost featureless, visages of hereditary misery, others with fearfully refined loveliness, but all are plump, well-fed, and at ease. They come from the orphanage of St. Matthew's, under the charge of the two ladies who walk with them, leading two lesser younglings, all but too small to be brought to the festival. Yes, these are the waifs and strays, of home and parents absolutely unknown, whom Robert Fulmort has gathered from the streets—his most hopeful conquest from the realm of darkness.

Here, all neatly, some stylishly dressed, are the St. Wulstan's Young Women's Association, girls from fifteen upwards, who earn their own livelihood in service or by their handiwork, but meet on Sunday afternoons to read, sing, and go to church together, have books lent out for the week, or questions set for those who like them. It is Miss Fennimore who is the nucleus of the band; she sits with them in church, she keeps the books, writes the questions, and leads the singing; and she is walking between her two chief friends, answering their eager and intelligent questions about trees and flowers, and directing their observation.

Boys! boys! boys! Objects in flat caps and little round buttons atop, knee-breeches, and short-tailed coats, funnier to look at than their white-capped sisters, gentlemanly choristers, tidy sons of artisans and warehousemen, ragged half-tamed little street vagabonds, all file past, under curate, schoolmaster or pupil teacher, till the whole multitude is safely deposited in a large mead running into the heart of the Forest, and belonging to the ranger, Sir John Raymond, who has been busy there, with all his family, for the last three days.

Policemen guard the gates from intruders, but all can look over the low hedge at the tents at either end, the cord dividing boy from girl, and the scattered hay, on which the strangers move about, mostly mazed by the strange sights, sounds, and smells, and only the petted orphans venturing to tumble about that curious article upon the ground. Two little sisters, however, evidently transplanted country children, sit up in a corner where they have found some flowers, fondling them and hugging them with ecstasy.

The band strikes up, and, at the appointed signal, grace is said by the archdeacon from the centre, the children are seated on the grass, and 'the nobility, clergy, and gentry' rush to the tents, and emerge with baskets of sandwiches of the largest dimensions, or cans full of Sir John's beer. The Whittingtonians devour as those that have eaten nothing this morning, the Wulstonites as though country air gave great keenness of appetite; the subdued silence of awe passes off, and voices, laughing, and play begin to betray some real enjoyment and familiarity.

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Such as are not too perfectly happy in the revelry of tumbling on the grass are then paraded through the show, to gaze at peas, currants, and potatoes, pyramids of geraniums, and roses peeping through white paper. Thence the younger ones return to play in the field; such of the elder ones as prefer walking are conducted through forest paths to gather flowers, and to obtain a closer view of that oft-described sight, a corn-field. Some of the elder Wulstonians get up a dance, tall girls dancing together with the utmost enjoyment; but at four o'clock the band plays *Dulce Domum*, the captains of twenties count heads and hunt up stragglers, all gather together in their places, plum buns and tea are administered till even these thirsty souls can drink no more. Again the files are marshalled, the banners displayed, and the procession moves towards the little Forest church, a small, low-walled, high-roofed building, enclosed by stately beeches, making a sort of outer cathedral around the little elevation where it stood in its railed-in churchyard.

Two thousand children besides spectators in a building meant for three hundred! How came it to be devised? There is a consultation among the clergy. They go from one portion to another of the well-generalled army, and each division takes up a position on the ground strewn with dry beech leaves; hassocks and mats are brought to the ladies, a desk set at the gate, and a chair for

the archdeacon; the choristers are brought near, and the short out-door service is begun.

How glorious and full the responses, 'as the voice of many waters,' and the chanted Psalms, the beautiful songs of degrees of the 27th of the month, rise with new fulness and vividness of meaning among the tall trees and sunlit foliage. One lesson alone is read, in Charlecote Raymond's fine, powerful voice, and many an eye is filled with tears at the words, 'One Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all,' as he gazes on the troops on troops of young and old, rich and poor, strangers and homeborn, all held together in that great unity, typified by the overshadowing sky, and evidenced by the burst of the Creed from every voice and every heart.

Then follow the Versicles, the Collects, the Thanksgiving, and the Blessing, and in a few warm, kind words the archdeacon calls on all to keep the bond of peace and brotherly love, and bade the strangers bear home with them the thought of the wonderful works of God. Then—

All people that on earth do dwell,
Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice,

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arises from the congregation in all its simple exultant majesty, forcing, as it were, every voice to break forth into singing unless it be choked by heart-swelling.

The last note has died away, but there is a sweet hush, as though lingering still, ere breaking the sense that this is none other than the gate of heaven.

Rattle and rumble, the vehicles are coming! The children rise, and somewhere begins the indispensable cheer. The gentlemen take the lead. 'Three times three for Mr. Fulmort!' 'Three cheers for Sir John Raymond!' 'Three for the Forest show!' Shouting and waving of hats will never cease, the gentlemen are as crazy as the boys, and what will become of the train?

Tumble them in—hoist up the girls while mankind is still vociferous. What's all this, coming in at the omnibus windows? Stand back, child, you don't want to be set down in London! Your nosegay, is it? Here are the prize nosegays, prize potatoes, prize currants, prize everything showering in on the Londoners to display or feast on at home. Many a family will have a first taste of fresh country green meat to-morrow, of such freshness, that is, as it may retain after eight hours of show and five of train. But all is compared! How the little girls hug their flowers. If any nosegays reach London alive, they will be cherished to their last hour, and maybe the leaves will live in prayer-books for many a year.

Poor little things! It has been to them apparently a rather weary and oppressive pleasure, too strange for the most part to be thoroughly enjoyed; but it will live in their memories for many a day, and as time goes on, will clear itself from the bewilderment, till it become one of the precious days that make gems on the thread of life.

Mervyn! Where has he been all this time? True, he once said he would see nothing of it, and seems to have kept his word. He did not even acknowledge the cheers for Mr. Fulmort.

Is not something visible behind the broad smooth bole of yonder beech tree? Have Mervyn and Cecily been there all the time of the evening service?

It is a remarkable fact, that though nobody has told anybody, every person who is curious, and many who are not, know who is to be Mrs. Fulmort of Beauchamp.

CHAPTER XXVII

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When will you marry?
Say the bells of St. Mary.
When I get rich,
Say the bells of Shoreditch.
When will that be?
Say the bells of Stepney.
I do not know,
Says the great bell of Bow.—*Nursery Rhyme*

There was some truth in Lucilla's view of herself and Honor as belonging to two distinct classes of development. Honor had grown up among those who fed on Scott, Wordsworth, and Fouqué, took their theology from the *British Critic*, and their taste from Pugin; and moulded their opinions and practice on the past. Lucilla and Phœbe were essentially of the new generation, that of Kingsley, Tennyson, Ruskin, and the *Saturday Review*. Chivalry had given way to common sense, romance to realism, respect for antiquity to pitying patronage, the past to the future. Perhaps the present has lost in reverence and refinement as much as it has gained in clearness and confidence! Lucilla represented reaction, therefore her attitude was antagonistic; Phœbe was the child of the newer system, therefore she loved the elder one, and sought out the likenesses to, rather than the differences from, her own tone of thought. And well was it that she had never let slip her hold on that broad, unchanging thread of truth, the same through all changes, making faith and principle one, though the developments in practice and shades of thought shake off the essential wisdom on which it grew, only to adopt some more fatal aberration of their own!

Thus standing between the two, Phœbe was a great help to both in understanding each other, and they were far more at ease when she was with them. In October, all three went to

Woolstone-lane for a brief stay. Honor wished that the physician should see Lucilla before the winter, and Phœbe was glad to avail herself of the opportunity of choosing furniture and hiring servants for her new establishment, free from the interference of Lady Bannerman, who was of course at Brighton.

She had been obliged to let her sisters go to Sutton without her, as the little parsonage had not room for three guests besides Lieschen, who was more indispensable to Maria than even herself, and both the others were earnestly set upon accepting the invitation. Cecily silenced her scruples by begging, as a proof of acceptance as a sister, that she might be intrusted with them, and promising that in her own quiet home, whence most of the family had been launched into life, they should meet with none of the excitements of merry Moorcroft; and Phœbe was obliged to resign her charge for these few weeks, and trust from Bertha's lively letters that all was well.

Another cause which made Honor and Lucy anxious to be in London was the possibility of Owen's arrival. He had last been heard of on the shores of Lake Superior, when he spoke of returning as soon as the survey for a new line of railway should have been completed, and it was not unlikely that he might come even before his letter. News would await him that he would regret as much as did his sister. Uncle Kit's death had enabled Charles Charteris, or rather his creditors, to advertise Castle Blanch for sale, and Lucilla, who had a more genuine affection for the place than had any of the natives, grieved extremely over the family disgrace that was causing it to pass into other hands.

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She had an earnest desire to take advantage of the display of the house and grounds to pay the scenes of her youth one last visit. The vehemence of this wish was her first recurrence to her old strength of will, and Honora beheld it as a symptom of recovery, though dreading the long and fatiguing day of emotion. Yet it might be taken as another token of improvement that she had ceased from that instinctive caution of feebleness which had made her shrink from all exertion or agitation.

Her chest was pronounced to be in a satisfactory state, her health greatly improved; and as there was no longer need for extra precaution, the three ladies set forth together on the first fine day.

The Indian summer was in full glory, every wood arrayed in brightness; and as they drove from the Wrapworth Station, the banks of the river were surpassingly lovely, brown, red, and olive, illuminated by sprays of yellow, like fireworks, and contrasting with the vivid green of the meadows and dark blue water. Honor recollected the fairy boat that once had floated there, and glancing at the pale girl beside her, could not but own the truth of the similitude of the crushed fire-fly; yet the fire of those days had scorched, not lighted; and it had been the mirth that tendeth to heaviness.

Cilla was gazing, with all her soul in her eyes, in silence. She was trying to revive the sense of home that once had made her heart bound at the first glimpse of Wrapworth; but her spirit leapt up no more. The familiar scene only impressed the sense of homelessness, and of the severance of the last tie to her father's parish, her mother's native place. Honor asked if she would stop in the village. 'Not yet,' she said; 'let us have the Castle first.'

At the next turn they overtook Mr. Prendergast, and he was instantly at the carriage-door, exacting a willing promise of taking luncheon with him on the way back, a rest for which Honor was thankful, sure as she was that this visit was costing Lucy more than she had anticipated.

Without a word, she beheld the green space of park, scattered with groups of glowing trees, the elms spangled with gold, the maples blushing themselves away, the parterre a gorgeous patchwork of scarlet, lilac, and orange, the Virginian creeper hanging a crimson mantle on the cloister. There was something inexpressibly painful in the sight of all this beauty, unheeded and cast away by the owners, and displayed as a matter of bargain and sale. Phœbe thought of the strange, uncomfortable dream that it had been to her when she had before looked and wondered at the scene before her. She retraced Robert's restless form in every window, and thought how little she had then augured the fruit of what he had suffered.

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The rooms were opened, and set out for inspection. Honor and Phœbe made it their duty to occupy the chattering maid, a stranger to Lucilla, and leave her free to move through the apartments, silent and very white, as if it were a sacred duty to stand wherever she had stood, to gaze at whatever her eyes had once met.

Presently she stood still, in the dining-room, her hand grasping the back of a chair, as she looked up to a large picture of three children, two boys and a girl, fancifully dressed, and playing with flowers. The waxen complexion, fair hair, and blue eyes of the girl were almost her own.

'This to be sold?' she said, turning round, and speaking for the first time.

'O yes, ma'am!—everything, unreservedly. That picture has been much admired—by the late Sir Thomas Lawrence, ma'am—the children of the late General Sir Christopher Charteris.'

Lucilla, whiter than before, walked quickly away. In a few seconds Phœbe followed, and found her leaning on the balustrade of the terrace, her breathing heavily oppressed; but she smiled coldly and sternly, and tightened a stiff, cold grasp on Phœbe's arm as she said—

'Honor has her revenge, Phœbe! These are the kindred for whom I broke from her! Well, if Charles sells his birthright and his own father, I don't know how I can complain of his selling my mother!'

'But, Lucy, listen. Miss Charlecote was asking about the agent. I am sure she means to try to get it for you.'

'I dare say. It is right that I should bear it!'

'And the maid said that there had been a gentleman speaking about it, and trying to secure it. She thought he had written to Mr. Charteris about it.'

'What gentleman?' and Lucy was ready to spring back to inquire.

'Miss Charlecote asked, and I believe it was Mr. Prendergast!'

There was a bright, though strange flickering of pleasure and pain over Cilla's face, and her eyelids quivered as she said, 'Yes—yes—of course; but he must not—he must not do it! He cannot afford it! I cannot let him!'

'Perhaps your cousin only needed to be reminded.'

'I have no hope of him. Besides, he cannot help himself; but at least—I say, Phœbe, tell Honor that it is kindness itself in her; but I can't talk about it to her—'

And Lucilla's steps sprang up-stairs, as desirous to escape the sight and speech of all.

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After the melancholy round of deserted bedrooms, full of bitter recollections, Lucilla again descended first, and at the door met the curate. After a few words, she turned, and said, 'Mr. Prendergast would row us down to the vicarage, if you liked.'

'Indeed, my dear,' said Honor, unwillingly, 'I am afraid of the cold on the water for you.'

'Then pray let me walk across the park!' she said imploringly; and Miss Charlecote yielded rather than try her submission too severely, though dreading her over-fatigue, and set off with Phœbe in the fly.

'You are sure it is not too far for you?' asked the curate.

'Quite. You know I always used to fly upon Wrapworth turf.' After some silence—'I know what you have been doing,' she said, with a choking voice.

'About the picture? I am sorry you do.'

'It is of no use for you to know that your cousin has no more heart than a lettuce run to seed.'

'When I knew that before, why may I not know that there are others not in the same case?' she said, with full heart and eyes.

'Because the sale must take place, and the purchaser may be a brute, so it may end in disappointment.'

'It can't end in disappointment.'

'It may be far beyond my means,' continued the curate, as if he had been answering her importunities for a new doll.

'That I know it is,' she said. 'If it can be done at all, the doing of it may be left to Miss Charlecote—it is an expiation I owe to her generous spirit.'

'You would rather she did it than I?' he asked, mortified.

'Nay—didn't I tell you that I let her do it as an expiation. Does not that prove what it costs me?'

'Then why not—' he began.

'Because,' she interrupted, 'in the first place, you have no idea of the price of Lawrence's portraits; and, in the second, it is so natural that you should be kind to me that it costs even my proud spirit—just nothing at all'—and again she looked up to him with beamy, tearful eyes, and quivering, smiling lip.

'What, it is still a bore to live with Miss Charlecote,' cried he, in his rough eagerness.

'Don't use such words,' she answered, smiling. 'She is all kindness and forgiveness, and what can it be but my old vixen spirit that makes this hard to bear?'

'Cilla!' he said.

'Well?'

'Cilla!'

'Well?'

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'I have a great mind to tell you why I came to Southminster.'

'To look at a living?'

'To look at you. If I had found you pining and oppressed, I had thought of asking if you could put up with your father's old friend.'

She looked with eyes of wonder, drew her arm away, and stood still, partly bewildered. 'You didn't?' she said, half in interrogation.

'I saw my mistake; you were too young and gay. But, Cilla,' he added, more tremulously, 'if you do wish for a home—'

'Don't, don't!' she cried; 'I can't have you talk as if I only wanted a home!'

'And indeed I have none as yet,' he said. 'But do you indeed mean that you could think of it?'—and he came nearer.

'It! Nonsense! Of you!' she vehemently exclaimed. 'How could you think of anything else?'

'Cilla,' he said, in great agitation, 'let me know what you are saying. Don't drive me crazy when it is not in the nature of things you should mean it!'

'Why not?' asked Lucilla. 'It is only too good for me.'

'Is it true, then?' he said, as he took both her hands in his. 'Is it true that you understand me, and are willing to be—to be my own—darling charge?'

'Oh, it would be such rest!'

It was as if the storm-tossed bird was folding its weary wing in perfect calm and confidence. Nor could he contain his sudden joy, but spoke incoherent words, and well-nigh wept over her.

'How did you come to think of it?' exclaimed she, as, the first gush of feeling over, they walked on arm-in-arm.

'I thought of it from the moment when I hoped I might be a resource, a comforter at least.'

'Not before?' was the rather odd question.

'No. The place was forlorn enough without you; but I was not such a fool as to think of a young beauty, and all that.'

'*All that* meaning my wickedness,' said Lucilla. 'Tell me again. You always did like the sprite even when it was wicked, only you were too good and right-minded.'

'Too old and too poor.'

'She is old and poor now,' said Cilla; 'worn out and washed out into a mere rag. And you like her the better?'

'Not washed out!' he said, as her countenance flushed into more than its wonted loveliness. 'I used to wish you hadn't such a face when those insolent fellows talked of you—but you will get up your looks again when I have the care of you. The first college living—there are some that can't choose but drop before long! The worst is, I am growing no younger!'

'Ah! but I am growing older!' she cried, triumphantly. 'All women from twenty-five to forty are of the same age as all men from thirty to fifty. We are of just the same standing, you see!' p. 489

'Seventeen years between us!'

'Nothing at all, as you will see when I put on my cap, and look staid.'

'No, no; I can't spare all that yellow hair.'

'Yellow indeed! if you don't know better what to call it, the sooner it is out of sight the better.'

'Why, what do you call it?'

'Flaxen, to be sure—*blonde cendrée*, if you like it better—that is the colour of tow and ashes!'

She was like a playful kitten for the next quarter of a mile, her prettiest sauciness returning in the exuberant, confiding gladness with which she clung to the affection that at length satisfied her spirit; but gravity came back to her as they entered the village.

'Poor Wrapworth!' she said, 'you will soon pass to strangers! It is strange to know that, yet to feel the old days returning for which I have pined ever since we were carried away from home and Mr. Pendy.'

'Yes, nothing is wanting but that we could remain here.'

'Never mind! We will make a better Wrapworth for one another, free from the stains of my Castle Blanch errors and sorrows! I am even glad of the delay. I want a little time to be good with poor dear Honor, now that I have heart and spirit to be good.'

'And I grudge every week to her! I declare, Cilla, you make me wish evil to my neighbour.'

'Then follow my example, and be content with this present gladness.'

'Ha! ha! I wonder what they'll say at Southminster. Didn't I row them for using you so abominably? I have not been near them since!'

'More shame for you! Sarah is my best correspondent, and no one ever did me so much good as

Mrs. Prendergast.'

'I didn't ask her to do you good!'

'You ought to have done so then; for I should not be the happy woman I am now if she had not done me good because she could not help it! I hope they won't take it to heart.'

'I hope they will!'

'What?'

'Turning you out?'

'Oh, I meant your throwing yourself away on a broken-down governess! There—let us have done with nonsense. Come in this way.'

It was through the churchyard, past the three graves, which were as trim as if Lucilla had daily tended them. 'Thank you,' she said; then gazed in silence, till with a sigh she exclaimed:—

'Poor Edna! Monument of my faults! What perverse determination of mine it was that laid her here!'

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'It was your generous feeling.'

'Do not miscall and embellish my perverse tyranny, as much to defy the Charterises as to do her justice. I am more ashamed now that I have the secret of your yielding!' she added, with downcast eyes, yet a sudden smile at the end.

'We will take that child home and bring him up,' said Mr. Prendergast.

'If his father wishes it, it will be right; not as if it were the pleasantest of charges. Thank you,' said Cilla. 'Three o'clock! Poor Honor, she must be starving!'

'What about her?' stammered Mr. Prendergast, hanging back shyly. 'Must she be told?'

'Not now,' said Lucilla, with all her alert readiness. 'I will tell her to-night. You will come in the first day you can!'

'To-morrow! Every possible day.'

Honor had truly been uneasy, fearing that Lucilla was walking, sitting down, or fasting imprudently; but the brilliant colour, the joyous eyes, and lively manner spoke wonderfully for the effects of native air. Mr. Prendergast had become more absent and awkward than ever, but his extra shyness passed unremarked, and Lucilla's tact and grace supplied all deficiencies without obtrusiveness. Always at home in the vicarage, she made none of her former bantering display of familiarity, but only employed it quietly to secure the guests having what they wanted, and to awaken the host to his duties, when he forgot that any one save herself needed attention.

She was carried off before the river fog should arise, and her abstracted silence all the way home was not wondered at; although Phœbe, sitting opposite to her, was at a loss to read the furtive smiles that sometimes unclosed her lips, or the calm, pensive look of perfect satisfaction on her features; and Honor could not comprehend her entire absence of fatigue after so trying a day, and wondered whether it were really the old complaint—want of feeling.

At night, Honor came to her room, and began—'My dear, I want to make a little explanation to you, if you are not tired.'

'Oh! no—I had a little explanation to make to you,' she answered, with a flush and a smile.

'Perhaps it may be on the same subject,' and as Cilla half laughed, and shook her head, she added—'I meant to tell you that long ago—from the time I had the Holt—I resolved that what remained of my income after the duties of my property were fulfilled, should make a fund for you and Owen. It is not much, but I think you would like to have the option of anticipating a part, in case it should be possible to rescue that picture.'

'Dear, dear Honor,' exclaimed Cilla; 'how very kindly you are doing it! Little did I think that Charles's heartlessness would have brought me so much joy and kindness.'

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'Then you would like it to be done,' said Honor, delighted to find that she had been able so to administer a benefit as to excite neither offence nor resignation. 'We will take care that the purchaser learns the circumstances, and he can hardly help letting you have it at a fair valuation.'

'Thanks, thanks, dear Honor,' repeated Lucy; 'and now for *my* explanation. Mr. Prendergast has asked me to marry him.'

Had it been herself, Honor could not have been more astounded.

'My child! impossible! Why, he might be your father! Is it that you want a home, Lucy? Can you not stay with me?'

'I can and I will for the present, Sweetest Honey,' said Cilly, caressingly drawing her arm round her. 'I want to have been good and happy with you; but indeed, indeed I can't help his being more to me!'

'He is a very excellent man,' began bewildered Honor; 'but I cannot understand—'

'His oddity? That's the very thing which makes him my own, and nobody else's, Mr. Pendency! Listen, Honor. Sit down, you don't half know him, nor did I know my own heart till now. He came to us, you know, when my father's health began to break after my mother's death. He was quite young, only a deacon; he lived in our house, and he was, with all his dear clumsiness, a daughter to my father, a nurse to us. I could tell you of such beautiful awkward tendernesses! How he used to help me with my sums—and tie Owen's shoes, and mince his dinner for him—and spare my father all that was possible! I am sure you know how we grieved after him.'

'Yes, but—'

'And now I know that it was *he* that I cared for at Wrapworth. With him I never was wild and naughty as I was with others, though I did not know—oh! Honor, if I had but known—that he always cared for the horrid little thing I was, I could not have gone on so; but he was too good and wise, even while he *did* love me, to think of *this*, till I had been tamed and come back to you! I am sure I can't be so naughty now, since he has thought of me!'

'Lucy, dearest, I am glad to see you so happy, but it is very strange to me. It is such a sudden change,' said Honor.

'No change! I never cared for any one half as much!'

'Lucy!' confounded at her apparent oblivion.

'It is true,' said Lucy, sitting down by her. 'Perhaps I thought I did, but if the other had ever been as much to me, I could never have used him as I did! Oh, Honor, when a person is made of the stuff I am, it is very hard to tell which is one's heart, and which is one's flirting-machine! for the other thing does simulate all the motions, and feel real true pain! But I know now that Mr. Pendency was safe in my rear heart of hearts all the time, though I never guessed it, and thought he was only a sort of father; but you see that was why I was always in awe of getting under Robert's dominion, and why I survived his turning me off, and didn't at all wish him to bring it on again.'

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'No, that you did not,' said Honor, in a cheered voice, as if acquitting her.

'And I am sure if Mr. Prendergast only looked like using me after my deserts, as *he* did, it would not be only a demi-decline that I should get into,' said Lucilla, her eyes full of tears. 'Oh! Honor, think of his care of my father! Kiss me and wish me joy in my father's name, and like him; for when you know him, you will see he is the only person in the wide world to whom you could safely trust your little torment!'

Honor could not but be carried along to give the hearty kiss and motherly congratulation as they were sought, and she saw that she must believe what Lucy said of her own feelings, incomprehensible though they were. But she regretted to hear of the waiting for a college living, and at the first impulse wished she had heard of this attachment before Hiltonbury's fate had been fixed.

'For shame, Honor, as if you ought not to respect Hiltonbury too much to tack it to my petticoat! But at least thank you, for if you could once think of committing Hiltonbury to him, you must like it for me.'

'I must like what is so evidently well for you, my child! Will you tell Phœbe?'

'Not till we go home, I think,' said Cilla, with a blush; and, as if to avoid farther discussion, she bade Honora good night. Decidedly, she wished Robert to feel more than she would like to see, or should he betray no feeling, she had rather not be aware of it.

But such news was already in town as to put to flight, for a time at least, the last remnants of coquetry.

Robert was in the house early in the morning, and called Miss Charlecote to speak to him in the study. He had a packet of letters in his hand, of which he gave one to herself, a long one in Owen's writing, but unfinished and undirected.

'Lakeville, Newcastle District, August 14th.

'MY DEAR HONOR,

'There is no saying how much I rejoice that I can write to you and Lucy again under the same roof. I hope soon to see you together again, and revive old times, but we are delayed by the discovery that the swamp lying full in the Grand Ottawa and Superior Line is impracticable, and would not only be the death of all the navvies employed thereon, but would swallow bodily the funds of the G. O. and S. Company. So we are carrying our survey in other directions, before making out our report, after which I hope to be permanently engaged on the construction. This will give me three months to spend at home, in knitting up old links, and considering how to dispose of my poor little encumbrance till I can set him to make his way here. You or Lucy would perhaps look out for some lady who takes Indian children, or the like. I am my own man now, and can provide the wherewithal, for my personal expenses are small, and engineering is well paid. Lucy must not think of bringing him out, for even at her fastest the Far West would be no place for her. Let her think of Glendalough, and realize that if she

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were here she would look back on it as a temple of comfort, civilization, and civility, and this place is the last attempt at social habitation for 200 and odd miles. It stands on a lake of its own, with an Indian name, "which no man can speak and no man can spell." It is colonial to the highest degree, and inhabited by all denominations, chiefly agreed in worshipping us as priests of the G. O. and S. Line, which is to make their fortune; and for their manners, least said soonest mended, though there are some happy exceptions, French Canadian, Lowland Scots, etc. and a wiry hard-working parson, whose parish extends nearly to Lake Superior, and whose remaining aroma of University is refreshing. There is also a very nice young lad, whose tale may be a moving example of what it is to come out here expecting to find in the backwoods Robinson Crusoe's life and that of the Last of the Mohicans combined. That is, it was not he, but his father, Major Randolph, an English officer, who, knowing nothing of farming, less of Canada, and least of all of speculation, got a grant of land, where he speculated only to lose, and got transferred to this forlorn tract, only to shiver with ague and die of swamp fever. During the twenty-five years of this long agony, he had contrived to have two wives, the first of whom left this son, whom he educated as a scholar, intending to finish him in England when the tide should turn, but whereas it never did, he must needs get a fresh partner into the whirlpool, a Yankee damsel out of a boarding-house. By the time she had had a couple of children, he died, and the whole weight remains bound about young Randolph's neck, tying him down to work for dear life in this doleful spot, without a farthing of capital, no stock, no anything. I came upon the clearing one day in the course of my surveying, and never did I see *Gone to the Dogs* more clearly written on any spot; the half-burnt or overthrown trees lying about overgrown with wild vines and raspberries, the snake fence broken down, the log-house looking as if a touch would upset it, and nothing hopeful but a couple of patches of maize and potatoes, and a great pumpkin climbing up a stump. My horse and myself were done up, so I halted, and was amazed at the greeting I received from the youth, who was hard at work on his hay, single-handed, except for the two children tumbling in it. The lady in her rocking-chair was contrast enough to make me heartily glad to find that she was his stepmother, not his wife. Since that, I have seen a good deal of him; he comes to Lakeville, five miles across the bush and seven across the lake, to church on Sunday, and spends the day with the parson, and Mr. Currie has given him work in our press of business, and finds him so effective, that he wants to take him on for good; but this can't be while he has got these three stones about his neck, for whom he works harder and lives worse than any day-labourer at Hiltonbury; regular hand to mouth, no chance of making a start, unless the Company will fortunately decide on the line I am drawing through the heart of his house, which will force them to buy him out of it. I go out to-morrow to mark the said line for Mr. Currie to report upon, and will finish my letter to travel with said report.

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'Aug. 21st.—Thanks to the Fire-King, he has done for the ancient log-house, though next time he mounts his "hot-copper filly," I do not desire a second neck-and-neck race with him. A sprain of the leg, and contusion (or confusion) of the head, are the extent of the damage received, and you will say that it is cheap, considering all things. I had done my 203 miles of marking, and was coming back on my last day's journey, debating whether to push on to Lakeville that night, camp out, or get a shake-down at Randolph's, bringing my own provender, for they live on hominy and milk, except for what he can shoot or catch. It was so dark that I had nearly fixed on sleeping in the bush, when it struck me that there must be an uncommonly fine aurora, but getting up a little rising ground where the trees were thinner, I observed it was to the south-west, not the north. That way there lies prairie land, at this season one ocean of dry bents, fit to burn like tinder, so that one spark would set fifty square miles alight at once. All the sky in that quarter was the colour of glowing copper, but the distance was so enormous that danger never occurred to me till I saw the deer scampering headlong, the birds awake and flying, and my horse trembling and wild to be off. Then I remembered that the wind was full from that direction, and not a bit of water between, nor all the way to the Lakeville lake. I never knew my beast's pace on the Kingston road what it was through that track, all the rustling and scuttling of the beasts and birds sounding round us, the glare gaining on us, and the scent of smoke beginning to taint the wind. There was Randolph's clearing at last, lonesome and still as ever, and a light in the window. Never was it so hard to pull in a horse; however, I did so. He was still up, reading by a pine torch, and in five minutes more the woman and her children were upon the horse, making for the lake. Randolph took his axe, and pocketed a book or two, and we dashed off together for a long arm of swamp that he knew of, running out from the lake. When we got to the other end of the clearing, I thought it was all up with us. The wall of red roaring flame had reached the other side, and the flame was leaping from the top of one pine to another, making them one shape of quivering red, like Christmas evergreens in the fire, a huge tree perhaps standing up all black against the lurid light, another crashing down like thunder, the ribbon of flame darting up like a demon, the whole at once standing forth a sheet of blazing light. I verily believe I should have stood on, fascinated with the horror and majesty of the sight, and feeling it vain to try to escape, when the burning wings were spreading to enclose the clearing and us with it, but Randolph urged me on, and we plunged through the bush at the best speed we could make, the smoke rolling after us, and the heat glowing like a furnace, so as to consume all power out of us. It was hell itself pursuing after us, and roaring for his

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prey, the trees coming crashing down, and shaking the earth under our feet, the flame absolutely running on before us upon the dry grass and scrub, and the scorching withering every drop of moisture from us, though not ten minutes before, we had been streaming at every pore.

'I saw green reeds before us, heard Randolph cry out, "Thank God," and thought I was plunging after him, when I found myself on the ground, and the branches of a hemlock covering me. Happily they were but the lesser boughs, and not yet alight; and at his own desperate peril, Randolph came back with his axe, and cut them off, then dragged me after him into the mud. Never bath more welcome! We had to dispute it with buffaloes, deer, all the beasts of the wood, tame and cowed with terror, and through them we floundered on, the cold of the water to our bodies making the burning atmosphere the more intolerable round our heads. At last we came to an island, where we fell upon the reeds so much spent that it was long before we found that our refuge was shared by a bear and by Randolph's old cow, to the infinite amaze of the bull-frogs. The Fire King was a hundred yards off; and a fierce shower, brought from other parts by his unwarrantable doings, began to descend, and finally quenched him in such smoke that we had to lie on our faces to avoid stifling. When the sun arose, there was Lakeville in its woods on one side, on the other the blackest desolation conceivable. The population were all astir. Mrs. Randolph had arrived safely, and Mr. Currie was about to set forth in search of my roasted remains, when they perceived the signals of distress that we were making, after Randolph had done gallant battle with the bear in defence of the old cow. He is a first-rate hunter, and despatched the fellow with such little aid as I could give, with a leg not fit to stand upon; and when the canoes came off to fetch us, he would not leave the place till he had skinned the beast. My leg is unserviceable at present, and all my bones feel the effect of the night in the swamp, so I am to lay by, make the drawings, and draw up the report, while Mr. Currie and Randolph do my work over again, all my marks having been effaced by his majesty the Fire King, and the clearing done to our hand. If I could only get rid of the intolerable parching and thirst, and the burning of my brains! I should not wonder if I were in for a touch of swamp fever.'

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Here Owen's letter broke off; and Honor begged in alarm for what Robert evidently had in reserve. He had received this letter to her enclosed in one from Mr. Currie, desiring him to inform poor young Sandbrook's friends of his state. By his account, Owen's delay and surrender of his horse had been an act of gallant self-devotion, placing him in frightfully imminent danger, whence only the cool readiness of young Randolph had brought him off, apparently with but slight hurts from the fall of the tree, and exposure to the night air of the heated swamp. He had been left at Lakeville in full confidence of restoration after a week's rest, but on returning from Lake Superior, Mr. Currie found him insensible, under what was at first taken for an aggravated access of the local fever, until, as consciousness returned, it became evident that the limbs on the left side were powerless. Between a litter and water transport, the sufferer was conveyed to Montreal, where the evil was traced to concussion of the brain from the blow from the tree, the more dangerous because unfelt at first, and increased by application to business. The injury of the head had deprived the limbs of motion and sensation, and the medical men thought the case hopeless, though likely to linger through many stages of feebleness of mind and body. Under these circumstances, Mr. Currie, being obliged to return home himself, and unable to leave the poor young man in such a condition among strangers, had decided on bringing him to England, according to his own most eager desire, as the doctors declared that the voyage could do no harm, and might be beneficial. Mr. Currie wrote from Quebec, where he had taken his passage by a steamer that would follow his letter in four days' time, and he begged Robert to write to him at Liverpool stating what should be done with the patient, should he be then alive. His mind, he said, was clear, but weak, and his memory, from the moment of his fall till nearly the present time, a blank. He had begged Mr. Currie to write to his sister or to Miss Charlecote, but the engineer had preferred to devolve the communication upon Mr. Fulmort. Of poor Owen he spoke with much feeling, in high terms of commendation, saying that he was a valuable friend and companion as well as a very right hand in his business, and that his friends might be assured that he (Mr. Currie) would watch over him as if he were his own son, and that his temporary assistant, Mr. Randolph, was devoted to him, and had nursed him most tenderly from the first.

'Four days' time,' said Honor, when she had taken in the sense of these appalling tidings. 'We can be at Liverpool to meet him. Do not object, Robert. Nothing else will be bearable to either his sister or me.'

'It was of his sister that I was thinking,' said Robert. 'Do you think her strong enough for the risks of a hurried journey, with perhaps a worse shock awaiting her when the steamer comes in? Will you let me go alone? I have sent orders to be telegraphed for as soon as the *Asia* is signalled, and if I go at once, I can either send for you if needful, or bring him to you. Will you not let me?'

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He spoke with persuasive authority, and Honora half yielded. 'It may be better,' she said, 'it *may*. A man may do more for him there than we could, but I do not know whether poor Lucy will let you, or—' (as a sudden recollection recurred to her) 'whether she ought.'

'Poor Owen is my friend, my charge,' said Robert.

'I believe you are right, you kind Robin,' said Honor. 'The journey might be a great danger for

Lucy, and if I went, I know she would not stay behind. But I still think she will insist on seeing him.'

'I believe not,' said Robert; 'at least, if she regard submission as a duty.'

'Oh, Robin, you do not know. Poor child, how am I to tell her?'

'Would you like for me to do so?' said Robert, in the quiet matter-of-course way of one to whom painful offices had become well-nigh natural.

'You? O Robin, if you—' she said, in some confusion, but at the moment the sound of the visitor's bell startled her, and she was about to take measures for their exclusion, when looking from the window, she saw that the curate of Wrapworth had already been admitted into the court. The next moment she had met him in the hall, and seizing his hand, exclaimed in a hurried whisper, 'I know! I know! But there is a terrible stroke hanging over my poor child. Come in and help us to tell her!'

She drew him into the study, and shut the door. The poor man's sallowness had become almost livid, and in half-sobbing words he exclaimed—'Is it so? Then give her to me at once. I will nurse her to the last, or save her! I knew it was only her being driven out to that miserable governess life that has been destroying her!' and he quite glared upon poor innocent Honor as a murderess.

'Mr. Prendergast, I do not know what you mean. Lucilla is nearly well again. It is only that we fear to give her some bad news of her brother.'

'Her brother! Is that all?' said the curate, in a tone of absolute satisfaction. 'I beg your pardon, Miss Charlecote; I thought I saw a doctor here, and you were going to sentence my darling.'

'You do see Robert Fulmort, whom I thought you knew.'

'So I do,' said Mr. Prendergast, holding out his hand. 'I beg your pardon for having made such a fool of myself; but you see, since I came to an understanding with that dear child, I have not thought of anything else, nor known what I was about.'

Robert could not but look inquiringly at Miss Charlecote.

'Yes,' she faltered, 'Mr. Prendergast has told you—what I could not—what I had not leave to say.'

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'Yes,' put in Mr. Prendergast, in his overflowing felicity, 'I see you think it a shocking match for such a little gem of beauty as that; but you young men should have been sharper. There's no accounting for tastes;' and he laughed awkwardly.

'I am heartily glad,' said Robert—and voice, look, and grasp of the hand conveyed the fullest earnestness—'I am exceedingly rejoiced that the dear little friend of all my life should be in such keeping! I congratulate you most sincerely, Mr. Prendergast. I never saw any one so well able to appreciate her.'

That is over, thought Honor; how well he has stood it! And now she ventured to recall them to the subject in hand, which might well hang more heavily on her heart than the sister's fate! It was agreed that Lucilla would bear the intelligence best from Mr. Prendergast, and that he could most easily restrain her desire for going to Liverpool. He offered himself to go to meet Owen, but Honor could not quite forgive the '*Is that all?*' and Robert remained constant to his former view, that he, as friend both of Owen and Mr. Currie, would be the most effective. So therefore it stood, and Lucilla was called out of the drawing-room to Mr. Prendergast, as Honor and Robert entered it. It was almost in one burst that Phœbe learnt the brother's accident and the sister's engagement, and it took her several moments to disentangle two such extraordinary events.

'I am very glad,' repeated Robert, as he felt rather than saw that both ladies were regarding him with concealed anxiety; 'it is by far the happiest and safest thing for her! It is an infinite relief to my mind.'

'I can't but be glad,' said Honor; 'but I don't know how to forgive her!'

'That I can do very easily,' said Robert, with a smile on his thin lips that was very reassuring, 'not only as a Christian, but as I believe nothing ever did me so much good. My fancy for her was an incentive which drew me on to get under better influences, and when we threw each other overboard, I could do without it. She has been my best friend, not even excepting you, Miss Charlecote; and as such I hope always to be allowed to regard her. There, Phœbe, you have had an exposition of my sentiments once for all, and I hope I may henceforth receive credit for sincerity.'

Miss Charlecote felt that, under the name of Phœbe, this last reproof was chiefly addressed to her; and perhaps Phœbe understood the same, for there was the slightest of all arch smiles about her full lip and downcast eye; and though she said nothing, her complete faith in her brother's explanation, and her Christian forgiveness of Lucilla, did not quench a strong reserve of wondering indignation at the mixed preferences that had thus strangely settled down upon the old curate.

She followed her brother from the room, to ask whether she had better not leave Woolstone-lane in the present juncture. But there was nowhere for her to go; Beauchamp was shut up, the cottage being painted, Sutton barely held the three present guests, and her elder sister from home. 'You cannot go without making a disturbance,' said Robert; 'besides, I think you ought to

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stay with Miss Charlecote. Lucilla is of no use to her; and this unlucky Owen is more to her than all the world besides. You may comfort her.'

Phœbe had no more to urge. She could not tell her brother that looks and words of Owen Sandbrook, and in especial his last farewell, which she was at that time too young and simple to understand, had, with her greater experience, risen upon her in an aspect that made her desirous of avoiding him. But, besides the awkwardness of such recollections at all, they seemed cruel and selfish when the poor young man was coming home crippled and shattered, only to die, so she dismissed them entirely, and set herself to listen and sympathize.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Old isle and glorious, I have heard
Thy fame across the sea,
And know my fathers' homes are thine,
My fathers rest with thee.—*A Cleveland Lore*

'R. M. Fulmort to Miss Charlecote.—The carriage to meet the 6 P.M. train.'

That was all the intelligence that reached Woolstone-lane till the court-gates were opened, and Robert hurried in before the carriage. 'Much better,' he said 'only he is sadly knocked up by the journey. Do not show yourselves till he is in his room. Which is it?'

Honora and Lucilla hastened to point it out, then drew back, and waited, Honor supporting herself against the wall, pale and breathless, Lucy hanging over the balusters, fevered with suspense. She heard the tread, the quick, muttered question and answer; she saw the heavy, helpless weight carried in; and as the steps came upwards, she was pulled back into the sitting-room by Honor, at first almost by force, then with passive, dejected submission, and held tight to the back of a chair, her lip between her teeth, as though withholding herself by force from springing forward as the familiar voice, weak, weary, and uncertain, met her ear.

At length Robert beckoned; and she flew at first, then slackened her pace, awestruck. Her brother lay on the bed, with closed eyes. The form was larger, more manly and robust than what she had known, the powerful framework rendering the wreck more piteous, and the handsome dark beard and moustache, and crisp, thick curls of hair made the straight, well-cut features resemble an old picture of a cavalier; nor had the bright, sunburnt complexion lost the hue of health; so that the whole gave the idea of present suffering rather than abiding illness. He seemed to her like a stranger, till at her step he looked up, and his dark gray eyes were all himself as he held out his hand and fondly spoke her name. She hung over him, restraining her exclamations with strong force; and even in the midst of her embrace he was saying, 'Honor! Is Honor here?'

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Trembling with emotion, Honor bent to kiss his brow, and felt his arm thrown about her neck, and the hairy lips kissing either cheek just as when, smooth and babyish, they had sought her motherly caress. 'May I come home?' he asked. 'They brought me without your leave!'

'And you could not feel sure of your Sweet Honey's welcome?'

He smiled his old smile of fondness, but dimmed by pain and languor; and the heavy lids sank over his eyes, but to be at once raised. 'Lucy! Home, Honor! It is all I wanted,' he said; 'you will be good to me, such as I am.'

'We will sit close to you, my dear; only you cannot talk—you must rest.'

'Yes. My head is very bad—my eyes ache,' he said, turning his head from the light, with closed eyes, and hand over them; but then he added—'One thing first—where is he?'

'Your little boy?' said Lucilla. 'Do you wish to see him? I will call him.'

'No, no, I could not;' and his brow contracted with pain. 'No! but did not I tell you all about him—your cousin, Honor? Do pull the curtain round, the light hurts me!'

Convinced that his mind was astray, there was no attempt at answering him; and all were so entirely occupied with his comforts, that Phœbe saw and heard no one until Robert came down, telling her that Owen had, in fact, improved much on the voyage, but that the long day's journey by train had brought on such severe and exhausting pain in the head, that he could scarcely speak or look up, and fatigue seemed to have confused the faculties that in the morning had been quite clear. Robert was obliged to go to his seven o'clock service, and Phœbe would fain have come with him, but he thought she might be useful at home.

'Miss Charlecote is so much absorbed in Owen,' he said, 'that I do not think she heard a word about that young Randolf. Mr. Currie is gone to spend to-morrow and Sunday with his father at Birmingham, but he let me have this young man to help to bring Owen home. Make Miss Charlecote understand that he is to sleep at my place. I will come back for him, and he is not to be in her way. He is such a nice fellow! And, Phœbe, I have no time, but there is Mrs. Murrell with the child in the study. Can you make her understand that Owen is far too ill to see them to-night? Keep them off poor Lucy, that's all.'

'Lucy, that's all!' thought Phœbe, as she moved to obey. 'In spite of all he says, Lucy will always be his first thought next to St. Matthew's; nor do I know why I should mind it, considering what a

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vast space there is between!’

‘Now my pa is come, shan’t I be a gentleman, and ride in a carriage?’ were the sounds that greeted Phœbe’s ears as she opened the door of the study, and beheld the small, lean child dressed in all his best; not one of the gray linen frocks that Lucilla was constantly making for him, but in a radiant tartan, of such huge pattern that his little tunic barely contained a sample of one of each portentous check, made up crosswise, so as to give a most comical, harlequin effect to his spare limbs and weird, black eyes. The disappointment that Phœbe had to inflict was severe, and unwittingly she was the messenger whom Mrs. Murrell was likely to regard with the most suspicion and dislike. ‘Come home along with me, Hoing, my dear,’ she said; ‘you’ll always find poor granny your friend, even if your pa’s ‘art is like the nether millstone, as it was to your poor ma, and as others may find it yet.’

‘I have no doubt Mr. Sandbrook will see him when he is a little recovered after his journey,’ said Phœbe.

‘No doubt, ma’am. I don’t make a doubt, so long as there is no one to put between them. I have ‘eard how the sight of an ‘opeful son was as balm to the eyes of his father; but if I could see Mr. Fulmort—’

‘My brother is gone to church. It was he who sent me to you.’

Mrs. Murrell had real confidence in Robert, whose friendliness had long been proved, and it was less impossible to persuade her to leave the house when she learnt that it was by his wish; but Phœbe did not wonder at the dread with which an interview with her was universally regarded.

In returning from this mission, Phœbe encountered the stranger in the lamp-light of the hall, intently examining the balustrade of the stairs.

‘This is the drawing-room,’ she courteously said, seeing that he seemed not to know where to go.

‘Thank you,’ he said, following her. ‘I was looking at the wood. What is it? We have none like it.’

‘It is Irish bog oak, and much admired.’

‘I suppose all English houses can scarcely be like this?’ said he, looking round at the carved wainscot.

‘Oh, no, this house is a curiosity. Part was built before 1500.’

‘In the time of the Indians?’ Then smiling, ‘I had forgotten. It is hard to realize that I am where I have so long wished to be. Am I actually in a room 360 years old?’

‘No; this room is less ancient. Here is the date, 1605, on the panel.’

‘Then this is such a house as Milton might have grown up in. It looks on the Thames?’

‘How could you tell that?’

‘My father had a map of London that I knew by heart, and after we came under Temple Bar, I marked the bearings of the streets. Before that I was not clear. Perhaps there have been changes since 1830, the date of his map.’

Phœbe opened a map, and he eagerly traced his route, pronouncing the names of the historical localities with a relish that made her almost sorry for their present associations. She liked his looks. He seemed to be about two or three and twenty, tall and well-made, with somewhat of the bearing of his soldier-father, but broad-shouldered and athletic, as though his strength had been exercised in actual bodily labour. His clear, light hazel eye was candid and well opened, with that peculiar prompt vigilance acquired by living in a wild country, both steady to observe and keen to keep watch. The dark chestnut hair covered a rather square brow, very fair, though the rest of the face was browned by sun and weather; the nose was straight and sensible, the chin short and firm; the lips, though somewhat compressed when shut, had a look of good-humour and cheerful intelligence peculiarly pleasant to behold. Altogether, it was a face that inspired trust.

Presently the entrance of the tea-things obliged the map to be cleared away; and Phœbe, while measuring out the tea, said that she supposed Miss Charlecote would soon come down.

‘Then are not you a Charlecote?’ he asked, with a tone of disappointment.

‘Oh, no! I am Phœbe Fulmort. There is no Charlecote left but herself.’

‘It was my mother’s name; and mine, Humfrey Charlecote Randolf. Sandbrook thought there was some connection between the families.’

Phœbe absolutely started, hurt for a moment that a stranger should presume to claim a name of such associations; yet as she met the bright, honest eyes, feeling glad that it should still be a living name, worthily borne. ‘It is an old family name at Hiltonbury, and one very much honoured,’ she said.

‘That is well,’ he said. ‘It is good to have a name that calls one to live up to it! And what is more strange, I am sure Miss Charlecote once had my mother’s hair.’

‘Beautiful ruddy gold?’

'Yes, yes; like no one else. I was wanting to do like poor Sandbrook.' He looked up in her face, and stroked her hair as she was leaning over him, and said, 'I don't like to miss my own curls.'

'Ah!' said Phoebe, half indignantly, 'he should know when those curls were hidden away and grew silvery.'

'He told me those things in part,' said the young man. 'He has felt the return very deeply, and I think it accounts for his being so much worse to-night—worse than I have seen him since we were at Montreal.'

'Is he quite sensible?'

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'Perfectly. I see the ladies do not think him so to-night; but he has been himself from the first, except that over-fatigue or extra weakness affect his memory for the time; and he cannot read or exert his mind—scarcely be read to. And he is sadly depressed in spirits.'

'And no wonder, poor man,' said Phoebe.

'But I cannot think it is as they told us at Montreal.'

'What?'

'That the brain would go on weakening, and he become more childish. Now I am sure, as he has grown stronger, he has recovered intellect and intelligence. No one could doubt it who heard him three days ago advising me what branch of mathematics to work up!'

'We shall hear to-morrow what Dr. F--- says. Miss Charlecote wrote to him as soon as we had my brother's telegram. I hope you are right!'

'For you see,' continued the Canadian, eagerly, 'injury from an external cause cannot be like original organic disease. I hope and trust he may recover. He is the best friend I ever had, except Mr. Henley, our clergyman at Lakeville. You know how he saved all our lives; and he persuaded Mr. Currie to try me, and give me a chance of providing for my little brothers and their mother better than by our poor old farm.'

'Where are they?' asked Phoebe.

'She is gone to her sister at Buffalo. The price of the land will help them on for a little while there, and if I can get on in engineering, I shall be able to keep them in some comfort. I began to think the poor boys were doomed to have no education at all.'

'Did you always live at Lakeville?'

'No; I grew up in a much more civilized part of the world. We had a beautiful farm upon Lake Ontario, and raised the best crops in the neighbourhood. It was not till we got entangled in the Land Company, five years ago, that we were sold up; and we have been sinking deeper ever since—till the old cow and I had the farm all to ourselves.'

'How could you bear it?' asked Phoebe.

'Well! it was rather dreary to see one thing going after another. But somehow, after I lost my own black mare, poor Minnehaha, I never cared so much for any of the other things. Once for all, I got ashamed of my own childish selfishness. And then, you see, the worse things were, the stronger the call for exertion. That was the great help.'

'Oh, yes, I can quite imagine that—I know it,' said Phoebe, thinking how exertion had helped her through her winter of trial. 'You never were without some one to work for.'

'No; even when my father was gone'—and his voice was less clear—'there was the less time to feel the change, when the boys and their mother had nothing but me between them and want.'

'And you worked for them.'

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'After a fashion,' he said, smiling. 'Spade-husbandry alone is very poor earth-scratching; and I don't really know whether, between that and my gun, we could have got through this winter.'

'What a life!' exclaimed Phoebe. 'Realities, indeed!'

'It is only what many colonists undergo,' he answered; 'if they do not prosper, it is a very hard life, and the shifting hopes render it the more trying to those who are not bred to it.'

'And to those that are?' she asked.

'To those that are there are many compensations. It is a free out-of-doors life, and the glorious sense of extent and magnificence in our woods, the sport one has there, the beauty of our autumns, and our white, grand, silent winters, make it a life *well* worth living.'

'And would these have made you content to be a backwoodsman all your life?'

'I cannot tell,' he said. 'They—and the boys—were my delight when I was one. And, after all, I used to recollect it was a place where there was a clear duty to do, and so, perhaps, safer than what fancy or choice would point at.'

'But you are very glad not to be still condemned to it.'

'Heartily glad not to be left to try to prop up a tumble-down log-hut with my own shoulder,' he laughed. 'This journey to England has been the great desire of my life, and I am very thankful to have had it brought about.'

The conversation was broken off by Robert's entrance. Finding that it was nearly nine o'clock, he went up-stairs to remind Miss Charlecote that tea had long been awaiting her, and presently brought her back from the silent watch by Owen's side that had hitherto seemed to be rest and comfort to all the three.

Owen had begged that his cup might be sent up by his friend, on whom he was very dependent, and it was agreed that Mr. Randolph should sleep in his room, and remain as a guest at Woolstone-lane until Mr. Currie should come to town. Indeed, Miss Charlecote relied on him for giving the physician an account of the illness which Owen, at his best, could not himself describe; and she cordially thanked him for his evidently devoted attendance, going over every particular with him, but still so completely absorbed in her patient as to regard him in no light but as an appendage necessary to her boy.

'How did you get on with the backwoodsman, Phœbe?' asked Lucilla, when she came down to tea.

'I think he is a sterling character,' said Phœbe, in a tone of grave, deep thought, not quite as if answering the question, and with an observable deepening of the red of her cheek.

'You quaint goose!' said Lucy, with a laugh that jarred upon Honor, who turned round at her with a look of reproachful surprise.

'Indeed, Honor dear,' she said, in self-vindication, 'I am not hard-hearted! I am only very much relieved! I don't think half so badly of poor Owen as I expected to do; and if we can keep Mrs. Murrell from driving him distracted, I expect to see him mend fast.'

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Robert confirmed her cheerful opinion, but their younger and better prognostications fell sadly upon Honora's ear. She had been too much grieved and shocked to look for recovery, and all that she dared to expect was to tend her darling's feebleness, her best desire was that his mind might yet have power to embrace the hope of everlasting Life ere he should pass away from her. Let this be granted, and she was prepared to be thankful, be his decay never so painful to witness and attend.

She could not let Robert leave her that night without a trembling question whether he had learnt how it was with Owen on this point. He had not failed to inquire of the engineer, but he could tell her very little. Owen's conduct had been unexceptionable, but he had made scarcely any demonstration or profession, and on the few occasions when opinions were discussed, spoke not irreverently, but in a tone of one who regretted and respected the tenets that he no longer held. Since his accident, he had been too weak and confused to dwell on any subjects but those of the moment; but he had appeared to take pleasure in the unobtrusive, though decided religious habits of young Randolph.

There she must rest for the present, and trust to the influence of home, perhaps to that of the shadow of death. At least he was the child of many prayers, and had not Lucilla returned to her changed beyond her hopes? Let it be as it would, she could not but sleep in gratitude that both her children were again beneath her roof.

She was early dressed, and wishing the backwoodsman were anywhere but in Owen's room. However, to her joy, the door was open, and Owen called her in, looking so handsome as he lay partly raised by pillows, that she could hardly believe in his condition, except for his weak, subdued voice.

'Yes, I am much better this morning. I have slept off the headache, and have been enjoying the old sounds!'

'Where is your friend?'

'Rushed off to look at St. Paul's through the shaking of doormats, and pay his respects to the Thames. He has none of the colonial *nil admirari* spirit, but looks at England as a Greek colonist would have looked at Athens. I only regret that the reality must tame his raptures. I told him to come back by breakfast-time.'

'He will lose his way.'

'Not he! You little know the backwood's power of topography! Even I could nearly rival some of the Arab stories, and he could guide you anywhere—or after any given beast in the Newcastle district. Honor, you must know and like him. He really is the New World Charlecote whom you always held over our heads.'

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'I thought you called him Randolph?'

'That is his surname, but his Christian name is Humfrey Charlecote, from his grandfather. His mother was the lady my father told you of. He saved an old Bible out of the fire, with it all in the fly-leaf. He shall show it to you, and it can be easily confirmed by writing to the places. I would have gone myself, if I had not been the poor creature I am.'

'Yes, my dear,' said Honora, 'I dare say it is so. I am very glad you found so attentive a friend. I

am most thankful to him for his care of you.'

'And you accept him as a relation,' said Owen, anxiously.

'Yes, oh, yes,' said Honor. 'Would you like anything before breakfast?'

Owen answered with a little plaintiveness. Perhaps he was disappointed at this cold acquiescence; but it was not a moment at which Honor could face the thought of a colonial claimant of the Holt. With Owen helpless upon her hands, she needed both a home and ample means to provide for him and his sister and child; and the American heir, an unwelcome idea twenty years previously, when only a vague possibility, was doubly undesirable when long possession had endeared her inheritance to her, when he proved not even to be a true Charlecote, and when her own adopted children were in sore want of all that she could do for them. The evident relinquishment of poor Owen's own selfish views on the Holt made her the less willing to admit a rival, and she was sufficiently on the borders of age to be pained by having the question of heirship brought forward. And she knew, what Owen did not, that, if this youth's descent were indeed what it was said to be, he represented the elder line, and that even Humfrey had wondered what would be his duty in the present contingency.

'Nonsense!' said she to herself. 'There is no need as yet to think of it! The place is my own by every right! Humfrey told me so! I will take time to see what this youth may be, and make sure of his relationship. Then, if it be right and just, he shall come after me. But I *will* not raise expectations, nor notice him more than as Owen's friend and a distant kinsman. It would be fatally unsettling to do more.'

Owen urged her no farther. Either he had not energy to enforce any point for long together, or he felt that the succession might be a delicate subject, for he let her lead to his personal affairs, and he was invalid enough to find them fully engrossing.

The Canadian came in punctually, full of animation and excitement, of which Phoebe had the full benefit, till he was called to help Owen to dress. While this was going on, Robert came into the drawing-room to breathe, after the hard task of pacifying Mrs. Murrell.

'What are you going to do to-day, Phoebe?' he asked. 'Have you got through your shopping?'

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'Some of it. Do you mean that you could come out with me?'

'Yes; you will never get through business otherwise.'

'Then if you have an afternoon to spare, could not we take Mr. Randolph to the Tower?'

'Why, Phoebe!'

'He has only to-day at liberty, and is so full of eagerness about all the grand old historical places, that it seems hard that he should have to find his way about alone, with no one to sympathize with him—half the day cut up, too, with nursing Owen.'

'He seems to have no difficulty in finding his way.'

'No; but I really should enjoy showing him the old armour. He was asking me about it this morning. I think he knows nearly as much of it as we do.'

'Very well. I say, Phoebe, would you object to my taking Brown and Clay—my two head boys? I owe them a treat, and they would just enter into this.'

Phoebe was perfectly willing to accept the two head boys, and the appointment had just been made when the doctor arrived. Again he brought good hope. From his own examination of Owen, and from Mr. Randolph's report, he was convinced that a considerable amelioration had taken place, and saw every reason to hope that in so young and vigorous a nature the injury to the brain might be completely repaired, and the use of the limbs might in part, at least, return, though full recovery could not be expected. He wished to observe his patient for a month or six weeks in town, that the course of treatment might be decided, after which he had better be taken to the Holt, to enjoy the pure air, and be out of doors as much as the season would permit.

To Honor this opinion was the cause of the deepest, most thankful gladness; but on coming back to Owen she found him sitting in his easy-chair, with his hand over his eyes, and his look full of inexpressible dejection and despondency. He did not, however, advert to the subject, only saying, 'Now then! let us have in the young pauper to see the old one.'

'My dear Owen, you had better rest.'

'No, no; let us do the thing. The grandmother, too!' he said impatiently.

'I will fetch little Owen; but you really are not fit for Mrs. Murrell.'

'Yes, I am; what am I good for but such things? It will make no difference, and it must be done.'

'My boy, you do not know to what you expose yourself.'

'Don't I,' said Owen, sadly.

Lucilla, even though Mr. Prendergast had just come to share her anxieties, caught her nephew on his way, and popped her last newly completed pinafore over his harlequinism, persuading him

that it was most beautiful and new.

The interview passed off better than could have been hoped. The full-grown, grave-looking man was so different from the mere youth whom Mrs. Murrell had been used to scold and preach at, that her own awe seconded the lectures upon quietness that had been strenuously impressed on her; and she could not complain of his reception of his "opeful son," in form at least. Owen held out his hand to her, and bent to kiss his boy, signed to her to sit down, and patiently answered her inquiries and regrets, asking a few civil questions in his turn.

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Then he exerted himself to say, 'I hope to do my best for him and for you, Mrs. Murrell, but I can make no promises; I am entirely dependent at present, and I do not know whether I may not be so for life.'

Whereat, and at the settled mournful look with which it was spoken, Mrs. Murrell burst out crying, and little Owen hung on her, almost crying too. Honor, who had been lying in wait for Owen's protection, came hastily in and made a clearance, Owen again reaching out his hand, which he laid on the child's head, so as to turn up the face towards him for a moment. Then releasing it almost immediately, he rested his chin on his hand, and Honor heard him mutter under his moustache, 'Flibbertigibbet!'

'When we go home, we will take little Owen with us,' said Honor, kindly. 'It is high time he was taken from Little Whittington-street. Country air will soon make a different-looking child of him.'

'Thank you,' he answered, despondingly. 'It is very good in you; but have you not troubles enough already?'

'He shall not be a trouble, but a pleasure.'

'Poor little wretch! He must grow up to work, and to know that he must work while he can;' and Owen passed his hand over those useless fingers of his as though the longing to be able to work were strong on him.

Honor had agreed with Lucilla that father and son ought to be together, and that little 'Hoeing's' education ought to commence. Cilla insisted that all care of him should fall to her. She was in a vehement, passionate mood of self-devotion, more overset by hearing that her brother would be a cripple for life than by what appeared to her the less melancholy doom of an early death. She had allowed herself to hope so much from his improvement on the voyage, that what to Honor was unexpected gladness was to her grievous disappointment. Mr. Prendergast arrived to find her half captious, half desperate.

See Owen! Oh, no! he must not think of it. Owen had seen quite people enough to-day; besides, he would be letting all out to him as he had done the other day.

Poor Mr. Prendergast humbly apologized for his betrayal; but had not Owen been told of the engagement?

Oh, dear, no! He was in no state for fresh agitations. Indeed, with him, a miserable, helpless cripple, Lucy did not see how she could go on as before. She could not desert him—oh, no!—she must work for him and his child.

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'Work! Why, Cilla, you have not strength for it.'

'I am quite well. I have strength for anything now I have some one to work for. Nothing hurts me but loneliness.'

'Folly, child! The same home that receives you will receive them.'

'Nonsense! As if I could throw such a dead weight on any one's hands!'

'Not on *any one's*,' said Mr. Prendergast. 'But I see how it is, Cilla; you have changed your mind.'

'No,' said Lucilla, with an outbreak of her old impatience; 'but you men are so selfish! Bothering me about proclaiming all this nonsense, just when my brother is come home in this wretched state! After all, he was my brother before anything else, and I have a right to consider him first!'

'Then, Cilla, you shall be bothered no more,' said Mr. Prendergast, rising. 'If you want me, well and good—you know where to find your old friend; if not, and you can't make up your mind to it, why, then we are as we were in old times. Good-bye, my dear; I won't fret you any more.'

'No,' said he to himself, as he paused in the Court, and was busy wiping from the sleeve of his coat two broad dashes of wet that had certainly not proceeded from the clouds, 'the dear child's whole heart is with her brother now she has got him back again. I'll not torment her any more. What a fool I was to think that anything but loneliness could have made her accept me—poor darling! I think I'll go out to the Bishop of Sierra Leone!'

'What can have happened to him?' thought Phœbe, as he strode past the little party on their walk to the Tower. 'Can that wretched little Cilly have been teasing him? I am glad Robert has escaped from her clutches!'

However, Phœbe had little leisure for such speculations in the entertainment of witnessing her companion's intelligent interest in all that he saw. The walk itself—for which she had begged—was full of wonder; and the Tower, which Robert's slight knowledge of one of the officials

enabled them to see in perfection, received the fullest justice, both historically and loyally. The incumbent of St. Matthew's was so much occupied with explanations to his boys, that Phœbe had the stranger all to herself, and thus entered to the full into that unfashionable but most heart-stirring of London sights, 'the Towers of Julius,' from the Traitors' Gate, where Elizabeth sat in her lion-like desolation, to her effigy in her glory upon Tilbury Heath—the axe that severed her mother's 'slender neck'—the pistol-crowned stick of her father—the dark cage where her favourite Raleigh was mewed—and the whole series of the relics of the disgraces and the glories of England's royal line—well fitted, indeed, to strike the imagination of one who had grown up in the New World without antiquity.

If it were a satisfaction to be praised and thanked for this expedition, Phœbe had it; for on her return she was called into Owen's room, where his first words to her were of thanks for her good-nature to his friend.

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'I am sure it was nothing but a pleasure,' she said. 'It happened that Robert had some boys whom he wanted to take.' Somehow she did not wish Owen to think she had done it on his own account.

'And you liked him?' asked Owen.

'Yes, very much indeed,' she heartily said.

'Ah! I knew you would;' and he lay back as if fatigued. Then, as Phœbe was about to leave him, he added—'I can't get my ladies to heed anything but me. You and Robert must take pity on him, if you please. Get him to Westminster Abbey, or the Temple Church, or somewhere worth seeing to-morrow. Don't let them be extortionate of his waiting on me. I must learn to do without him.'

Phœbe promised, and went.

'Phœbe is grown what one calls a fine young woman instead of a sweet girl,' said Owen to his sister, when she next came into the room; 'but she has managed to keep her innocent, half-wondering look, just as she has the freshness of her colour.'

'Well, why not, when she has not had one *real* experience?' said Lucilla, a little bitterly.

'None?' he asked, with a marked tone.

'None,' she answered, and he let his hand drop with a sigh; but as if repenting of any half betrayal of feeling, added, 'she has had all her brothers and sisters at sixes and sevens, has not she?'

'Do you call that a real experience?' said Lucilla, almost with disdain, and the conversation dropped.

Owen's designs for his friend's Sunday fell to the ground. The backwoodsman fenced off the proposals for his pleasure, by his wish to be useful in the sick-room; and when told of Owen's desire, was driven to confess that he did not wish for fancy church-going on his first English Sunday. There was enough novelty without that; the cathedral service was too new for him to wish to hear it for the first time when there was so much that was unsettling.

Honor, and even Robert, were a little disappointed. They thought eagerness for musical service almost necessarily went with church feeling; and Phœbe was the least in the world out of favour for the confession, that though it was well that choirs should offer the most exquisite and ornate praise, yet that her own country-bred associations with the plain unadorned service at Hiltonbury rendered her more at home where the prayers were read, and the responses congregational, not choral. To her it was more devotional, though she fully believed that the other way was the best for those who had begun with it.

So they went as usual to the full service of the parish church, where the customs were scrupulously rubrical without being ornate. The rest and calm of that Sunday were a boon, coming as they did after a bustling week.

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All the ensuing days Phœbe was going about choosing curtains and carpets, or hiring servants for herself or Mervyn. She was obliged to act alone, for Miss Charlecote, on whom she had relied for aid, was engrossed in attending on Owen, and endeavouring to wile away the hours that hung heavily on one incapable of employment or even attention for more than a few minutes together. So constantly were Honor and Lucy engaged with him, that Phœbe hardly saw them morning, noon, or night; and after being out for many hours, it generally fell to her lot to entertain the young Canadian for the chief part of the evening. Mr. Currie had arrived in town on the Monday, and came at once to see Owen. His lodgings were in the City, where he would be occupied for some time in more formally mapping out and reporting on the various lines proposed for the G. O. and S. line; and finding how necessary young Randolph still was to the invalid, he willingly agreed to the proposal that while Miss Charlecote continued in London, the young man should continue to sleep and spend his evenings in Woolstone-lane.

CHAPTER XXIX

Have you seen but a bright lily grow,
Before rude hands have touched it?
Have you marked but the fall of the snow,

At the end of a week Mervyn made his appearance in a vehement hurry. Cecily's next sister, an officer's wife, was coming home with two little children, for a farewell visit before going to the Cape, and Maria and Bertha must make way for her. So he wanted to take Phœbe home that afternoon to get the Underwood ready for them.

'Mervyn, how can I go? I am not nearly ready.'

'What can you have been doing then?' he exclaimed, with something of his old temper.

'This house has been in such a state.'

'Well, you were not wanted to nurse the sick man, were you? I thought you were one that was to be trusted. What more is there to do?'

Phœbe looked at her list of commissions, and found herself convicted. Those patterns ought to have been sent back two days since. What had she been about? Listening to Mr. Randolph's explanations of the *Hiawatha* scenery! Why had she not written a note about that hideous hearth-rug? Because Mr. Randolph was looking over Stowe's *Survey of London*. Methodical Phœbe felt herself in disgrace, and yet, somehow, she could not be sorry enough; she wanted a reprieve from exile at Hiltonbury, alone and away from all that was going on. At least she should hear whether *Macbeth*, at the Princess's Theatre, fulfilled Mr. Randolph's conceptions of it; and if Mr. Currie approved his grand map of the Newcastle district, with the little trees that she had taught him to draw.

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Perhaps it was the first time that Mervyn had been justly angry with her; but he was so much less savage than in his injustice that she was very much ashamed and touched; and finally, deeply grateful for the grace of this one day in which to repair her negligence, provided she would be ready to start by seven o'clock next morning. Hard and diligently she worked, and very late she came home. As she was on her way up-stairs she met Robert coming out of Owen's room.

'Phœbe,' he said, turning with her into her room, 'what is the matter with Lucy?'

'The matter?'

'Do you mean that you have not observed how ill she is looking?'

'No; nothing particular.'

'Phœbe, I cannot imagine what you have been thinking about. I thought you would have saved her, and helped Miss Charlecote, and you absolutely never noticed her looks!'

'I am very sorry. I have been so much engaged.'

'Absorbed, you should call it! Who would have thought you would be so heedless of her?'

He was gone. 'Still crazy about Lucy,' was Phœbe's first thought; her second, 'Another brother finding me heedless and selfish! What can be the matter with me?' And when she looked at Lucilla with observant eyes, she did indeed recognize the justice of Robert's anxiety and amazement. The brilliant prettiness had faded away as if under a blight, the eyes were sinking into purple hollows, the attitude was listless, the whole air full of suffering. Phœbe was dismayed and conscience-stricken, and would fain have offered inquiries and sympathy, but no one had more thoroughly than Lucy the power of repulsion. 'No, nothing was amiss—of course she felt the frost. She would not speak to Honor—there was nothing to speak about;' and she went up to her brother's room.

Mr. Randolph was out with Mr. Currie, and Phœbe, still exceedingly busy writing notes and orders, and packing for her journey, did not know that there was an unconscious resolution in her own mind that her business *should* not be done till he came home, were it at one o'clock at night! He did come at no unreasonable hour, and found her fastening directions upon the pile of boxes in the hall.

'What are you doing? Miss Charlecote is not going away?'

'No; but I am going to-morrow.'

'You!'

'Yes; I must get into our new house, and receive my sisters there the day after to-morrow.'

'I thought you lived with Miss Charlecote.'

'Is it possible that you did not know what I have been doing all this week?'

'Were you not preparing a house for your brother?'

'Yes, and another for myself. Did you not understand that we set up housekeeping separately upon his marriage?'

'I did not understand,' said Humfrey Randolph, disconsolately. 'You told me you owed everything to Miss Charlecote.'

'I am afraid your colonial education translated that into £ s. d.'

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‘Then you are not poor?’

‘No, not exactly,’ said Phœbe, rather puzzled and amused by his downcast air.

‘But,’ he exclaimed, ‘your brother is in business; and Mr. Fulmort of St. Matthew’s—’

‘Mr. Fulmort of St. Matthew’s is poor because he gave all to St. Matthew’s,’ said Phœbe; ‘but our business is not a small one, and the property in the country is large.’

He panted on her last direction in disconsolate silence, then reading, ‘Miss Fulmort, The Underwood, Hiltonbury, Elverslope Station,’ resumed with fresh animation, ‘At least you live near Miss Charlecote?’

‘Yes, we are wedged in between her park and our own—my brother’s, I mean.’

‘That is all right then! She has asked me for Christmas.’

‘I am very glad of it,’ said Phœbe. ‘There, thank you, good night.’

‘Is there nothing more that I can do for you?’

‘Nothing—no, no, don’t hammer that down, you will wake Owen. Good night, good-bye; I shall be gone by half-past six.’

Though Phœbe said good-bye, she knew perfectly well that the hours of the morning were as nothing to the backwoodsman, and with spirits greatly exhilarated by the Christmas invitation, she went to bed, much too sleepy to make out why her wealth seemed so severe a shock to Humfrey Randolph.

The six o’clock breakfast was well attended, for Miss Charlecote was there herself, as well as the Canadian, Phœbe, and Mervyn, who was wonderfully amiable considering the hour in the morning. Phœbe felt in some slight degree less unfeeling when she found that Lucilla’s fading looks had been no more noticed by Miss Charlecote than by herself; but Honor thought Owen’s illness accounted for all, and only promised that the doctor should inspect her.

A day of exceeding occupation ensued. Mervyn talked the whole way of Cecily, his plans and his prospects; and Phœbe had to draw her mind out of one world and immerse it into another, straining ears and voice all the time to hear and be heard through the roar of the train. He left her at the cottage: and then began the work of the day, presiding over upholsterers, hanging pictures, arranging books, settling cabinets of collections, disposing of ornaments, snatching meals at odd times, in odder places, and never daring to rest till long after dark, when, with fingers freshly purified from dust, limbs stiff with running up and down stairs, and arms tired with heavy weights, she sat finally down before the drawing-room fire with her solitary cup of coffee, and a book that she was far too weary to open.

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Had she never been tired before, that her heart should sink in this unaccountable way? Why could she not be more glad that her sisters were coming home, and dear Miss Fennimore? What made every one seem so dull and stupid, and the comings and goings so oppressive, as if everything would be hateful till Christmas? Why had she belied all her previous good character for method and punctuality of late, and felt as if existence only began when—one person was in the room?

Oh! can this be falling in love?

There was a chiffonier with a looking-glass back just opposite to her, and, raising her eyes, poor Phœbe beheld a young lady with brow, cheeks, and neck perfectly glowing with crimson!

‘You shan’t stand there long at any rate,’ said she, almost vindictively, getting up and pushing the table with its deep cover between her and the answering witness.

‘Love! Nonsense! Yet I don’t see why I should be ashamed! Yes! He is my wise man, he is the real Humfrey Charlecote! His is the very nature I always thought some one must still have—the exact judgment I longed to meet with. Not stern like Robin’s, not sharp like Mervyn’s, nor high-flying like dear Miss Charlecote’s, nor soft like Bevil’s, nor light like Lucy’s, nor clear and clever like Miss Fennimore’s—no, but considerate and solid, tender and true—such as one can lean upon! I know why he has the steadfast eyes that I liked so much the first evening. And there is so much more in him than I can measure or understand. Yes, though I have known him but ten days, I have seen much more of him than of most men in a year. And he has been so much tried, and has had such a life, that he may well be called a real hero in a quiet way. Yes, I well may like him! And I am sure he likes me!’ said another whisper of the heart, which, veiled as was the lady in the mirror, made Phœbe put both hands over her face, in a shamefaced ecstatic consciousness. ‘Nay—I was the first lady he had seen, the only person to speak to. No, no; I know it was not that—I feel it was not! Why, otherwise, did he seem so sorry I was not poor? Oh! how nice it would be if I were! We could work for each other in his glorious new land of hope! I, who love work, was made for work! I don’t care for this mere young lady life! And must my trumpery thousand a year stand in the way? As to birth, I suppose he is as well or better born than I—and, oh! so far superior in tone and breeding to what ours used to be! He ought to know better than to think me a fine young lady, and himself only an engineer’s assistant! But he won’t! Of course he will be honourable about it—and—and perhaps never dare to say another word till he has made his fortune—and when will that ever be? It will be right—’ ‘But’ (and a very different but it was this time) ‘what am I thinking about? How can I be wishing such things

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when I have promised to devote myself to Maria? If I could rough it gladly, she could not; and what a shameful thing it is of me to have run into all this long day dream and leave her out. No, I know my lot! I am to live on here, and take care of Maria, and grow to be an old maid! I shall hear about him, when he comes to be a great man, and know that the Humfrey Charlecote I dreamt about is still alive! There, I won't have any more nonsense!

And she opened her book; but finding that Humfrey Randolph's remarks would come between her and the sense, she decided that she was too tired to read, and put herself to bed. But there the sense of wrong towards Maria filled her with remorse that she had accepted her rights of seniority, and let the maids place her in the prettiest room, with the best bay window, and most snug fireplace; nor could she rest till she had pacified her self-reproach, by deciding that all her own goods should move next day into the chamber that did not look at the Holt firs, but only at the wall of the back yard.

'Yes,' said Phœbe, stoutly in her honest dealing with herself in her fresh, untried morning senses. 'I do love Humfrey Charlecote Randolph, and I think he loves me! Whether anything more may come of it, will be ordered for me; but whether it do so or not, it is a blessing to have known one like him, and now that I am warned, and can try to get back self-control, I will begin to be the better for it. Even if I am not quite so happy, this is something more beautiful than I ever knew before. I will be content!'

And when Bertha and Maria arrived, brimful of importance at having come home with no escort but a man and maid, and voluble with histories of Sutton, and wedding schemes, they did not find an absent nor inattentive listener. Yet the keen Bertha made the remark, 'Something has come over you, Phœbe. You have more countenance than ever you had before.'

Whereat Phœbe's colour rushed into her cheeks, but she demanded the meaning of countenance, and embarked Bertha in a dissertation.

When Phœbe was gone, Robert found it less difficult to force Lucilla to the extremity of a *tête-à-tête*. Young Randolph was less in the house, and, when there, more with Owen than before, and Lucilla was necessarily sometimes to be caught alone in the drawing-room.

'Lucy,' said Robert, the first time this occurred, 'I have a question to ask you.'

'Well!'—she turned round half defiant.

'A correspondent of Mervyn, on the Spanish coast, has written to ask him to find a chaplain for the place, guaranteeing a handsome stipend.'

'Well,' said Lucilla, in a cold voice this time.

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'I wished to ask whether you thought it would be acceptable to Mr. Prendergast.'

'I neither know nor care.'

'I beg your pardon,' said Robert, after a pause; 'but though I believe I learnt it sooner than I ought, I was sincerely glad to hear—'

'Then unhear!' said Lucilla, pettishly. 'You, at least, ought to be glad of that.'

'By no means,' returned Robert, gravely. 'I have far too great a regard for you not to be most deeply concerned at what I see is making you unhappy.'

'May not I be unhappy if I like, with my brother in this state?'

'That is not all, Lucilla.'

'Then never mind! You are the only one who never pitied me, and so I like you. Don't spoil it now!'

'You need not be afraid of my pitying you if you have brought on this misunderstanding by your old spirit!'

'Not a bit of it! I tell you he pitied me. I found it out in time, so I set him free. That's all.'

'And that was the offence?'

'Offence! What are you talking of? He didn't offend—No, but when I said I could not bring so many upon him, and could not have Owen teased about the thing, he said he would bother me no more, that I had Owen, and did not want him. And then he walked off.'

'Taking you at your word?'

'Just as if one might not say what one does not mean when one wants a little comforting,' said Lucy, pouting; 'but, after all, it is a very good thing—he is saved a great plague for a very little time, and if it were all pity, so much the better. I say, Robin, shall you be man enough to read the service over me, just where we stood at poor Edna's funeral?'

'I don't think that concerns you much,' said Robert.

'Well, the lady in Madge Wildfire's song was gratified at the "six brave gentlemen" who "kirkward should carry her." Why should you deprive me of that satisfaction? Really, Robin, it is quite true. A little happiness might have patched me up, but—'

'The symptoms are recurring? Have you seen F---?'

'Yes. Let me alone, Robin. It is the truest mercy to let me wither up with as little trouble as possible to those who don't want me. Now that you know it, I am glad I can talk to you, and you will help me to think of what has never been enough before my eyes.'

Robert made no answer but a hasty good-bye, and was gone.

Lucilla gave a heavy sigh, and then exclaimed, half-aloud—

'Oh, the horrid little monster that I am. Why can't I help it? I verily believe I shall flirt in my shroud, and if I were canonized my first miracle would be like St. Philomena's, to make my own relics presentable!'

Wherewith she fell a laughing, with a laughter that soon turned to tears, and the exclamation, 'Why can I make nobody care for me but those I can't care for? I can't help disgusting all that is good, and it will be well when I am dead and gone. There's only one that will shed tears good for anything, and he is well quit of me!'

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The poor little lonely thing wept again, and after her many sleepless nights, she fairly cried herself to sleep. She awoke with a start, at some one being admitted into the room.

'My dear, am I disturbing you?'

It was the well-known voice, and she sprang up.

'Mr. Pendy, Mr. Pendy, I was very naughty! I didn't mean it. Oh, will you bear with me again, though I don't deserve it?'

She clung to him like a child wearied with its own naughtiness.

'I was too hasty,' he said; 'I forgot how wrapped up you were in your brother, and how little attention you could spare, and then I thought that in him you had found all you wanted, and that I was only in your way.'

'How could you? Didn't you know better than to think that people put their brothers before their—Mr. Pendys?'

'You seemed to wish to do so.'

'Ah! but you should have known it was only for the sake of being coaxed!' said Lucilla, hanging her head on one side.

'You should have told me so.'

'But how was I to know it?' And she broke out into a very different kind of laughter. 'I'm sure I thought it was all magnanimity, but it is of no use to die of one's own magnanimity, you see.'

'You are not going to die; you are coming to this Spanish place, which will give you lungs of brass.'

'Spanish place? How do you know? I have not slept into to-morrow, have I? That Robin has not flown to Wrapworth and back since three o'clock?'

'No, I was only inquiring at Mrs. Murrell's.'

'Oh, you silly, silly person, why couldn't you come here?'

'I did not want to bother you.'

'For shame, for shame; if you say that again I shall know you have not forgiven me. It is a moral against using words too strong for the occasion! So Robert carried you the offer of the chaplaincy, and you mean to have it!'

'I could not help coming, as he desired, to see what you thought of it.'

'I only know,' she said, half crying, yet laughing, 'that you had better marry me out of hand before I get into any more mischief.'

The chaplaincy was promising. The place was on the lovely coast of Andalusia. There was a small colony of English engaged in trade, and the place was getting into favour with invalids. Mervyn's correspondent was anxious to secure the services of a good man, and the society of a lady-like wife, and offered to guarantee a handsome salary, such as justified the curate in giving up his chance of a college living; and though it was improbable that he would ever learn a word of Spanish, or even get so far as the pronunciation of the name of the place, the advantages that the appointment offered were too great to be rejected, when Lucilla's health needed a southern climate.

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'Oh! yes, yes, let us go,' she cried. 'It will be a great deal better than anything at home can be.'

'Then you venture on telling Owen, now!'

'Oh, yes! It was a mere delusion of mine that it would cost him anything. Honor is all that he wants, I am rather in their way than otherwise. He rests on her down-pillow-ship, and she sees, hears, knows nothing but him!'

'Is Miss Charlecote aware of—what has been going wrong?'

'Not she! I told her before that I should take my own time for the communication, and I verily believe she has forgotten all about it! Then little demure Phœbe fell over head and ears in love with the backwoodsman on the spot, and walked about in a dream such as ought to have been good fun to watch, if I had had the spirit for it; and if Robert had not been sufficiently disengaged to keep his eyes open, I don't know whether anything would have roused them short of breaking a blood-vessel or two.'

'I shall never rest till you are in my keeping! I will go to Fulmort at once, and tell him that I accept.'

'And I will go to Owen, and break the news to him. When are you coming again?'

'To-morrow, as soon as I have opened school.'

'Ah! the sooner we are gone the better! Much good you can be to poor Wrapworth! Just tell me, please, that I may know how badly I served you, how often you have inquired at Mrs. Murrell's.'

'Why—I believe—each day except Saturday and Sunday; but I never met him there till just now.'

Lucilla's eyes swam with tears; she laid her head on his shoulder, and, in a broken voice of deep emotion, she said, 'Indeed, I did not deserve it! But I think I shall be good now, for I can't tell why I should be so much loved!'

Mr. Prendergast was vainly endeavouring to tell her why, when Humfrey Randolph's ring was heard, and she rushed out of the room.

Owen's first hearty laugh since his return was at her tidings. That over, he spoke with brotherly kindness.

'Yes, Lucy,' he said, 'I do think it is the best and happiest thing for you. He is the only man whom you could not torment to death, or who would have any patience with your antics.'

'I don't think I shall try,' said Lucy. 'What are you shaking your head for, Owen? Have I not had enough to tame me?'

'I beg your pardon, Cilly. I was only thinking of the natural companionship of bears and monkeys. Don't beat me!'

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'Some day you shall come out and see us perform, that's all,' said Lucilla, merrily. 'But indeed, Owen, if I know myself at all, unmerited affection and forbearance, with no nonsense about it, is the only way to keep me from flying out. At any rate, I can't live without it!'

'Ah!' said Owen, gravely, 'you have suffered too much through me for me to talk to you in this fashion. Forgive me, Lucy; I am not up to any other, just yet.'

Whatever Lucilla might have said in the first relief of recovering Mr. Prendergast, she could not easily have made up her mind to leave her brother in his present condition, and flattered herself that the '*at once*' could not possibly be speedy, since Mr. Prendergast must give notice of his intention of leaving Wrapworth.

But when he came the next morning, it proved that things were in a far greater state of forwardness than she had thought possible. So convinced were both the curate and Robert of the need of her avoiding the winter cold, that the latter had suggested that one of his own curates, who was in need of change and country air, should immediately offer himself as a substitute at Wrapworth, either for a time or permanently, and Lucy was positively required to name a day as early as possible for the marriage, and told, on the authority of the physician, that it might almost be called suicide to linger in the English frosts.

The day which she chose was the 1st of December, the same on which Mervyn was to be married. There was a purpose in thus rendering it impracticable for any Fulmort to be present; 'And,' said Owen, 'I am glad it should be before I am about. I could never keep my countenance if I had to give her away to brother Peter!'

'Keeping his countenance' might have two meanings, but he was too feeble for agitation, and seemed only able to go through the time of preparation and parting, by keeping himself as lethargic and indifferent as possible, or by turning matters into a jest when necessarily brought before him. Playing at solitaire, or trifling desultory chat, was all that he could endure as occupation, and the long hours were grievously heavy. His son, though nearly four years old, was no companion or pleasure to him. He was, in his helpless and morbid state, afraid of so young a child, and little Owen was equally afraid of him; each dreaded contact with the other, and more than all the being shut into a room together; and the little boy, half shy, half assured, filled by the old woman with notions of his own grandeur, and yet constrained by the different atmosphere of Woolstone-lane, was never at ease or playful enough before him to be pleasant to watch. And, indeed, his Cockney pronunciation and ungainly vulgar tricks had been so summarily repressed by his aunt, that his fear of both the ladies rendered him particularly unengaging and unchildlike. Nevertheless, Honora thought it her duty to take him home with her to the Holt, and gratified Robert by engaging a nice little girl of fourteen, whom Lucilla called the crack orphan, to be his attendant when they should leave town. This was to be about a fortnight after the wedding, since St. Wulstan's afforded greater opportunities for privacy and exemption from

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bustle than even Hiltonbury, and Dr. Prendergast and his daughter could attend without being in the house.

The Prendergasts of Southminster were very kind and friendly, sending Lucilla warm greetings, and not appearing at all disconcerted at welcoming their former governess into the family. The elders professed no surprise, but great gladness; and Sarah, who *was* surprised, was trebly rejoiced. Owen accused his sister of selecting her solitary bridesmaid with a view to enhancing her own beauty by force of contrast; but the choice was prompted by real security of the affectionate pleasure it would confer. Handsome presents were sent both by the Beaumonts and Bostocks, and Lucilla, even while half fretted, half touched by Mrs. Bostock's patronizing felicitations, could not but be pleased at these evidences that her governess-ship had not been an utter failure.

Her demeanour in the fortnight before her marriage was unlike what her friends had ever seen, and made them augur better for Mr. Prendergast's venture. She was happy, but subdued; quiet and womanly, gentle without being sad, grave but not drooping; and though she was cheerful and playful, with an entire absence of those strange effervescences that had once betrayed acidity or fermentation. She had found the power of being affectionately grateful to Honor, and the sweetness of her tender ways towards her and Owen would have made the parting all the sadder to them if it had not been evident that, as she said, it was happiness that thus enabled her to be good. The satisfied look of rest that had settled on her fair face made it new. All her animation and archness had not rendered it half so pleasant to look upon.

The purchaser of Castle Blanch proved to be no other than Mr. Calthorp! Lucilla at first was greatly discomfited, and begged that nothing might be said about the picture; but the next time Mr. Prendergast arrived, it was with a request from Mr. Calthorp that Miss Sandbrook would accept the picture as a wedding gift! There was no refusing it—indeed, the curate had already accepted it; and when Lucilla heard that 'the Calthorp' had been two years married to what Mr. Prendergast called 'a millionairess, exceedingly hideous,' she still had vanity enough to reflect that the removal of her own resemblance might be an act of charity! And the sum that Honor had set apart for the purchase was only too much wanted for the setting up housekeeping in Spain, whither the portrait was to accompany her, Mr. Prendergast declared, like the Penates of the pious Æneas!

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Robert brought in his gift on the last day of November, just before setting off for Sutton. It was an unornamented, but exquisitely-bound Bible and Prayer Book, dark-brown, with red-edged leaves.

'Good-bye, Lucilla,' he said; 'you have been the brightest spot to me in this life. Thank you for all you have done for me.'

'And for all I never intended to do?' said Lucilla, smiling, as she returned his pressure of the hand.

He was gone, not trusting her to speak, nor himself to hear a word more.

'Yes, Robin,' proceeded Lucy, half aloud, 'you are the greater man, I know very well; but it is in human nature to prefer flesh and blood to mediæval saints in cast-iron, even if one knows there is a tender spot in them.'

There was a curious sense of humiliation in her full acquiescence in the fact that he was too high, too grand for her, and in her relief, that the affection, that would have lifted her beyond what she was prepared for, had died away, and left her to the more ordinary excellence and half-paternal fondness of the man of her real choice, with whom she could feel perfect ease and repose. Possibly the admixture of qualities that in her had been called *fast* is the most contrary to all real aspiration!

But there was no fault to be found with the heartfelt affection with which she loved and honoured her bridegroom, lavishing on him the more marks of deference and submission just because she knew that her will would be law, and that his love was strong enough to have borne with any amount of caprice or seeming neglect. The sacrifices she made, without his knowledge, for his convenience and comfort, while he imagined hers to be solely consulted, the concessions she made to his slightest wish, the entire absence of all teasing, would not have been granted to a younger man more prepossessing in the sight of others.

It was in this spirit that she rejected all advice to consult health rather than custom in her wedding dress. Exactly because Mr. Prendergast would have willingly received her in the plainest garb, she was bent on doing him honour by the most exquisite bridal array; and never had she been so lovely—her colour such exquisite carnation, her eyes so softened, and full of such repose and reliance, her grace so perfect in complete freedom from all endeavour at attracting admiration.

The married pair came back from church to Owen's sitting-room—not bear and monkey, not genie and fairy, as he had expected to see; but as they stood together, looking so indescribably and happily one, that Owen smiled and said, 'Ah! Honor, if you had only known twenty years ago that this was Mrs. Peter Prendergast, how much trouble it would have saved.'

'She did not deserve to be Mrs. Peter Prendergast,' said the bride.

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'See how you deserve it now.'

‘That I never shall!’

Brother and sister parted with light words but full hearts, each trying to believe, though neither crediting Mr. Prendergast’s assurance that the two Owens should come and be at home for ever if they liked in Santa Maria de X---. Neither could bear to face the truth that henceforth their courses lay apart, and that if the sister’s life were spared, it could only be at the sacrifice of expatriation for many years, in lands where, well or ill, the brother had no call. Nor would Lucilla break down. It was due to her husband not to let him think she suffered too much in resigning home for him; and true to her innate hatred of agitation, she guarded herself from realizing anything, and though perfectly kind and respectful to Honora, studiously averted all approaches to effusion of feeling.

Only at the last kiss in the hall, she hung round her friend with a vehement embrace, and whispered, ‘Forgive! You have forgiven!’

‘Forgive me, Lucilla!’

‘Nay, that I have forgiven you for all your pardon and patience is shown by my enduring to leave Owen to you now.’

Therewith surged up such a flood of passionate emotions that, fleeing from them as it were, the bride tore herself out of Honor’s arms, and sprang hastily into the carriage, nervously and hastily moving about its contents while Mr. Prendergast finished his farewells.

After all, there was a certain sense of rest, snugness, and freedom from turmoil, when Honor dried her eyes and went back to her convalescent. The house seemed peaceful, and they both felt themselves entering into the full enjoyment of being all in all to one another.

There was one guest at the Sutton wedding whose spirit was at St. Wulstan’s. In those set eyes, and tightly-closed lips, might be traced abstraction in spite of himself. Were there not thoughts and prayers for another bride, elsewhere kneeling? Was not the solitary man struggling with the last remnants of fancies at war with his life of self-devotion, and crushing down the few final regrets, that would have looked back to the dreams of his youth. No marvel that his greatest effort was against being harsh and unsympathizing, even while his whole career was an endeavour to work through charities of deed and word into charities of thought and judgment.

CHAPTER XXX

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Untouched by love, the maiden’s breast
Is like the snow on Rona’s crest
High seated in the middle sky,
In bright and barren purity;
But by the sunbeam gently kissed,
Scarce by the gazing eye ’tis missed,
Ere down the lonely valley stealing,
Fresh grass and growth its course revealing;
It cheers the flock, revives the flower,
And decks some happy shepherd’s bower.—SCOTT

Slow to choose, but decided in her choice, Phœbe had always been, and her love formed no exception to this rule. She was quite aware that her heart had been given away, and never concealed it from herself, though she made it a principle not to indulge in future castle buildings, and kept a resolute guard over her attention. It was impossible to obviate a perpetual feeling of restlessness and of tedium in whatever she was about; but she conquered oftener than she gave way, and there was an indescribable sense of peace and sweetness in a new and precious possession, and an undefined hope through all.

Miss Fennimore, who came the day after the girls’ return from Sutton, saw only the fuller development of her favourite pupil, and, in truth, Maria and Bertha had so ineffably much to narrate, that her attention would have been sufficiently engrossed to hinder her observation of the symptoms, even had the good lady been as keen and experienced in love as in science.

Poor little Phœbe! equable as she was, she was in a great perturbation when, four days before Christmas, she knew that Miss Charlecote, with Owen Sandbrook and Humfrey Randolph, had arrived at the Holt. What was so natural as for her to go at once to talk over the two weddings with her dear old friend? Yes, but did her dear old friend want her, when these two young men had put an end to her solitude? Was she only making Miss Charlecote an excuse? She would wait in hopes that one of the others would ask if she were going to the Holt! If so, it could not but be natural and proper—if not— This provoking throbbing of her heart showed that it was not only for Honor Charlecote that she wished to go.

That ring at the bell! What an abominable goose she was to find a flush of expectation in her cheek! And after all it was only Sir John. He had found that his son had heard nothing from the Holt that morning, and had come in to ask if she thought a call would be acceptable. ‘I knew they were come home,’ he said, ‘for I saw them at the station yesterday. I did not show myself, for I did not know how poor young Sandbrook might like it. But who have they got with them?’

‘Mr. Randolph, Owen Sandbrook’s Canadian friend.’

'Did I not hear he was some sort of relation?'

'Yes; his mother was a Charlecote.'

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'Ha! that accounts for it. Seeing him with her, I could almost have thought it was thirty years ago, and that it was my dear old friend.'

Phœbe could have embraced Sir John. She could not conceal her glow of delight so completely that Bertha did not laugh and say, 'Mr. Charlecote is what the Germans would call Phœbe's *Bild*. She always blushes and looks conscious if he is mentioned.'

Sir John laughed, but with some emotion, and Phœbe hastily turned her still more blushing face away. Certainly, if Phœbe had had any prevision of her present state of mind, she never would have bought that chiffonier.

When Sir John had sufficiently admired the details of the choice little drawing-room, and had been shown by the eager sisters all over the house, he asked if Phœbe would walk up with him to the Holt. He had hoped his eldest son, who had ridden over with him, would have come in, and gone up with them, but he supposed Charlie had seized on him. (Poor Sir John, his attempt at match-making did not flourish.) However, he had secured Phœbe's most intense gratitude by his proposal, and down she came, a very pretty picture, in her dark brown dress, scarlet cloak, and round, brown felt hat, with the long, curly, brown feather tipped with scarlet, her favourite winter robin colouring. Her cheeks were brilliant, and her eyes not only brighter, but with a slight drooping that gave them the shadiness they sometimes wanted. And it was all from a ridiculous trepidation which made it well-nigh impossible to bring out what she was longing to say—'So you think Mr. Randolph like Mr. Charlecote.'

Fortunately he was beforehand with her, for both the likeness and the path through the pine woods reminded him strongly of his old friend, and he returned to the subject. 'So you are a great admirer of dear old Charlecote, Phœbe: you can't remember him?'

'No, but Robert does, and I sometimes think I do.' (Then it came.) 'You think Mr. Randolph like him?' Thanks to her hat, she could blush more comfortably now.

'I did not see him near. It was only something in air and figure. People inherit those things wonderfully. Now, my son Charlie sits on horseback exactly like his grandfather, whom he never saw; and John—'

Oh! was he going to run away on family likenesses? Phœbe would not hear the 'and John;' and observed, 'Mr. Charlecote was his godfather, was he not?'

Which self-evident fact brought him back again to 'Yes; and I only wish he had seen more of him! These are his plantations, I declare, that he used to make so much of!'

'Yes, that is the reason Miss Charlecote is so fond of them.'

'Miss Charlecote! When I think of him, I have no patience with her. I do believe he kept single all his life for her sake: and why she never would have him I never could guess. You ladies are very unreasonable sometimes, Phœbe.'

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Phœbe tried to express a rational amount of wonder at poor Honor's taste, but grew incoherent in fear lest it should be irrational, and was rather frightened at finding Sir John looking at her with some amusement; but he was only thinking of how willingly the poor little heiress of the Mervyns had once been thrown at Humfrey Charlecote's head. But he went on to tell her of all that her hero had ever been to him and to the county, and of the blank his death had left, and never since supplied, till she felt more and more what a 'wise' man truly was!

No one was in the drawing-room, but Honor came down much more cheerful and lively than she had been for years, and calling Owen materially better—the doctors thought the injury to the head infinitely mitigated, and the first step to recovery fairly taken—there were good accounts of the Prendergasts, and all things seemed to be looking well. Presently Sir John, to Phœbe's great satisfaction, spoke of her guest, and his resemblance, but Honor answered with half-resentful surprise. Some of the old servants had made the same remark, but she could not understand it, and was evidently hurt by its recurrence. Phœbe sat on, listening to the account of Lucilla's letters, and the good spirits and health they manifested; forcing herself not too obviously to watch door or window, and when Sir John was gone, she only offered to depart, lest Miss Charlecote should wish to be with Owen.

'No, my dear, thank you; Mr. Randolph is with him, and he can read a little now. We are getting above the solitaire board, I assure you. I have fitted up the little room beyond the study for his bedroom, and he sits in the study, so there are no stairs, and he is to go out every day in a chair or the carriage.'

'Does the little boy amuse him?'

'No, not exactly, poor little fellow. They are terribly afraid of each other, that is the worst of it. And then we left the boy too long with the old woman. I hear his lessons for a quarter of an hour a day, and he is a clever child enough; but his pronunciation and habits are an absolute distress, and he is not happy anywhere but in the housekeeper's room. I try to civilize him, but as yet I cannot worry poor Owen. You can't think how comfortable we are together, Phœbe, when we are alone. Since his sister went we have got on so much better. He was shy before her; but I must

tell you, my dear, he asked me to read my Psalms and Lessons aloud, as I used to do; and we have had such pleasant evenings, and he desired that the servants might still come in to prayers in the study. But then he always was different with me.'

And Phœbe, while assenting, could not silence a misgiving that she thought very cruel. She would believe Owen sincere if Humfrey Randolph did. Honor, however, was very happy, and presently begged her to come and see Owen. She obeyed with alacrity, and was conducted to the study. No Randolph was there, only pen, ink, paper, and algebra. But as she was greeting Owen, who looked much better and less oppressed, Honor made an exclamation, and from the window they saw the young man leaning over the sundial, partly studying its mysteries, partly playing with little Owen, who hung on him as an old playmate.

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'Yes,' said Owen, 'he has taken pity on the boy—he is very good to him—has served an apprenticeship.'

Mr. Randolph looked up, saw Phœbe, gave a start of recognition and pleasure, and sped towards the house.

'Yes, Phœbe, I do see *some* likeness,' said Honor, as though a good deal struck and touched.

All the ridiculous and troublesome confusion was so good as to be driven away in the contentment of Humfrey Randolph's presence, and the wondrous magnetic conviction that he was equally glad to be with her. She lost all restlessness, and was quite ready to amuse Owen by a lively discussion and comparison of the two weddings, but she so well knew that she should like to stay too long, that she cut her time rather over short, and would not stay to luncheon. This was not like the evenings that began with Hiawatha and ended at Lakeville, or on Lake Ontario; but one pleasure was in store for Phœbe. While she was finding her umbrella, and putting on her clogs, Humfrey Randolph ran down-stairs to her, and said, 'I wanted to tell you something. My stepmother is going to be married.'

'You are glad?'

'Very glad. It is to a merchant whom she met at Buffalo, well off, and speaking most kindly of the little boys.'

'That must be a great load off your mind.'

'Indeed it is, though the children must still chiefly look to me. I should like to have little George at a good school. However, now their immediate maintenance is off my hands, I have more to spend in educating myself. I can get evening lessons now, when my day's work is over.'

'Oh! do not overstrain your head,' said Phœbe, thinking of Bertha.

'Heads can bear a good deal when they are full of hope,' he said, smiling.

'Still after your out-of-doors life of bodily exercise, do you not find it hard to be always shut up in London?'

'Perhaps the novelty has not worn off. It is as if life had only begun since I came into the city.'

'A new set of faculties called into play?'

'Faculties—yes, and everything else.'

'I must go now, or my sisters will be waiting for me, and I see your dinner coming in. Good-bye.'

'May I come to see you?'

'O yes, pray let me show you our cottage.'

'When may I come?'

'To-morrow, I suppose.'

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She felt, rather than saw him watching her all the way from the garden-gate to the wood. That little colloquy was the sunshiny point in her day. Had the tidings been communicated in the full circle, it would have been as nothing compared with their reservation for her private ear, with the marked 'I wanted to tell *you*.' Then she came home, looked at Maria threading holly-berries, and her heart fainted within her. There were moments when poor Maria would rise before her as a hardship and an infliction, and then she became terrified, prayed against such feelings as a crime, and devoted herself to her sister with even more than her wonted patient tenderness.

The certainty that the visit would take place kept her from all flutterings and self-debate, and in due time Mr. Randolph arrived. Anxiously did Phœbe watch for his look at Maria, for Bertha's look at him, and she was pleased with both. His manner to Maria was full of gentleness, and Bertha's quick eyes detected his intellect. He stood an excellent examination from her and Miss Fennimore upon the worn channel of Niagara, which had so often been used as a knockdown argument against Miss Charlecote's cosmogony; and his bright terse powers of description gave them, as they agreed, a better idea of his woods than any travels which they had read.

It was no less interesting to observe his impression of the English village-life at Hiltonbury. To him, the aspect of the country had an air of exquisite miniature finish, wanting indeed in breadth and freedom, but he had suffered too much from vain struggling single-handed with Nature in

her might, not to value the bounds set upon her; and a man who knew by personal experience what it was to seek his whole live stock in an interminable forest, did not complain of the confinement of hedges and banks. Nay, the 'hedgerow elms and hillocks green' were to him as classical as Whitehall; he treated Maria's tame robins with as much respect as if they had been Howards or Percies; holly and mistletoe were handled by him with reverential curiosity; and the church and home of his ancestors filled him with a sweet loyal enthusiasm, more eager than in those to whom these things were familiar.

Miss Charlecote herself came in for some of these feelings. He admired her greatly in her Christmas aspect of Lady Bountiful, in which she well fulfilled old visions of the mistress of an English home, but still more did he dwell upon her gentleness, and on that shadowy resemblance to his mother, which made him long for some of that tenderness which she lavished upon Owen. He looked for no more than her uniformly kind civility and hospitality, but he was always wishing to know her better; and any touch of warmth and affection in her manner towards him was so delightful that he could not help telling Phœbe of it, in their next brief *tête-à-tête*.

He was able to render a great service to Miss Charlecote. Mr. Brooks's understanding had not cleared with time, and the accounts that had been tangled in summer were by the end of the year in confusion worse confounded. He was a faithful servant, but his accounts had always been audited every month, and in his old age, his arithmetic would not carry him farther, so that his mistress's long absence abroad had occasioned such a hopeless chaos, that but for his long services, his honesty might have been in question. Honora put this idea away with angry horror. Not only did she love and trust the old man, but he was a legacy from Humfrey, and she would have torn the page from her receipts rather than rouse the least suspicion against him. Yet she could not bear to leave any flaw in Humfrey's farm books, and she toiled and perplexed herself in vain; till Owen, finding out what distressed her, and grieving at his own incapacity, begged that Randolf might help her; when behold! the confused accounts arranged themselves in comprehensible columns, and poor old Brooks was proved to have cheated himself so much more than his lady as to be entirely exonerated from all but puzzle-headedness. The young man's farmer life qualified him to be highly popular at the Holt. He was curious about English husbandry, talked to the labourers, and tried their tools with no unpractised hand, even the flail which Honor's hatred of steam still kept as the winter's employment in the barn; he appreciated the bullocks, criticized the sheep, and admired the pigs, till the farming men agreed 'there had not been such an one about the place since the Squire himself.'

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Honora might be excused for not having detected a likeness between the two Humfreys. Scarcely a feature was in the same mould, the complexion was different, and the heavily-built, easy-going Squire, somewhat behind his own century, had apparently had nothing in common with the brisk modern colonial engineer; yet still there was something curiously recalling the expression of open honesty, and the whole cast of countenance, as well as the individuality of voice, air, and gestures, and the perception grew upon her so much in the haunts of her cousin, where she saw his attitudes and habits unconsciously repeated, that she was almost ready to accept Bertha's explanation that it was owing to the influence of the Christian name that both shared. But as it had likewise been borne by the wicked disinherited son who ran away, the theory was somewhat halting.

Phœbe's intercourse with Humfrey the younger was much more fragmentary than in town, and therefore, perhaps, the more delicious. She saw him on most of the days of his fortnight's stay, either in the mutual calls of the two houses, in chance meetings in the village, or in walks to or from the holy-day services at the church, and these afforded many a moment in which she was let into the deeper feelings that his first English Christmas excited. It was not conventional Christmas weather, but warm and moist, thus rendering the contrast still stronger with the sleighing of his prosperous days, the snowshoe walk of his poorer ones. A frost hard enough for skating was the prime desire of Maria and Bertha, who both wanted to see the art practised by one to whom it was familiar. The frost came at last, and became reasonably hard in the first week of the new year, one day when Phœbe, to her regret, was forced to drive to Elverslope to fulfil some commissions for Mervyn and Cecily, who were expected at home on the 8th of January, after a Christmas at Sutton.

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However, she had a reward. 'I do think,' said Miss Fennimore to her, as she entered the drawing-room, 'that Mr. Randolf is the most good-natured man in the world! For full three-quarters of an hour this afternoon did he hand Maria up and down a slide on the pond at the Holt!'

'You went up to see him skate?'

'Yes; he was to teach Bertha. We found him helping the little Sandbrook to slide, but when we came he sent him in with the little maid, and gave Bertha a lesson, which did not last long, for she grew nervous. Really her nerves will never be what they were! Then Maria begged for a slide, and you know what any sort of monotonous bodily motion is to her; there is no getting her to leave off, and I never saw anything like the spirit and good-nature with which he complied.'

'He is *very* kind to Maria,' said Phœbe.

'He seems to have that sort of pitying respect which you first put into my mind towards her.'

'Oh, are you come home, Phœbe?' said Maria, running into the room. 'I did not hear you. I have been sliding on the ice all the afternoon with Mr. Randolf. It is so nice, and he says we will do it

again to-morrow.'

'Ha, Phœbe!' said Bertha, meeting her on the stairs, 'do you know what you missed?'

'Three children sliding on the ice,' quoted Phœbe.

'Seeing how a man that is called Humfrey can bear with your two sisters making themselves ridiculous. Really I should set the backwoods down as the best school of courtesy, but that I believe some people have that school within themselves. Hollo!'

For Phœbe absolutely kissed Bertha as she went up-stairs.

'Ha?' said Bertha, interrogatively; then went into the drawing-room, and looked very grave, almost sad.

Phœbe could not but think it rather hard when, on the last afternoon of Humfrey Randolph's visit, there came a note from Mervyn ordering her up to Beauchamp to arrange some special contrivances of his for Cecily's morning-room—her mother's, which gave it an additional pang. It was a severe, threatening, bitterly cold day, not at all fit for sliding, even had not both the young ladies and Miss Fennimore picked up a suspicion of cold; but Phœbe had no doubt that there would be a farewell visit, and did not like to lose it.

'Take the pony carriage, and you will get home faster,' said Bertha, answering what was unspoken.

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No; the groom sent in word that the ponies were gone to be rough-shod, and that one of them had a cold.

'Never mind,' said Phœbe, cheerfully; 'I shall be warmer walking.'

And she set off, with a lingering will, but a step brisk under her determination that her personal wishes should never make her neglect duty or kindness. She did not like to think that he would be disappointed, but she had a great trust in *his* trust in herself, and a confidence, not to be fretted away, that some farewell would come to pass, and that she should know when to look for him again.

Scanty sleety flakes of snow were falling before her half-hour's walk was over, and she arrived at the house, where anxious maids were putting their last touches of preparation for the mistress. It was strange not to feel more strongly the pang of a lost home; and had not Phœbe been so much preoccupied, perhaps it would have affected her strongly, with all her real joy at Cecily's installation; but there were new things before her that filled her mind too full for regrets for the rooms where she had grown up. She only did her duty scrupulously by Cecily's writing-table, piano, and pictures, and then satisfied the housekeeper by a brief inspection of the rooms, more laudatory than particular. She rather pitied Cecily, after her comfortable parsonage, for coming to all those state drawing-rooms. If it had been the west wing, now!

By this time the snow was thicker, and the park beginning to whiten. The housekeeper begged her to wait and order out the carriage, but she disliked giving trouble, and thought that an unexpected summons might be tardy of fulfilment, so she insisted on confronting the elements, confident in her cloak and india-rubber boots, and secretly hoping that the visitor at the cottage might linger on into the twilight.

As she came beyond the pillars of the portico, such a whirl of snow met her that she almost questioned the prudence of her decision, when a voice said, 'It is only the drift round the corner of the house.'

'You here?'

'Your sister gave me leave to come and see you home through the snow-storm.'

'Oh, thank you! This is the first time you have been here,' she added, feeling as if her first words had been too eagerly glad.

'Yes, I have only seen the house from a distance before. I did not know how large it was. Which part did you inhabit?'

'There—the west wing—shut up now, poor thing!'

'And where was the window where you saw the horse and cart? Yes, you see I know that story; which was your window?'

'The nearest to the main body of the house. Ah! it is a dear old window. I have seen many better things from it than that!'

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'What kind of things?'

'Sunsets and moonsets, and the Holt firs best of all.'

'Yes, I know better now what you meant by owing all to Miss Charlecote,' he said, smiling. 'I owe something to her, too.'

'Oh, is she going to help you on?' cried Phœbe.

'No, I do not need that. What I owe to her is—knowing you.'

It had come, then! The first moment of full assurance of what had gleamed before; and yet the shock, sweet as it was, was almost pain, and Phœbe's heart beat fast, and her downcast look betrayed that the full force of his words—and still more, of his tone—had reached her.

'May I go on?' he said. 'May I dare to tell you what you are to me? I knew, from the moment we met, that you were what I had dreamt of—different, but better.'

'I am sure I knew that you were!' escaped from Phœbe, softly, but making her face burn, as at what she had not meant to say.

'Then you can bear with me? You do not forbid me to hope.'

'Oh! I am a great deal too happy!'

There came a great wailing, driving gust of storm at that moment, as if it wanted to sweep them off their feet, but it was a welcome blast, for it was the occasion of a strong arm being flung round Phœbe, to restrain that fluttering cloak. 'Storms shall only blow us nearer together, dearest,' he said, with recovered breath, as, with no unwilling hand, she clung to his arm for help.

'If it be God's will,' said Phœbe, earnestly.

'And indeed,' he said, fervently, 'I have thought and debated much whether it were His will; whether it could be right, that I, with my poverty and my burthens, should thrust myself into your wealthy and sheltered life. At first, when I thought you were a poor dependent, I admitted the hope. I saw you spirited, helpful, sensible, and I dared to think that you were of the stuff that would gladly be independent, and would struggle on and up with me, as I have known so many do in my own country.'

'Oh! would I not?'

'Then I found how far apart we stand in one kind of social scale, and perhaps that ought to have overthrown all hope; but, Phœbe, it will not do so! I will not ask you to share want and privation, but I will and do ask you to be the point towards which I may work, the best earthly hope set before me.'

'I am glad,' said Phœbe, 'that you knew too well to think there was any real difference. Indeed, the superiority is all yours, except in mere money. And mine, I am sure, need not stand in the way, but there is one thing that does.'

'What? Your brothers?'

'I do not know. It is my sister Maria. I promised long ago that nothing should make me desert her;' and, with a voice faltering a little, but endeavouring to be firm, 'a promise to fulfil a duty appointed by Providence must not be repented of when the cost is felt.'

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'But why should you think of deserting her?' he said. 'Surely I may help to bear your cares; and there is something so good, so gentle and lovable about her, that she need be no grievance. I shall have to bring my little brothers about you, too, so we shall be even,' he added, smiling.

'Then,' she said, looking in his face as beginning to take counsel with him, 'you think it is right to assume a new tie that must have higher claims than the prior one that Heaven sent me.'

'Nay, dearest, is not the new one instituted by Heaven? If I promise that I will be as entirely Maria's brother as you are her sister, and will reverence her affliction, or more truly her innocence, in the same way, will you not trust her, as well as yourself, with me?'

'Trust, oh! indeed I do, and am thankful. But I am thinking of you! Poor dear Maria might be a drag, where I should not! And I cannot leave her to any of the others. She could not be long without me.'

'Well, faithless one, we may have to wait the longer; though I feel that you alone would be happiest fighting up the hill with me.'

'Oh, thank you for knowing that so well.'

'But as we both have these ties, and as, besides, I should be a shabby adventurer to address you but on equal terms, we must be content to wait till—as with God's blessing I trust to do—I have made a home smooth enough for Maria as well as for you! Will that do, Phœbe?'

'Somehow it seems too much,' murmured Phœbe; 'and yet I knew it of you.'

'And as you both have means of your own, it may bring the time nearer,' he said. 'There, you see I can calculate on your fortune, though I still wish it were out of the way.'

'If it were not for Maria, I should.'

'And now with this hope and promise, I feel as if, even if it were seven years, they would be like so many days,' said Humfrey. 'You will not be of those, my Phœbe, who suffer and are worn by a long engagement?'

'One cannot tell without a trial,' said Phœbe; 'but indeed I do not see why security and rest, or even hope deferred, should hurt me. Surely, having a right to think about you cannot do so?'

And her look out of those honest clear gray eyes was one of the most perfect reliance and gladness.

'May I be worthy of those thoughts!' he fervently said. 'And you will write to me—even when I go back to the Ottawa?'

'I shall be so glad to tell you everything, and have your letters! Oh! no, with them I am not going to pine'—and her strong young nature laughed at the folly. p. 533

'And while God gives me strength, we will not be afraid,' he answered. 'Phœbe, I looked at the last chapter of Proverbs last night, and thought you were like that woman of strength and skill on whose "lips is the law of kindness." And "you are not afraid of the snow," as if to complete the likeness.'

'I did not quite know it was snowing. I like it, for it suits your country.'

'I like it, because you are as clear, firm, and pure as my own clear crystal ice,' he said; 'only not quite so cold! And now, what remains? Must your brothers be consulted?' he added, reluctantly.

'It will be right that I should tell them,' said Phœbe. 'From Robert I could not keep such a thing, and Mervyn has a right to know. I cannot tell how he may take it, but I do not think that I owe him such implicit obedience as if he were my father. And by the time you really ask for me, you know you are to be such a rising engineer that they are all to be almost as proud of you as I am!'

'God helping me,' he gravely answered, his eyes raised upwards, and as it were carrying with them the glance that had sought them in almost playful confidence.

And thus they looked forth upon this life. Neither was so young as not to be aware of its trials. She knew the sorrows of suspense, bereavement, and family disunion; and he, before his twenty-fourth year, had made experience of adversity, uncongeniality, disappointment, and severe—almost hopeless—everyday labour. It was not in the spirit of those who had not braced on their armour, but of those who had made proof of it, that they looked bravely and cheerfully upon the battle, feeling their strength doubled as faithful companions-in-arms, and willing in that strength and trust to bear patiently with the severest trial of all—the delay of their hopes. The cold but bracing wind, the snow driving and whirling round them in gusts, could not daunt nor quench their spirits—nay, rather gave them additional vigour and enjoyment, while even the tokens of the tempest that they bore away were of perfect dazzling whiteness.

Never was shelter less willingly attained than when the park wicket of the Underwood was reached, just as the early twilight was becoming darkness. It was like a foretaste for Phœbe of seeing him go his own way in the storm while she waited safely housed; but they parted with grave sweet smiles, and a promise that he would snatch a moment's farewell on the morrow. Phœbe would rather not have been met by Bertha, at the front door, in some solicitude—'You are come at last! Are you wet? are you cold?'

'Oh, no, thank you! Don't stand in the draught,' said Phœbe, anxious to shake her off; but it was not to be done. Bertha preceded her up-stairs, talking all the way in something of her old mischievous whisper. 'Am I in disgrace with you, too, Phœbe? Miss Fennimore says I have committed an awful breach of propriety; but really I could not leave you to the beating of the pitiless storm alone. I am afraid Malta's sagacity and little paws would hardly have sufficed to dig you out of a snowdrift before life was extinct. Are you greatly displeased with me, Phœbe?' And being by this time in the bedroom, she faced about, shut the door, and looked full at her sister. p. 534

'No—no—dear Bertha, not displeased in the least; only if you would go—'

'Now, Phœbe, indeed that is not kind of you,' said Bertha, pleadingly, but preparing to obey.

'No, Bertha, it is not,' said Phœbe, recovering herself in a moment. 'I am sorry for it; but oh! don't you know the feeling of wanting to have one's treasure all to oneself for a little moment before showing it? No, don't go;' and the two sisters flung their arms round one another. 'You shall hear now.'

'No, no,' said Bertha, kissing her; 'my time for obtrusive, childish curiosity is over! I only was so anxious;' and she looked up with tearful eyes, and almost the air of an elder sister. Phœbe might well requite the look with full-hearted tenderness and caresses, as she said, calmly, 'Yes, Bertha, I am very happy.'

'You ought to be,' said Bertha, seriously.

'Yes,' said Phœbe, taking the *ought* in a different sense from what she meant; 'he is all, and more, than I ever thought a man wise in true wisdom should be.'

'And a man of progress, full of the dignity of labour,' said Bertha. 'I am glad he is not an old bit of county soil like John Raymond! My dear Phœbe, Sir John will tear his hair!'

'For shame, Bertha!'

'Well, I will not tease you with my nonsense; but you know it is the only thing that keeps tears out of one's eyes. I see you want to be alone. Dear Phœbe!' and she clung to her neck for a moment.

'An instant more, Bertha. You see everything, I know; but has Miss Fennimore guessed?'

'No, my dear, I do not think any such syllogism has ever occurred to her as, Lover's look conscious; Phœbe looks conscious; therefore Phœbe is in love! It is defective in the major, you see, so it could not enter her brain.'

'Then, Bertha, do not let any one guess it. I shall speak to Mervyn to-morrow, and write to Robin. It is their due, but no one else must know it—no, not for a long time—years perhaps.'

'You do not mean to wait for years?'

'We must.'

'Then what's the use of having thirty thousand pounds?'

'No, Bertha, it would not be like him to be content with owing all to my fortune, and beginning life in idleness. It would be just enough to live on, with none of the duties of property, and that would never do! I could not wish it for him, and he has his brothers to provide for.'

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'Well, let him work for them, and have your money to make capital! Really, Phœbe, I would not lose such a chance of going out and seeing those glorious Lakes!'

'I have Maria to consider.'

'Maria! And why are you to be saddled with Maria?'

'Because I promised my mother—I promised myself—I promised Mervyn, that she should be my care. I have told him of that promise, and he accepts it most kindly.'

'You cannot leave her to me? Oh! Phœbe, do you still think me as hateful as I used to be?'

'Dear, dear Bertha, I have full trust in your affection for her; but I undertook the charge, and I cannot thrust it on to another, who might—'

'Don't say that, Phœbe,' cried Bertha, impetuously; 'I am the one to have her! I who certainly never can, never shall, marry—I who am good for nothing but to look after her. Say you do not think me unworthy of her, Phœbe.'

'I say no such thing,' said Phœbe, affectionately, 'but there is no use in discussing the matter. Dear Bertha, leave me, and compose yourself.'

Truly, during that evening Bertha was the agitated one, her speech much affected, and her gestures restless, while Phœbe sat over her work, her needle going swiftly and evenly, and her eyes beaming with her quiet depth of thankful bliss.

In the morning, again, it was Bertha who betrayed an uneasy restlessness, and irrepressible desire to banish Miss Fennimore and Maria from the drawing-room, till the governess, in perplexity, began to think of consulting Phœbe whether a Jack Hastings affair could be coming over again.

Phœbe simply trusted to the promise, and went about her morning's avocations with a heart at rest, and when at last Humfrey Randolph did hurry in for a few moments, before he must rush back to the Holt, her greeting was so full of reliance and composure that Miss Fennimore perceived nothing. Bertha, however, rested not. As well as she could, under a fearful access of stammering, she insisted that Mr. Randolph should come into the dining-room to look at a—a—a—a—

'Ah, well!' thought Miss Fennimore, 'Phœbe is gone, too, so she will keep guard.'

If Miss Fennimore could have looked through the door, she would have seen the astonished Maria pounced upon, as if in sport, pulled up-stairs, and desired by Bertha to find her book of dried flowers to show Mr. Randolph. Naughty Bertha, who really did not believe the dried flowers had ever been brought home from Woolstone-lane! It served the manœuvrer right, that Maria, after one look at the shelves, began to cry out for Phœbe to come and find them. But it signified the less since the lovers had not left the hall, and had exchanged all the words that there was time for before Bertha, at the sound of the re-opening door, flew down to put her hand into Humfrey's and grasp it tightly, looking in his face instead of speaking. 'Thank you,' he said, returning the pressure, and was gone. 'We improve as we go on. Number three is the best of my brothers-in-law, Phœbe,' said Bertha, lightly. Then leaving Phœbe to pacify Maria about the flowers, she went into her own room, and cried bitterly and overpoweringly.

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CHAPTER XXXI

Thekla. I should love thee.

Whate'er thou hadst chosen, thou wouldst still have acted
Nobly and worthy of thee; but repentance
Shall ne'er disturb thy soul's fair peace.

Max. Then I must leave thee; must part from thee!

Thekla. Being faithful
To thine own self, thou art faithful too to me.—*Wallenstein*

Phœbe and Maria went alone to the Park to receive the bridal pair, for poor Bertha was so

nervous and unhinged as not even to wish to leave the fireside. It was plain that she must not be deprived of an elder sister's care, and that it would be unlikely that she would ever have nerve enough to undertake the charge of Maria, even if Phœbe could think of shifting the responsibility, or if a feeble intellect could be expected to yield the same deference to a younger sister as came naturally to an elder one.

Thus Phœbe's heart was somewhat heavy as she braced herself for her communication to Mervyn, doubtful as to the extent of his probable displeasure, but for that very cause resolved on dealing openly from the first, while satisfied that, at her age, his right was rather to deference than to surrender of judgment. Maria roamed through the house, exclaiming at the alterations, and Phœbe sat still in the concentrated, resolute stillness that was her form of suspense.

They came! The peals of the Hiltonbury bells rung merrily in the cold air, the snow sparkled bridal, the icicles glittered in the sunset light, the workpeople stood round the house to cheer the arrival, and the sisters hurried out.

It was no more the pale, patient face! The cheeks were rounded, the brown eyes smiled, the haggard air, that even as a bride Cecily had worn, was entirely gone, and Mervyn watched exultingly Phœbe's surprise at what he had made of the wan, worn girl they had met at Hyères. The only disappointment was Bertha's absence, and there was much regret that the new-comers had not heard of her cold so as to have seen her at the Underwood on their way. They had spent the previous day in town in going over the distillery, by Cecily's particular wish, and had afterwards assisted at a grand impromptu entertainment of all the workpeople, at their own expense and Robert's trouble. Mervyn did certainly seem carried out of his own knowledge of himself, and his wife had transgressed every precedent left by his mother, who had never beheld Whittingtonia in her life!

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Phœbe found their eager talk so mazy and indistinct to her perception that she became resolved to speak and clear her mind at the first opportunity; so she tarried behind, when Cecily went up, under Maria's delighted guidance, to take off her bonnet, and accosted Mervyn with the ominous words, 'I want to speak to you.'

'Make haste, then; there is Cecily left to Maria.'

'I wanted to tell you that I am engaged.'

'The deuce you are!'

'To Mr. Randolph, Miss Charlecote's Canadian cousin.'

Mervyn, who had expected no less than John Raymond, whirled round in indignant surprise, and looked incredulously at her, but was confronted by her two open, unabashed eyes, as she stood firm on both her feet, and continued: 'I have been thrown a good deal with him, so as to learn his goodness and superiority. I know you will think it a very bad match, for he has nothing but his hands and head; but we mean to wait till he can offer what are considered as equal terms. We thought it right you should know.'

'Upon my word, that's a clever fellow!'

Phœbe knew very well that this was ironical, but would not so reply. 'He has abilities,' she said, 'and we are ready to wait till he has made proof of them.'

'Well, what now?' he cried in despair. 'I *did* think you the sensible one of the lot.'

'When you know him,' she said, with her fearless smile, 'you will own that I *was* sensible there.'

'Really, the child looks so complacent that she would outface me that this mad notion was a fine thing! I declare it is worse than Bertha's business; and you so much older! At least Hastings was a man of family, and this is a Yankee adventurer picked out of the back of a ditch by that young dog, Sandbrook. Only a Yankee could have had the impudence! I declare you are laughing all the time. What have you to say for yourself?'

'His father was major in the ---th dragoons, and was one of the Randolfs of ---shire. His mother was a Charlecote. His birth is as good as our own, and you saw that he is a gentleman. His character and talents have gained his present situation, and it is a profession that gives every opening for ability; nor does he ask for me till his fortune is made.'

'But hinders you from doing better! Pray, what would Augusta say to you?' he added, jocosely, for even while lashing himself up, his tone had been placable.

'He shall satisfy her.'

'How long has this been going on?'

'We only spoke of it yesterday. Bertha found it out; but I wish no one else to know it except Robert.'

'Somehow she looks so cool, and she is so entirely the last girl I expected to go crazy, that I can't laugh at the thing as I ought! I say, what's this about Miss Charlecote; will she do anything for him?'

'I believe not.'

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'And pray who vouches for his antecedents, such as they are.'

'Mr. Currie and Owen Sandbrook both know the whole.'

'Is Sandbrook at the Holt?'

'Yes,' answered Phœbe, suppressing her strong distaste against bringing him into the affair.

'Well, I shall make inquiries, and—and—it is a horrid unlucky business, and the old girl should be scarified for putting you in his way. The end will be that you'll marry on your own means, and be pinched for life. Now, look here, you are no fool at the bottom; you will give it up if I find that he is no go.'

'If it be proved that I ought,' said Phœbe. 'And if you find him what I have told you, you will make no opposition. Thank you, Mervyn.'

'Stay,' said he, laughing, and letting her kiss him, 'I have made no promises, mind!'

The confidence that Phœbe had earned had stood her in good stead. Mervyn had great trust in her judgment, and was too happy besides for severity on other people's love. Nor were her perfect openness, and fearless though modest independence, without effect. She was not one who invited tyranny, but truly 'queen o'er herself,' she ruled herself too well to leave the reins loose for others to seize.

The result of the interview had surpassed her hopes, and she had nothing to regret but her brother's implied purpose of consulting Owen Sandbrook. Friend of Humfrey though he were, she could not feel secure of his generosity, and wished the engineer had been the nearer referee; but she did not say so, as much for shame at her own uncharitableness, as for fear of rousing Mervyn's distrust; and she was afraid that her injunctions to secrecy would be disregarded. Fully aware that all would be in common between the husband and wife, she was still taken by surprise when Cecily, coming early next day to the Underwood to see Bertha, took her aside to say, 'Dearest, I hope this is all right, and for your happiness.'

'You will soon know that it is,' said Phœbe, brightly.

'Only, my dear, it must not be a long engagement. Ah! you think that nothing now, but I could not bear to think that *you* were to go through a long attachment.'

Was this forgiving Cecily really fancying that her sorrows had been nothing worse than those incidental to a long attachment?

'Ah!' thought Phœbe, 'if she could ever have felt the full reliance on which I can venture, she need never have drooped! What is time to trust?'

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Mervyn kept his word, and waiving ceremony, took his wife at once to the Holt, and leaving her with Miss Charlecote, made a visit to Owen in the study, wishing, in the first place, to satisfy himself of the young man's competence to reply to his questions. On this he had no doubt; Owen had made steady progress ever since he had been in England, and especially during the quiet time that had succeeded his sister's marriage. His mental powers had fully regained their keenness and balance, and though still incapable of sustained exertion of his faculties, he could talk as well as ever, and the first ten minutes convinced Mervyn that he was conversing with a shrewd sensible observer, who had seen a good deal of life, and of the world. He then led to the question about young Randolf, endeavouring so to frame it as not to betray the occasion of it.

The reply fully confirmed all that Phœbe had averred. The single efforts of a mere youth, not eighteen at the time of his father's failure, without capital, and set down in a wild uncleared part of the bush, had of course been inadequate to retrieve the ruined fortunes of the family; but he had shown wonderful spirit, patience, and perseverance, and the duteous temper in which he had borne the sacrifice of his prospects by his father's foolish speculations and unsuitable marriage, his affectionate treatment of the wife and children when left on his hands, and his cheerful endurance of the severest and most hopeless drudgery for the bare support of life, had all been such as to inspire the utmost confidence in his character. Of his future prospects, Owen spoke with a sigh almost of envy. His talent and industry had already made him a valuable assistant to Mr. Currie, and an able engineer had an almost certain career of prosperity open to him. Lastly Mervyn asked what was the connection with Miss Charlecote, and what possibilities it held out. Owen winced for a moment, then explained the second cousinship, adding, however, that there was no entail, that the disposal of Miss Charlecote's property was entirely in her own power, and that she had manifested no intention of treating the young man with more than ordinary civility, in fact that she had rather shrunk from acknowledging his likeness to the family. His father's English relatives had, in like manner, owned him as a kinsman; but had shown no alacrity in making friends with him. The only way to be noticed, as the two gentlemen agreed, when glad to close their conference in a laugh, is to need no notice.

'Uncommon hard on a fellow,' soliloquized Owen, when left alone. 'Is it not enough to have one's throat cut, but must one do it with one's own hands? It is a fine thing to be magnanimous when one thinks one is going off the stage, but quite another thing when one is to remain there. I'm no twelfth century saint, only a nineteenth century beggar, with an unlucky child on my hands! Am I to give away girl, land, and all to the fellow I raked out of his swamps? Better have let him grill and saved my limbs! And pray what more am I to do? I've introduced him, made no secret of his parentage, puffed him off, and brought him here, and pretty good care he takes of himself! Am I

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to pester poor Honey if she does prefer the child she bred up to a stranger? No, no, I've done my part: let him look out for himself!

Mervyn allowed to Phœbe that Randolph was no impostor, but warned her against assuming his consent. She suspected that Owen at least guessed the cause of these inquiries, and it kept her aloof from the Holt. When Miss Charlecote spoke of poor Owen's want of spirits, discretion told her that she was not the person to enliven him; and the consciousness of her secret made her less desirous of confidences with her kind old friend, so that her good offices chiefly consisted in having little Owen to the Underwood to play with Maria, who delighted in his society, and unconsciously did much for his improvement.

Honor herself perceived that Phœbe's visits only saddened her convalescent, and that in his present state he was happiest with no one but her, who was more than ever a mother to him. They were perfectly at ease together, as she amused him with the familiar books, which did not strain his powers like new ones, the quiet household talk, the little playful exchanges of tender wit, and the fresh arrangement of all her museum on the natural system, he having all the entertainment, and she all the trouble, till her conversion astonished Bertha. The old religious habits of the Holt likewise seemed to soothe and give him pleasure; but whether by force of old association, or from their hold on his heart, was as yet unknown to Honora, and perhaps to himself. It was as if he were deferring all demonstration till he should be able again to examine the subject with concentrated attention. Or it might be that, while he shrank from exerting himself upon Randolph's behalf, he was not ready for repentance, and therefore distrusted, and hung back from, the impulses that would otherwise have drawn him to renew all that he had once cast aside. He was never left alone without becoming deeply melancholy, yet no companionship save Honor's seemed to suit him for many minutes together. His brain was fast recovering the injury, but it was a trying convalescence; and with returning health, his perfect helplessness fretted him under all the difficulties of so tall and heavy a man being carried from bed to sofa, from sofa to carriage.

'Poor Owen!' said Phœbe to herself, one day when she had not been able to avoid witnessing this pitiable spectacle of infirmity; 'I can't think why I am always fancying he is doing Humfrey and me some injustice, and that he knows it. He, who brought Humfrey home, and has praised him to Mervyn! It is very uncharitable of me, but why will he look at me as if he were asking my pardon? Well, we shall see the result of Mervyn's inspection!'

Mervyn and his wife were going for two nights to the rooms at the office, in the first lull of the bridal invitations, which were infinitely more awful to Cecily than to Phœbe. After twenty-nine years of quiet clerical life, Cecily neither understood nor liked the gaieties even of the county, had very little to say, and, unless her aunt were present, made Phœbe into a protector, and retired behind her, till Phœbe sometimes feared that Mervyn would be quite provoked, and remember his old dread lest Cecily should be too homely and bashful for her position. Poor dear Cecily! She was as good and kind as possible; but in the present close intercourse it sometimes would suggest to Phœbe, 'was she quite as wise as she was good?'

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And Miss Fennimore, with still clearer eyes, inwardly decided that, though religion should above all form the morals, yet the morality of common sense and judgment should be cultivated with an equal growth.

Cecily returned from London radiant with sisterly congratulation, in a flutter of delight with Mr. Randolph, and intimating a glorious project in the background, devised between herself and Mervyn, then guarding against possible disappointment by declaring it might be all her own fancy.

The meaning of these prognostics appeared the next morning. Mervyn had been much impressed by Humfrey Randolph's keen business-like appearance and sensible conversation, as well as by Mr. Currie's opinion of him; and, always detesting the trouble of his own distillery, it had occurred to him that to secure an active working partner, and throw his sister's fortune into the business, would be a most convenient, generous, and brotherly means of smoothing the course of true love; and Cecily had been so enchanted at the happiness he would thus confer, that he came to the Underwood quite elevated with his own kindness.

Phœbe heard his offer with warm thankfulness, but could not answer for Humfrey.

'He has too much sense not to take a good offer,' said Mervyn, 'otherwise, it is all humbug his pretending to care for you. As to Robert's folly, have not I given up all that any rational being could stick at? I tell you, it is the giving up those houses that makes me in want of capital, so you are bound to make it up to me.'

Mervyn and Phœbe wrote by the same post. 'I will be satisfied with whatever you decide upon as right,' were Phœbe's words; but she refrained from expressing any wish. What was the use of a wise man, if he were not to be let alone to make up his mind? She would trust to him to divine what it would be to her to be thus one with her own family, and to gain him without losing her sisters. The balance must not be weighted by a woman's hand, when ready enough to incline to her side; and why should she add to his pain, if he must refuse?

How ardently she wished, however, can be imagined. She could not hide from herself pictures of herself and Humfrey, sometimes in London, sometimes at the Underwood, working with Robert, and carrying out the projects which Mervyn but half acted on, and a quarter understood.

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The letter came, and the first line was decisive. In spite of earnest wishes and great regrets, Humfrey could not reconcile the trade to his sense of right. He knew that as Mervyn conducted it, it was as unobjectionable as was possible, and that the works were admirably regulated; but it was in going over the distillery as a curiosity he had seen enough to perceive that it was a line in which enterprise and exertion could only find scope by extending the demoralizing sale of spirits, and he trusted to Phœbe's agreeing with him, that when he already had a profession fairly free from temptation, it was his duty not to put himself into one that might prove more full of danger to him than to one who had been always used to it. He had not consulted Robert, feeling clear in his own mind, and thinking that he had probably rather not interfere.

Kind Humfrey! That bit of consideration filled Phœbe's heart with grateful relief. It gave her spirits to be comforted by the tender and cheering words with which the edge of the disappointment was softened, and herself thanked for her abstinence from persuasion. 'Oh, better to wait seven years, with such a Humfrey as this in reserve, than to let him warp aside one inch of his sense of duty! As high-minded as dear Robert, without his ruggedness and harshness,' she thought as she read the manly, warm-hearted letter to Mervyn, which he had enclosed, and which she could not help showing to Bertha.

It was lost on Bertha. She thought it dull and poor-spirited not to accept, and manage the distillery just as he pleased. Any one could manage Mervyn, she said, not estimating the difference between a petted sister and a junior partner, and it was a new light to her that the trade—involving so much chemistry and mechanic ingenuity—was not good enough for anybody, unless they were peacocks too stupid to appreciate the dignity of labour! For the first time Phœbe wished her secret known to Miss Charlecote, for the sake of her appreciation of his triumph of principle.

'This is Robert's doing!' was Mervyn's first exclamation, when Phœbe gave him the letter. 'If there be an intolerable plague in the world, it is the having a fanatical fellow like that in the family. Nice requital for all I have thrown away for the sake of his maggots! I declare I'll resume every house I've let him have for his tomfooleries, and have a gin bottle blown as big as an ox as a sign for each of them.'

Phœbe had a certain lurking satisfaction in observing, when his malediction had run itself down, 'He never consulted Robert.'

'Don't tell me that! As if Robert had not run about with his mouth open, reviling his father's trade, and pluming himself on keeping out of it.'

'Mervyn, you know better! Robert had said no word against you! It is the facts that speak for themselves.'

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'The facts? You little simpleton, do you imagine that we distil the juices of little babies?'

Phœbe laughed, and he added kindly, 'Come, little one, I know this is no doing of yours. You have stuck by this wicked distiller of vile liquids through thick and thin. Don't let the parson lead you nor Randolf by the nose; he is far too fine a fellow for that; but come up to town with me and Cecily, as soon as Lady Caroline's bear fight is over, and make him hear reason.'

'I should be very glad to go and see him, but I cannot persuade him.'

'Why not?'

'When a man has made up his mind, it would be wrong to try to over-persuade him, even if I believed that I could.'

'You know the alternative?'

'What?'

'Just breaking with him a little.'

She smiled.

'We shall see what Crabbe, and Augusta, and Acton will say to your taking up with a dumpy leveller. We shall have another row. And you'll be broken up again!'

That was by far the most alarming of his threats; but she did not greatly believe that he would bring it to pass, or that an engagement, however imprudent, conducted as hers had been, could be made a plea for accusing Miss Fennimore or depriving her of her sisters. She tried to express her thankfulness for the kindness that had prompted the original proposal, and her sympathy with his natural vexation at finding that a traffic which he had really ameliorated at considerable loss of profit, was still considered objectionable; but he silenced this at once as palaver, and went off to fetch his wife to try her arguments.

This was worse than Phœbe had expected! Cecily was too thorough a wife not to have adopted all her husband's interests, and had totally forgotten all the objections current in her own family against the manufacture of spirits. She knew that great opportunities of gain had been yielded up, and such improvements made as had converted the distillery into a model of its kind; she was very proud of it, wished every one to be happy, and Mervyn to be saved trouble, and thought the scruples injurious and overstrained. Phœbe would not contest them with her. What the daughter had learnt by degrees, might not be forced on the wife; and Phœbe would only protest against

trying to shake a fixed purpose, instead of maintaining its grounds. So Cecily continued affectionately hurt, and unnecessarily compassionate, showing that a woman can hardly marry a person of tone inferior to her own without some deterioration of judgment, beneficial and elevating as her influence may be in the main.

Poor Cecily! she did the very thing that those acquainted with the ins and outs of the family had most deprecated! She dragged Robert into the affair, writing a letter, very pretty in wifely and sisterly goodwill, to entreat him to take Mr. Randolph in hand, and persuade him of the desirableness of the spirit manufacture in general, and that of the Fulmort house in particular.

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The letter she received in return was intended to be very kind, but was severely grave, in simply observing that what he had not thought fit to do himself, he could not persuade another to do.

Those words somehow acted upon Mervyn as bitter and ungrateful irony; and working himself up by an account, in his own colouring, of Robert's behaviour at the time of the foundation of St. Matthew's, he went thundering off to assure Phœbe that he *must* take an active partner, at all events; and that if she and Robert did not look out, he should find a moneyed man who knew what he was about, would clear off Robert's waste, and restore the place to what it had once been.

'What is your letter, Phœbe?' he asked, seeing an envelope in Robert's handwriting on her table.

Phœbe coloured a little. 'He has not said one word to Humfrey,' she said.

'And what has he said to you? The traitor, insulting me to my wife!'

Phœbe thought for one second, then resolved to take the risk of reading all aloud, considering that whatever might be the effect, it could not be worse than that of his surmises.

'Cecily has written to me, greatly to my surprise, begging for my influence with Randolph to induce him to become partner in the house. I understand by this that he has already refused, and that you are aware of his determination; therefore I have no scruple in writing to tell you that he is perfectly right. It is true that the trade, as Mervyn conducts it, is free from the most flagrant evils that deterred me from taking a share in it; and I am most thankful for the changes he has made.'

'You show it, don't you?' interjected Mervyn.

'I had rather see it in his hands than those of any other person, and there is nothing blameworthy in his continuance in it. But it is of questionable expedience, and there are still hereditary practices carried on, the harm of which he has not hitherto perceived, but which would assuredly shock a new-comer such as Randolph. You can guess what would be the difficulty of obtaining alteration, and acquiescence would be even more fatal. I do not tell you this as complaining of Mervyn, who has done and is doing infinite good, but to warn you against the least endeavour to influence Randolph. Depend upon it, even the accelerating your marriage would not secure your happiness if you saw your husband and brother at continual variance in the details of the business, and opposition might at any moment lead Mervyn to undo all the good he has effected.'

'Right enough there;' and Mervyn, who had looked furious at several sentences, laughed at last. 'I must get another partner, then, who can and will manage; and when all the gin-palaces are more splendiferous than ever, what will you and the parson say?'

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'That to do a little wrong in hopes of hindering another from doing worse, never yet succeeded!' said Phœbe, bravely.

She saw that the worst was over when he had come to that laugh, and that the danger of a quarrel between the brothers was averted. She did not know from how much terror and self-reproach poor Cecily was suffering, nor her multitudinous resolutions against kindly interferences upon *terra incognita*.

That fit of wrath subsided, and Mervyn neither looked out for his moneyed partner, nor fulfilled his threat of bringing the united forces of the family displeasure upon his sister. Still there was a cloud overshadowing the enjoyment, though not lessening the outward harmony of those early bridal days. The long, dark drives to the county gaities, shut up with Mervyn and Cecily, were formidable by the mere existence of a topic, never mentioned, but always secretly dwelt on. And in spite of three letters a week, Phœbe was beginning to learn that trust does not fully make up to the heart for absence, by the distance of London to estimate that of Canada, and by the weariness of one month, the tedium of seven years!

'Yet,' said Bertha to Cecily, 'Phœbe is so stupidly like herself now she is engaged, that it is no fun at all. Nobody would guess her to be in love! If they cared for each other one rush, would not they have floated to bliss even on streams of gin?'

Cecily would not dispute their mutual love, but she was not one of those who could fully understand the double force of that love which is second to love of principle. Obedience, not judgment, had been her safeguard, and, like most women, she was carried along, not by the abstract idea, but by its upholder.

Intuition, rather than what had actually passed before her, showed Phœbe more than once that Cecily was sorely perplexed by the difference between the standard of Sutton and that of Beauchamp. Strict, scrupulous, and deeply devout, the clergyman's daughter suffered at every

deviation from the practices of the parsonage, made her stand in the wrong places, and while conscientiously and painfully fretting Mervyn about petty details, would be unknowingly carried over far greater stumbling-blocks. In her ignorance she would be distressed at habits which were comparatively innocent, and then fear to put forth her influence at the right moment. There was hearty affection on either side, and Mervyn was exceedingly improved, but more than once Phœbe saw in poor Cecily's harassed, puzzled, wistful face, and heard in her faltering remonstrances, what it was to have loved and married without perfect esteem and trust.

CHAPTER XXXII

p. 546

Get thee an ape, and trudge the land
The leader of a juggling band.—SCOTT

'Master Howen, Master Howen, you must not go up the best stairs.'

'But I will go up the best stairs. I don't like the nasty, dark, back stairs!'

'Let me take off your boots then, sir; Mrs. Stubbs said she could not have such dirty marks—'

'I don't care for Mrs. Stubbs! I won't take my boots off! Get off—I'll kick you if you touch them! I shall go where I like! I'm a gentleman. I shall ave hall the Olt for my very hown!'

'Master Howen! Oh my!'

For Flibbertigibbet's teeth were in the crack orphan's neck, and the foot that she had not seized kicking like a vicious colt, when a large hand seized him by the collar, and lifted him in mid-air; and the crack orphan, looking up as though the oft-invoked 'ugly man' of her infancy had really come to bear off naughty children, beheld for a moment, propped against the door-post, the tall figure and bearded head hitherto only seen on the sofa.

The next instant the child had been swung into the study, and the apparition, stumbling with one hand and foot to the couch, said breathlessly to the frightened girl, 'I am sorry for my little boy's shameful behaviour! Leave him here. Owen, stay.'

The child was indeed standing, as if powerless to move or even to cry, stunned by his flight in the air, and dismayed at the terrific presence in which he was for the first time left alone. Completely roused and excited, the elder Owen sat upright, speaking not loud, but in tones forcible from vehement feeling.

'Owen, you boast of being a gentleman! Do you know what we are? We are beggars! I can neither work for myself nor for you. We live on charity. That girl earns her bread—we do not! We are beggars! Who told you otherwise?'

Instead of an answer, he only evoked a passion of frightened tears, so piteous, that he spoke more gently, and stretched out his hand; but his son shook his frock at him in terror, and retreated out of reach, backwards into a corner, replying to his calls and assurances with violent sobs, and broken entreaties to go back to 'granma.'

At last, in despair, Owen lowered himself to the floor, and made the whole length of his person available; but the child, in the extremity of terror at the giant crawling after him, shrieked wildly and made a rush at the door, but was caught and at once drawn within the grasp of the sweeping arm.

All was still. He was gathered up to the broad breast; the hairy cheek was gently pressed against his wet one. It was a great powerful, encircling caress that held him. There was a strange thrill in this contact between the father and son—a new sensation of intense loving pity in the one, a great but soothing awe in the other, as struggling and crying no more, he clung ever closer and closer, and drew the arm tighter round him. p. 547

'My poor little fellow!' And never had there been such sweetness in those deep full tones.

The boy responded with both arms round his neck, and face laid on his shoulder. Poor child! it was the affection that his little heart had hungered for ever since he had left his grandmother, and which he had inspired in no one.

A few more seconds, and he was sitting on the floor, resting against his father, listening without alarm to his question—'Now, Owen, what were you saying?'

'I'll never do it again, pa—never!'

'No, never be disobedient, nor fight with girls. But what were you saying about the Holt?'

'I shall live here—I shall have it for my own.'

'Who told you so?'

'Granma.'

'Grandmamma knows nothing about it.'

'Shan't I, then?'

'Never! Listen, Owen. This is Miss Charlecote's house as long as she lives—I trust till long after

you are a man. It will be Mr. Randolph's afterwards, and neither you nor I have anything to do with it.'

The two great black eyes looked up in inquiring, disappointed intelligence. Then he said, in a satisfied tone—

'We ain't beggars—we don't carry rabbit-skins and lucifers!'

'We do nothing so useful or profitable,' sighed poor Owen, striving to pull himself up by the table, but desisting on finding that it was more likely to overbalance than to be a support. 'My poor boy, you will have to work for me!' and he sadly stroked down the light hair.

'Shall I?' said the little fellow. 'May I have some white mice? I'll bring you all the halfpence, pa!'

'Bring me a footstool, first of all. There—at this rate I shall be able to hop about on one leg, and be a more taking spectacle,' said Owen, as, dragging himself up by the force of hand and arm, he resettled himself on his couch, as much pleased as amazed at his first personal act of locomotion after seven months, and at the discovery of recovered strength in the sound limbs. Although, with the reserve of convalescence, he kept his exploit secret, his spirits visibly rose; and whenever he was left alone, or only with his little boy, he repeated his experiments, launching himself from one piece of furniture to another; and in spite of the continued deadness of the left side, feeling life, vigour, and hope returning on him.

His morbid shyness of his child had given way to genuine affection, and Owen soon found that he liked to be left to the society of Flibbertigibbet, or as he called him for short, Giblets, exacting in return the title of father, instead of the terrible 'pa.' Little Owen thought this a preparation for the itinerant white-mouse exhibition, which he was permitted to believe was only delayed till the daily gymnastic exertions should have resulted in the use of crutches, and till he could safely pronounce the names of the future mice, Hannibal and Annabella, and other traps for aspirates! Nay, his father was going to set up an exhibition of his own, as it appeared; for after a vast amount of meditation, he begged for pen and paper, ruler and compasses, drew, wrote, and figured, and finally took to cardboard and penknife, begging the aid of Miss Charlecote, greatly to the distress of the little boy, who had thought the whole affair private and confidential, and looked forward to a secret departure early in the morning, with crutches, mice, and model.

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Miss Charlecote did her best with needle and gum, but could not understand; and between her fears of trying Owen's patience and letting him overstrain his brain, was so much distressed that he gave it up; but it preyed on him, till one day Phœbe came in, and he could not help explaining it to her, and claiming her assistance, as he saw her ready comprehension. For two afternoons she came and worked under him; and between card, wire, gum, and watch-spring, such a beauteous little model locomotive engine and train were produced, that Owen archly assured her that 'she would be a fortune in herself to a rising engineer,' and Honor was struck by the sudden crimson evoked by the compliment.

Little Owen thought their fortune made, and was rather disappointed at the delay, when his father, confirming his idea that their livelihood might depend on the model, insisted that it should be carried out in brass and wood, and caused his chair to be frequently wheeled down to the blacksmith's and carpenter's, whose comprehension so much more resembled their lady's than that of Miss Fulmort, and who made such intolerable blunders, that he bestowed on them more vituperation than, in their opinion, 'he had any call to;' and looked in a passion of despair at the numb, nerveless fingers, once his dexterous servants.

Still his spirits were immensely improved, since resolution, hope, and independence had returned. His mental faculties had recovered their force, and with the removal of the disease, the healthfulness and elasticity of his twenty-five years were beginning to compensate for the lost powers of his limbs. As he accomplished more, he grew more enterprising and less disinclined to show off his recovered powers. He first alarmed, then delighted Honor; begged for crutches, and made such good use of them, that Dr. Martin held out fair hopes of progress, though advising a course of rubbing and sea-air at Brighton.

Perhaps Honor had never been happier than during these weeks of improvement, with her boy so completely her own, and more than she had ever known him; his dejection lessening, his health returning, his playfulness brilliant, his filial fondness most engaging. She did not know the fixed resolution that actuated him, and revived the entire man! She did not know what was kept in reserve till confidence in his efficiency should dispose her to listen favourably. Meantime the present was so delightful to her that she trembled and watched lest she should be relapsing into the old idolatry. The test would be whether she would put Owen above or below a clear duty.

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The audit of farm-accounts before going to Brighton was as unsatisfactory as the last. Though not beyond her own powers of unravelling, they made it clear that Brooks was superannuated. It was piteous to see the old man seated in the study, racking his brains to recollect the transaction with Farmer Hodnet about seed-wheat and working oxen; to explain for what the three extra labourers had been put on, and to discover his own meaning in charging twice over for the repairs of Joe Littledale's cottage; angered and overset by his mistress's gentle cross-examination, and enraged into absolute disrespect when that old object of dislike, Mr. Sandbrook, looked over the books, and muttered suggestions under his moustache.

'Poor old man!' both exclaimed, as he left the room, and Honor sighed deeply over this failure of the last of the supports left her by Humfrey. 'I must pension him off,' she said. 'I hope it will not

hurt his feelings much!' and then she turned away to her old-fashioned bureau, and applied herself to her entries in her farming-books, while Owen sat in his chair, dreamily caressing his beard, and revolving the proposition that had long been in his mind.

At last the tall, red book was shut, the pen wiped, the bureau locked, and Honor came back to her place by the table, and resumed her needlework. Still there was silence, till she began: 'This settles it! I have been thinking about it ever since you have been so much better. Owen, what should you think of managing the property for me?'

He only answered by a quick interrogative glance.

'You see,' she continued, 'by the help of Brooks, who knew his master's ways, I have potted on, to my own wonderment; but Brooks is past work, my downhill-time is coming, high farming has outrun us both, and I know that we are not doing as Humfrey would wish by his inheritance. Now I believe that nothing could be of greater use to me, the people, or the place, than that you should be in charge. We could put some deputy under your control, and contrive for your getting about the fields. I would give you so much a year, so that your boy's education would be your own doing, and we should be *so* comfortable.'

Owen leant back, much moved, smiled and said, 'Thanks, dear Honor; you are much too good to us.'

'Think about it, and tell me what would be right. Brooks has £100 a year, but you will be worth much more, for you will develop all the resources, you know.'

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'Best Honor, Sweetest Honey,' said Owen, hastily, the tears rising to his eyes, 'I cannot bear to frustrate such kind plans, nor seem more ungrateful than I have been already. I will not live on you for nothing longer than I can help; but indeed, this must not be.'

'Not?'

'No. There are many reasons against it. In the first place, I know nothing of farming.'

'You would soon learn.'

'And vex your dear old spirit with steam-ploughs and haymaking machines.'

She smiled, as if from him she could endure even steam.

'Next, such an administration would be highly distasteful here. My overweening airs as a boy have not been forgotten, and I have always been looked on as an interloper. Depend on it, poor old Brooks fancies the muddle in his accounts was a suggestion of my malice! Imagine the feelings of Hiltonbury, when I, his supplanter, begin to tighten the reins.'

'If it be so, it can be got over,' said Honor, a little aghast.

'If it ought to be attempted,' said Owen; 'but you have not heard my personal grounds for refusing your kindness. All your goodness and kind teaching cannot prevent the undesirableness of letting my child grow up here, in a half-and-half position, engendering domineering airs and unreasonable expectations. You know how, in spite of your care and warnings, it worked on me, though I had more advantages than that poor little man. Dear Honor, it is not you, but myself that I blame. You did your utmost to disabuse me, and it is only the belief that my absurd folly is in human nature that makes me thus ungracious.'

'But,' said Honora, murmuring, as if in shame, 'you know you, and therefore your child, must be my especial charge, and always stand first with me.'

'First in your affection, dearest Honey,' he said, fondly; 'I trust I have been in that place these twenty years; I'll never give that up; but if I get as well as I hope to do, I mean to be no charge on any one.'

'You cannot return to your profession?'

'My riding and surveying days are over, but there's plenty of work in me still; and I see my way to a connection that will find me in enough of writing, calculating, and drawing, to keep myself and Owen, and I expect to make something of my invention too, when I am settled in London.'

'In London?'

'Yes; the poor old woman in Whittington-street is breaking—pining for her grandchild, I believe, and losing her lodgers, from not being able to make them comfortable; and without what she had for the child, she cannot keep an effective servant. I think of going to help her out.'

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'That woman?'

'Well, I do owe her a duty! I robbed her of her own child, and it is cruel to deprive her of mine when she has had all the trouble of his babyhood. Money would not do the thing, even if I had it. I have brought it on myself, and it is the only atonement in my power; so I mean to occupy two or three of her rooms, work there, and let her have the satisfaction of "doing for me." When you are in town, I shall hop into Woolstone-lane. You will give me holidays here, won't you? And whenever you want me, let me be your son? To that you know I reserve my right,' and he bent towards her affectionately.

'It is very right—very noble,' she was faltering forth. He turned quickly, the tears, ready to fall, springing quite forth.

'Honor! you have not been able to say that since I was a child! Do not spoil it. If this be right, leave it so.'

'Only one thing, Owen, are you sufficiently considering your son's good in taking him there, out of the way of a good education.'

'A working education is the good one for him,' said Owen, 'not the being sent at the cost of others—not even covertly at yours, Sweet Honey—to an expensive school. He is a working man's son, and must so feel himself. I mean to face my own penalties in him, and if I see him in a grade inferior to what was mine by birth, I shall know that though I brought it on him, it is more for his real good and happiness to be a man of the people, than a poor half-acknowledged gentleman. So much for my Americanisms, Honor!'

'But the dissent—the cant!'

'Not so much cant as real piety obtrusively expressed. Poor old thing! I have no fear but that little Giblets will go my way! he worships me, and I shall not leave his *h's* nor more important matters to her mercy. He is nearly big enough for the day school Mr. Parsons is setting on foot. It is a great consideration that the place is in the St. Matthew's district!'

'Well, Owen, I cannot but see that it may be your rightest course; I hope you may find yourself equal to it,' said Honor, struggling with a fresh sense of desertion, though with admiration and esteem returning, such as were well worth the disappointment.

'If not,' said Owen, smiling, to hide deeper feelings, 'I reserve to you the pleasure of maintaining me, nursing me, or what not! If my carcase be good for nothing, I hereby make it over to you. And now, Honor, I have not been without thought for you. I can tell you of a better successor for Brooks.'

'Well!' she said, almost crossly.

'Humfrey Charlecote Randolf,' said Owen, slowly, giving full effect to the two Christian names.

Honor started, gasped, and snatching at the first that occurred of her objections, exclaimed, 'But, my dear, he is as much an engineer as yourself.' p. 552

'From necessity, not choice. He farmed till last August.'

'Canadian farming! Besides, what nonsense to offer a young man, with all the world before him, to be bailiff of this little place.'

'It would, were he only to stand in Brooks's position; but if he were the acknowledged heir, as he ought to be—yes, I know I am saying a dreadful thing—but, my good Queen Elizabeth, your Grace would be far wiser to accept Jamie at once than to keep your subjects fretting over your partialities. He will be a worthy Humfrey Charlecote if you catch and pin him down young. He will be worthy any way, but if you let him go levelling and roaming over the world for the best half of his life, this same Holt will lose its charms for him and his heirs for ever.'

'But—but how can you tell that he would be caught and pinned?'

'There is a very sufficient pin at the Underwood.'

'My dear Owen, impossible!'

'Mind, no one has told me in so many words, but Mervyn Fulmort gave me such an examination on Randolf as men used to do when matrimony is in the wind; and since that, he inferred the engagement, when he came to me in no end of a rage, because my backwoodsman had conscientious scruples against partaking in their concoction of evil spirits.'

'Do you mean that Mervyn wants to employ him?'

'To take him into partnership, on the consideration of a certain thirty thousand. You may judge whence that was to come! And he, like Robert, declined to live by murdering bodies and souls. I am afraid Mervyn has been persecuting them ever since.'

'Ever since when?'

'This last conversation was some three weeks ago. I suspect the principal parties settled it on that snowy Twelfth-day—'

'But which of them, Owen?'

'Which?' exclaimed Owen, laughing. 'The goggle or the squint?'

'For shame, Owen. But I cannot believe that Phœbe would not have told me!'

'Having a sister like Lady Bannerman may hinder confidences to friends.'

'Now, Owen, are you sure?'

'As sure as I was that it was a moonstruck man that slept in my room in Woolstone-lane. I knew that Cynthia's darts had been as effective as though he had been a son of Niobe!'

'I don't believe it yet,' cried Honor; 'an honourable man—a sensible girl! Such a wild thing!'

'Ah! Queen Elizabeth! Queen Elizabeth! shut up an honourable man and a sensible girl in a cedar parlour every evening for ten days, and then talk of wild things! Have you forgotten what it is to be under twenty-five?'

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'I hate Queen Elizabeth,' said Honor, somewhat tartly.

He muttered something of an apology, and resumed his book. She worked on in silence, then looking up said, rather as if rejoicing in a valid objection, 'How am I to know that this man is first in the succession? I am not suspecting him of imposition. I believe that, as you say, his mother was a Charlecote, but how do I know that she had not half-a-dozen brothers. There is no obligation on me to leave the place to any one, but this youth ought not to come before others.'

'That is soon answered,' said Owen. 'The runaway, your grandfather's brother, led a wild, Leather-Stocking life, till he was getting on in years, then married, luckily not a squaw, and died at the end of the first year, leaving one daughter, who married Major Randolph, and had this only son.'

'The same relation to me as Humfrey! Impossible! And pray how do you prove this?'

'I got Currie to make notes for me which I can get at in my room,' said Owen. 'You can set your lawyer to write to the places, and satisfy yourself without letting him know anything about it.'

'Has he any expectations?'

'I imagine not. I think he has never found out that our relationship is not on the Charlecote side.'

'Then it is the more—impertinent, I really must say, in him to pay his addresses to Phoebe, if he have done so.'

'I can't agree with you. What was her father but an old distiller, who made his fortune and married an heiress. You sophisticated old Honey, to expect him to be dazzled with her fortune, and look at her from a respectful distance! I thought you believed that "a man's a man for a' that," and would esteem the bold spirit of the man of progress.'

'Progress, indeed!' said Honor, ironically.

'Listen, Honor,' said Owen, 'you had better accuse me of this fortune-hunting which offends you. I have only obeyed Fate, and so will you. From the moment I met him, he seemed as one I had known of old. It was Charlecotism, of course; and his signature filled me with presentiment. Nay, though the fire and the swamp have become mere hearsay to me now, I still retain the recollection of the impression throughout my illness that he was to be all that I might have been. His straightforward good sense and manly innocence brought Phoebe before me, and Currie tells me that I had fits of hatred to him as my supplanter, necessary as his care was to me.'

Honor just stopped herself from exclaiming, 'Never!' and changed it into, 'My own dear, generous boy!'

'You forget that I thought it was all over with me! The first sensations I distinctly remember were as I lay on my bed at Montreal, one Sunday evening, and saw him sitting in the window, his profile clearly cut against the light, and retracing all those old silhouettes over the mantelshelf. Then I remembered that it had been no sick delusion, but truth and verity, that he was the missing Charlecote! And feeling far more like death than life, I was glad that you should have some one to lean on of your own sort; for, Honor, it was his Bible that he was reading!—one that he had saved out of the fire. I thought it was a lucid interval allowed me for the sake of giving you a better son and support than I had been, and looked forward to your being happy with him. As soon as I could get Currie alone, I told him how it stood, and made him take notes of the evidence of his identity, and promise to make you understand it if I were dead or childish. My best hope was to see him accepted as my expiation; but when I got back, and you wouldn't have him at any price, and I found myself living and lifelike, and had seen her again—'

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'Her? Phoebe? My poor boy, you do not mean—'

'I do mean that I was a greater fool than you even took me for,' said Owen, with rising colour. 'First and last, that pure child's face and honest, plain words had an effect on me which nothing else had. The other affair was a mere fever by comparison, and half against my will.'

'Owen!'

'Yes, it was. When I was with that poor thing, her fervour carried me along; and as to the marriage, it was out of shortsighted dread of the uproar that would have followed if I had not done it. Either she would have drowned herself, or her mother would have prosecuted me for breach of promise, or she would have proclaimed all to Lucy or Mr. Prendergast. I hadn't courage for either; though, Honor, I had nearly told you the day I went to Ireland, when I felt myself done for.'

'You were married then?'

'Half-an-hour!' said Owen, with something of a smile, and a deep sigh. 'If I had spoken, it would have saved a life! but I could not bear to lose my place with you, nor to see that sweet face

turned from me.'

'You must have known that it would come out in time, Owen. I never could understand your concealment.'

'I hardly can,' said Owen, 'except that one shuffles off unpleasant subjects! I did fancy I could stave it off till Oxford was over, and I was free of the men there; but that notion might have been a mere excuse to myself for putting off the evil day. I was too much in debt, too, for an open rupture with you; and as to her, I can truly say that my sole shadow of an excuse is that I was too young and selfish to understand what I was inflicting!' He passed his hand over his face, and groaned, as he added—'Well, that is over now; and at last I can bear to look at her child!' Then recurring in haste to the former subject—'You were asking about Phœbe! Yes, when I saw the fresh face ennobled but as simple as ever, the dog in the manger seemed to me a reasonable beast! Randolph's admiration was a bitter pill. If I were to be nailed here for ever, I could not well spare the moonbeams from my prison! But that's over now—it was a diseased fancy! I have got my boy now, and can move about; and when I get into harness, and am in the way of seeing people, and maturing my invention, I shall never think of it again.'

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'Ah! I am afraid that is all I can wish for you!'

'Don't wish it so pitifully, then,' said Owen, smiling. 'After having had no hope of her for five years, and being the poor object I am, this is no such great blow; and I am come to the mood of benevolence in which I really desire nothing so much as to see them happy.'

'I will think about it,' said Honor.

And though she was bewildered and disappointed, the interview had, on the whole, made her happier, by restoring the power of admiring as much as she loved. Yet it was hard to be required to sacrifice the interests of one whom she adored, her darling, who might need help so much, to do justice to a comparative stranger; and the more noble and worthy Owen showed himself, the less willing was she to decide on committing herself to his unconscious rival. Still, did the test of idolatry lie here?

She perceived how light-hearted this conversation had rendered Owen, as though he had thrown off a weight that had long been oppressing him. He was overflowing with fun and drollery throughout the journey; and though still needing a good deal of assistance at all changes of carriage, showed positive boyish glee in every feat he could accomplish for himself; and instead of shyly shrinking from the observation and casual help of fellow-travellers, gave ready smiles and thanks.

Exhilarated instead of wearied by the journey, he was full of enjoyment of the lodgings, the window, and the view; a new spring of youthfulness seemed to have come back to him, and his animation and enterprise carried Honor along with him. Assuredly she had never known more thorough present pleasure than in his mirthful, affectionate talk, and in the sight of his daily progress towards recovery; and a still greater happiness was in store for her. On the second day, he begged to accompany her to the week-day service at the neighbouring church, previously sending in a request for the offering of the thanks of Owen Charteris Sandbrook for preservation in great danger, and recovery from severe illness.

'Dearest,' she said, 'were I to recount my causes of thanksgiving, I should not soon have done! This is best of all.'

'Not fully *best* yet, is it?' said Owen, looking up to her with eyes like those of his childhood.

'No; but it soon will be.'

'Not yet,' said Owen; 'I must think first; perhaps write or talk to Robert Fulmort. I feel as if I *could* now.'

'You long for it?'

'Yes, as I never even *thought* I did,' said Owen, with much emotion. 'It was strange, Honor, as soon as I came home to the old places, how the old feelings, that had been set aside so long, came back again. I would have given the world to recover them in Canada, but could only envy Randolph, till they woke up again of themselves at the sight of the study, and the big Bible we used to read with you.'

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'Yet you never spoke.'

'No; I *could* not till I had proved to myself that there was no time-serving in them, if you must know the truth!' said Owen, colouring a little. 'Besides, having been told my wits would go, how did I know but that they were a symptom of my second childhood?'

'How could any one have been so cruel as to utter such a horrible presage?'

'One overhears and understands more than people imagine, when one has nothing to do but to lie on the broad of one's back and count the flies,' said Owen. 'So, when I was convinced that my machine was as good as ever, but only would not stand application, I put off the profession, just to be sure what I should think of it when I could *think*.'

'Well!' was all Honor could say, gazing through glad tears.

'And now, Honor dear,' said he, with a smile, 'I don't know how it is. I've tried experiments on my brains. I have gone through half-a-dozen tough calculations. I have read over a Greek play, and made out a problem or two in mechanics, without being the worse for it; but, somehow, I can't for the life of me hark back to the opinions that had such power over me at Oxford. I can't even recollect the half of them. It is as if that hemlock spruce had battered them out of my head.'

'Even like as a dream when one awaketh.'

'Something like it! Why, even *unknownst* to you, Sweet Honey, I got at one or two of the books I used to swear by, and somehow I could not see the force of what they advanced. There's a futility about it all, compared with the substance.'

'Before, you did not believe with your heart, so your understanding failed to be convinced.'

'Partly so,' said Owen, thoughtfully. 'The fact is, that religion is so much proved to the individual by personal experience and actual sensation, that those who reason from without are on different ground, and the *avocato del diavolo* has often apparently the advantage, because the other party's security is that witness in his own breast which cannot be brought to light.'

'Only apparently.'

'Really, sometimes, with the lookers-on who have accepted the doctrines without feeling them. They, having no experience, feel the failure of evidence, where the tangible ends.'

'Do you mean to say that this was the case with yourself, my dear? I should have thought, if ever child were good—'

'So did I,' said Owen, smiling. 'I simulated the motions to myself and every one else: and there was a grain of reality, after all; but neither you nor I ever knew how much was mere imitation and personal influence. When I outgrew implicit faith in *you*, I am afraid my higher faith went with it—first through recklessness, then through questioning. After believing more than enough, the transition is easy to doubting what is worthy of credit at all.'

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'From superstition to rationalism.'

'Yes; overdoing articles of faith and observances, while the mind and conscience are young and tender, brings a dangerous reaction when liberty and independent reflection begin.'

'But, Owen, I may have overdone observances, yet I did not teach superstitions,' said Honor.

'Not consciously,' said Owen. 'You meant to teach me dogmatically only what you absolutely believed yourself. But you did not know how boundless is a child's readiness to accept what comes as from a spiritual authority, or you would have drawn the line more strongly between doctrine and opinion, fact and allegory, the true and the edifying.'

'In effect, I treated you as the Romish Church began by doing to the populace.'

'Exactly so. Like the mediæval populace, I took legend for fact; and like the modern populace, doubted of the whole together, instead of sifting. There is my confession, Honor dear. I know you are happier for hearing it in full; but remember, my errors are not chargeable upon you. If I had ever been true towards myself or you, and acted out what I thought I felt, I should have had the personal experience that would have protected the truth when the pretty superstructure began to pass away.'

'What you have undertaken now is an acting out!'

'I hope it is. Therefore it is the first time that I have ever trusted myself to be in earnest. And after all, Honor, though it is a terrible past to look back on, it is so very pleasant to be coming *home*, and to realize mercy and pardon, and hopes of doing better, that I can't feel half the broken-down sorrow that perhaps ought to be mine. It won't stay with me, when I have you before me.'

Honor could not be uneasy. She was far too glad at heart for that. The repentance was proving itself true by its fruits, and who could be anxious because the gladness of forgiveness overpowered the pain of contrition?

Her inordinate affection had made her blind and credulous where her favourite was concerned, so as to lead to his seeming ruin, yet when the idol throne was overturned, she had learnt to find sufficiency in her Maker, and to do offices of love without excess. Then after her time of loneliness, the very darling of her heart had been restored, when it was safe for her to have him once more; but so changed that he himself guarded against any recurrence to the old exclusive worship.

CHAPTER XXXIII

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But the pine woods waved,
And the white streams raved;
They told me in my need,
That softness and feeling
Were not soul-healing;
And so it was decreed—

That the marvellous flowers of woman's duty
Should grow on the grave of buried beauty.—FABER

Easter was at hand, and immediately after it Mr. Currie was to return to Canada to superintend the formation of the Grand Ottawa and Superior line. He and his assistants were hard at work on the specifications, when a heavy tap and tramp came up the stairs, and Owen Sandbrook stood before them, leaning on his crutch, and was greeted with joyful congratulations on being on his legs again.

'Randolf,' he said, hastily, 'Miss Charlecote is waiting in the carriage to speak to you. Give me your pen.'

'I shall be back in an instant.'

'Time will show. Where are you?—"such sleepers to be—" I see. Down with you.'

'Yes; never mind hurrying back,' said the engineer; 'we can get this done without you'—and as the door closed—'and a good deal beside. I hear you have put it in train.'

'I have every reason to hope so. Does he guess?'

'Not a whit, as far as I can tell. He has been working hard, and improving himself in his leisure. He would have made a first-rate engineer. It is really hard to be robbed of two such assistants one after the other.'

Meanwhile Honor had spent those few moments in trepidation. She had brought herself to it at last! The lurking sense of injustice had persuaded her that it was crossing her conscience to withhold the recognition of her heir, so soon as she had received full evidence of his claims and his worthiness. Though she had the power, she felt that she had not the right to dispose of her property otherwise; and such being the case, it was a duty to make him aware of his prospects, and offer him such a course as should best enable him to take his future place in the county. Still it was a severe struggle. Even with her sense of insufficiency, it was hard to resign any part of the power that she had so long exercised; she felt that it was a risk to put her happiness into unknown hands, and perhaps because she had had this young man well-nigh thrust on her, and had heard him so much lauded, she almost felt antagonistic to him as rival of Owen, and could have been glad if any cause for repudiating him would have arisen. Even the favour that he had met with in Phœbe's eyes was no recommendation. She was still sore at Phœbe's want of confidence in her; she took Mervyn's view of his presumption, and moreover it was another prize borne off from Owen. Poor dear Honor, she never made a greater sacrifice to principle than when she sent her William off to Normandy to summon her Edgar Atheling.

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She did not imagine that she had it in her to have hated any one so much.

Yet, somehow, when the bright, open face appeared, it had the kindred, familiar air, and the look of eagerness so visibly fell at the sight of her alone in the carriage, that she could not defend herself from a certain amusement and interest, while she graciously desired him to get in, and drive with her round the Park, since she had something to tell him that could not be said in a hurry. Then as he looked up in inquiry, suspecting, perhaps, that she had heard of his engagement, she rushed at once to the point.

'I believe you know,' she said, 'that I have no nearer relation than yourself?'

'Not Sandbrook?' he asked, in surprise.

'He is on my mother's side. I speak of my own family. When the Holt came to me, it was as a trust for my lifetime to do my best for it, and to find out to whom afterwards it should belong. I was told that the direct heir was probably in America. Owen Sandbrook has convinced me that you are that person.'

'Thank you,' began young Randolf, somewhat embarrassed; 'but I hope that this will make little difference to me for many years!'

Did he underrate the Holt, the wretch, or was it civility? She spoke a little severely. 'It is not a considerable property, but it gives a certain position, and it should make a difference to you to know what your prospects are.'

The colour flushed into his cheeks as he said, 'True! It may have a considerable effect in my favour. Thank you for telling me;' and then paused, as though considering whether to volunteer more, but as yet her manner was not encouraging, but had all the dryness of effort.

'I have another reason for speaking,' she continued. 'It is due to you to warn you that the estate wants looking after. I am unequal to the requirements of modern agriculture, and my faithful old bailiff, who was left to me by my dear cousin, is past his work. Neither the land nor the people are receiving full justice.'

'Surely Sandbrook could find a trustworthy steward,' returned the young man.

'Nay, had you not better, according to his suggestion, come and live on the estate yourself, and undertake the management, with an allowance in proportion to your position as the heir?'

Her heart beat high with the crisis, and she saw his colour deepen from scarlet to crimson as he said, 'My engagement with Mr. Currie—'

'Mr. Currie knows the state of things. Owen Sandbrook has been in communication with him, and he does not expect to take you back with him, unless you prefer the variety and enterprise of your profession to becoming a country gentleman of moderate means.' She almost hoped that he would, as she named the rental and the proposed allowance, adding, 'The estate must eventually come to you, but it is for you to consider whether it may not be better worth having if, in the interim, it be under your superintendence.'

He had had time to grow more familiar with the idea, and spoke readily and frankly. 'Indeed, Miss Charlecote, I need no inducement. It is the life I should prefer beyond all others, and I can only hope to do my duty by you, and whatever you may think fit to intrust to me.' And, almost against her will, the straightforward honesty of his look brought back to her the countenance where she had always sought for help.

'Then your past misfortunes have not given you a distaste to farming?'

'They did not come from farming, but speculation. I was brought up to farm work, and am more at home in it than in anything else, so that I hope I could be useful to you.'

She was silent. Oh, no; she had not the satisfaction of being displeased. He was ready enough, but not grasping; and she found herself seeing more of the Charlecote in him, and liking him better than she was ready to grant.

'Miss Charlecote,' he said after a few moments' thought, 'in the relations you are establishing between us, it is right that you should know the full extent of the benefits you are conferring.'

It was true, then? Well, it was better than a New World lady, and Honora contrived to look pleasantly expectant.

'I know it was very presumptuous,' he said; 'but I could not help making my feelings known to one who is very dear to you—Miss Fulmort.'

'Indeed she is,' said Honor; though maybe poor Phœbe had of late been a shade less dear to her.

'And with your consent,' said he, perhaps a little disconcerted by her want of warmth, 'I hope this kindness of yours may abridge the term of waiting to which we looked forward.'

'What were you waiting for?'

'Until such time as I could provide a home to which she could take her sister Maria. So you see what you have done for us.'

'Maria!'

'Yes. She promised her mother, on her death-bed, that Maria should be her charge, and no one could wish her to lay it aside.'

'And the family are aware of the attachment?'

'The brothers are, and have been kinder than I dared to expect. It was thought better to tell no one else until we could see our way; but you have a right to know now, and I have the more hope that you will find comfort in the arrangement, since I know how warmly and gratefully she feels towards you. I may tell her?' he added, with a good deal of affirmation in his question.

'What would you do if I told you not?' she asked, thawing for the first time out of her set speeches.

'I should feel very guilty and uncomfortable in writing.'

'Then come home with me to-morrow, and let us talk it over,' she said, acting on a mandate of Owen's which she had strenuously refused to promise to obey. 'You may leave your work in Owen's hands. He wants to stay a few days in town, to arrange his plans, and, I do believe, to have the pleasure of independence; but he will come back on Saturday, and we will spend Easter together.'

'Miss Charlecote,' said Humfrey, suddenly, 'I have no right to ask, but I cannot but fear that my having turned up is an injury to Sandbrook.'

'I can only tell you that he has been exceedingly anxious for the recognition of your rights.'

'I understand now!' exclaimed Humfrey, turning towards her quickly; 'he betrayed it when his mind was astray. I am thrusting him out of what would have been his!'

'It cannot be helped,' began Honor; 'he never expected—'

'I can say nothing against it,' said the young man, with much emotion. 'It is too generous to be talked of, and these are not matters of choice, but duty; but is it not possible to make some compensation?'

'I have done my best to lay up for those children,' said Honor; 'but his sister will need her full half, and my City property has other claimants. I own I should be glad to secure that, after me, he should not be entirely dependent upon health which, I fear, will never be sound again.'

'I know you would be happier in arranging it yourself, though he has every claim on my gratitude. Could not the estate be charged with an annuity to him?'

'Thank you!' said Honor, warmly. 'Such a provision will suit him best. I see that London is his element; indeed, he is so much incapacitated for a country life that the estate would have been a burthen to him, could he have rightly inherited it. He is bent on self-maintenance; and all I wish is, that when I am gone, he should have something to fall back upon.'

'I do not think that I can thank you more heartily for any of your benefits than for making me a party to this!' he warmly said. 'But there is no thanking you; I must try to do so by deeds.'

She was forced to allow that her Atheling was winning upon her!

'Two points I liked,' she said to Robert, who spent the evening with her, while Owen was dining with Mr. Currie—'one that he accepted the Holt as a charge, not a gift—the other that he never professed to be marrying for *my* sake.'

'Yes, he is as true as Phœbe,' said Robert. 'Both have real power of truth from never deceiving themselves. They perfectly suit one another.'

'High praise from you, Robin. Yet how could you forgive his declaration from so unequal a position?'

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'I thought it part of his consistently honest dealing. Had she been a mere child, knowing nothing of the world, and subject to parents, it might have been otherwise; but independent and formed as she is, it was but just to avow his sentiments, and give her the choice of waiting.'

'In spite of the obloquy of a poor man paying court to wealth?'

'I fancy he was too single-minded for that idea, and that it was not wealth which he courted was proved by his rejection of Mervyn's offer. Do you know, I think his refusal will do Mervyn a great deal of good. He is very restless to find out the remaining objections to his management, and Randolf will have more influence with him than I ever could, while he considers parsons as a peculiar species.'

'If people would only believe the good of not compromising!'

'They must often wait a good while to see the good!'

'But, oh! the fruit is worth waiting for! Robin,' she added, after a pause, 'you have been in correspondence with my boy.'

'Yes,' said Robert; 'and there, indeed, you may be satisfied. The seed you sowed in the morning is bearing its increase!'

'I sowed! Ah, Robert! what I sowed was a false crop, that had almost caused the good seed to be rooted up together with it!'

'Not altogether, said Robert. 'If you made any mistakes that led to a confusion of real and unreal in his mind, still, the real good you did to him is incalculable.'

'So he tells me, dear boy! But when I think what he was as a child, and what he has been as a youth, I cannot but charge it on myself.'

'Then think what he is, and will be, I trust, as a man,' said Robert. 'Even at the worst, the higher, purer standard that had been impressed on him saved him from lower depths; and when "he came to himself," it was not as if he had neither known his Father's house nor the way to it. Oh, Miss Charlecote! you must not come to me to assure you that your training of him was in vain! I, who am always feeling the difference between trying to pull him and poor Mervyn upwards! There may be more excuse for Mervyn, but Owen knows where he is going, and springs towards it; while Mervyn wonders at himself at every stage, and always fancies the next some delusion of my strait-laced imagination.'

'Ah! once I spurned, and afterwards grieved over, the saying that very religious little boys either die or belie their promise.'

'There is some truth in it,' said Robert. 'Precocious piety is so beautiful that it is apt to be fostered so as to make it insensibly imitative and unreal, or depend upon some individual personal influence; and there is a certain reaction at one stage of growth against what has been overworked.'

'Then what could you do with such a child as my Owen if it were all to come over again? His aspirations were often so beautiful that I could not but reverence them greatly; and I cannot now believe that they were prompted by aught but innocence and baptismal grace!'

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'Looking back,' said Robert, 'I believe they were genuine, and came from his heart. No; such a devotional turn should be treated with deep reverence and tenderness; but the expression had better be almost repressed, and the test of conduct enforced, though without loading the conscience with details not of general application, and sometimes impracticable under other circumstances.'

'It is the practicalness of dear Owen's reformation that makes it so thoroughly satisfactory,' said Honora; 'though I must say that I dread the experiment. You will look after him, for this week, Robert; I fear he is overdoing himself in his delight at moving about and working again.'

'I will see how he gets on. It will be a good essay for the future.'

'I cannot think how he is ever to bear living with Mrs. Murrell.'

'She is a good deal broken and subdued, and is more easily repressed than one imagines at her first onset. Besides, she is very proud, and rather afraid, of him, and will not molest him much. Indeed, it is a good arrangement for him; he ought to have care above that of the average landlady.'

'Will he get it?'

'I trust so. She has the ways of a respectable servant; and her religious principle is real, though we do not much admire its manifestation. She will be honest and careful of his wants, and look after his child, and nurse him tenderly if he require it!'

'As if any one but myself would do that! But it is right, and he will be all the better and happier for accepting his duty to her while she lives, if he can bear it.'

'As he says, it is his only expiation.'

'Well! I should not wonder if you saw more of me here than hitherto. A born Cockney like me gets inclined to the haunts of men as she grows old, and if your sisters and Charlecote Raymond suffice for the parish, I shall be glad to be out of sight of the improvements *he* will make.'

'Not without your consent?'

'I shall have to consent in my conscience to what I hate in my heart.'

'I am not the man to argue you away from here,' said Robert, eagerly. 'If you would take up the Young Women's Association, it would be the only thing to make up for the loss of Miss Fennimore. Then the St. Wulstan's Asylum wants a lady visitor.'

'My father's foundation, whence his successor ousted me, in a general sweep of troublesome ladies,' said Honor. 'How sore I was, and how things come round.'

'We'll find work for you,' cried Robert, highly exhilarated. 'I should like to make out that we can't do without you.'

'Why, Robin, you of all men taking to compliments!'

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'It is out of self-interest. Nothing makes so much difference to me as having this house inhabited.'

'Indeed,' she said, highly gratified; 'I thought you wanted nothing but St. Matthew's.'

'Nay,' said Robert, as a bright colour came over his usually set and impassive countenance. 'You do not want me to say what you have always been to me, and how better things have been fostered by your presence, ever since the day you let me out of Hiltonbury Church. I have often since thought it was no vain imagination that you were a good spirit sent to my rescue by Mr. Charlecote.'

'Poor Robin,' said Honor, her lip quivering; 'it was less what I gave than what you gathered up. I barely tolerated you.'

'Which served me right,' said Robert, 'and made me respect you. There are so few to blame me now that I need you all the more. I can hardly cede to Owen the privilege of being your only son.'

'You are my autumn-singing Robin,' said Honor, too true to let him think that he could stand beside Owen in her affections, but with intense pleasure at such unwonted warmth from one so stern and reserved; it was as if he was investing her with some of the tenderness that the loss of Lucilla had left vacant, and bestowing on her the confidences to which new relations might render Phœbe less open. It was no slight preferment to be Robert Fulmort's motherly friend; and far beyond her as he had soared, she might still be the softening element in his life, as once she had been the ennobling one. If she had formed Robert, or even given one impulse such as to lead to his becoming what he was, the old maid had not lived in vain.

She was not selfish enough to be grieved at Owen's ecstasy in emancipation; and trusting to being near enough to watch over him without being in his way, she could enjoy his overflowing spirits, and detect almost a jocund sound in the thump of his crutch across the hall, as he hurried in, elated with hopes of the success of his invention, eager about the Canadian railway, delighted with the society of his congeners, and pouring out on her all sorts of information that she could not understand. The certainty that her decision was for his happiness ought surely to reconcile her to carrying home his rival in his stead.

Going down by an early train, she resolved, by Robert's advice, to visit Beauchamp at once, and give Mervyn a distinct explanation of her intentions. He was tardy in taking them in, then exclaimed—'Phœbe's teetotaller! Well, he is a sharp fellow! The luck that some men have!'

'Dear Phœbe,' cried Cecily, 'I am so thankful that she is spared a long attachment. It was telling on her already!'

'Oh, we should have put a stop to the affair if he had gone out to Canada,' roundly asserted Mervyn; 'but of course he knew better—'

'Not at all—this was quite a surprise.'

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Mervyn recollected in time that it was best that Miss Charlecote should so imagine, and reserved for his wife's private ear his conviction that the young fellow had had this hope in his eye when refusing the partnership. Such smartness and foresight commanded his respect as a man of the world, though maybe the women would not understand it. For Phœbe's interest, he must encourage the lady in her excellent intentions.

'It is very handsome in you, Miss Charlecote—very handsome—and I am perfectly unprejudiced in assuring you that you have done the very best thing for yourself. Phœbe is a good girl, and devoted to you already.'

'Indeed she is,' said Cecily. 'She looks up to you so much!'

Somehow Honor did not want Mrs. Fulmort to assure her of this.

'And as to the place,' continued Mervyn, 'you could not put it into better hands to get your people out of their Old World ways. A young man like that, used to farming, and with steam and mechanics at his fingers' ends, will make us all look about us.'

'Perhaps,' murmured poor Honor, with quailing heart.

'John Raymond and I were looking about the Holt the other day,' said Mervyn, 'and agreeing how much more could be made of it. Clear away some of those hedgerows—grub up a bit of copse or two—try chemical manures—drain that terrible old marsh beyond the plantation—and have up a good engine-house where you have those old ramshackle buildings at the Home Farm! Why, the place will bring in as much again, and you've hit on the very man to carry it out. He shall try all the experiments before I adopt them.'

Honora felt as if she must flee! If she were to hear any more she should be ready to banish young Randolph to Canada, were he ten times her heir. Had she lived to hear Humfrey's new barn, with the verge boards conceded to her taste, called ramshackle? And she had given her word!

As she left Beauchamp, and looked at her scraggy pine-trees cresting the hill, she felt as though they were her own no longer, and as if she had given them up to an enemy. She assured herself that nothing could be done without her free-will, and considered of the limitations that must be imposed on this frightful reformer, but her heart grew sick at the conviction that either she would have to yield, or be regarded as a mere incubus and obstruction.

With almost a passionate sense of defence of Humfrey's trees, and Humfrey's barns, she undid the gate of the fir plantations—his special favourites. The bright April sun shed clear gleams athwart the russet boles of the trees, candied by their white gum, the shadows were sharply defined, and darkened by the dense silvered green canopy, relieved by fresh light young shoots, culminating in white powdery clusters, or little soft crimson conelets, all redolent of fresh resinous fragrance. The wind whispered like the sound of ocean in the summit of the trees, and a nightingale was singing gloriously in the distance. All recalled Humfrey, and the day, thirty years back, when she had given him such sore pain, in those very woods, grasping the shadow instead of the substance, and taking the sunshine out of his life as well as from her own. Never had she felt such a pang in thinking of that day, or in the vain imagination of how it might have been!

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'Yet I believe I am doing right,' she thought. 'Humfrey himself might say that old things must pass away, and the past give place to the present! Let me stand once more under the tree where I gave him that answer! Shall I feel as if he would laugh at me for my shrinking, or approve me for my resolution?'

The tree was a pinaster, of lengthy foliage and ponderous cones, standing in a little shooting-path, leading from the main walk. She turned towards it and stood breathless for a moment.

There stood the familiar figure—youthful, well-knit, firm, with the open, steadfast, kindly face, but with the look of crowned exultant love that she had only once beheld, and that when his feet were already within the waters of the dark river. It was his very voice that exclaimed, 'Here she is!' Had her imagination indeed called up Humfrey before her, or was he come to upbraid her with her surrender of his charge to modern innovation! But the spell was broken, for a woodland nymph in soft gray, edged with green, was instantly beside him, and that calmly-glad face was no reflection of what Honora's had ever been.

'Dear, dear Miss Charlecote,' cried Phœbe, springing to her; 'we thought you would come home this way, so we came to meet you, and were watching both the paths.'

'Thank you, my dear,' said Honor. 'Could that man, who looked so like Humfrey, be thinking how those firs would cut up into sleepers?'

'Do you know,' said Phœbe, eagerly, 'he says this wood is a little likeness of his favourite place in his old home.'

'I am afraid,' he added, as if apologizing, 'I shall always feel most at home in the smell of pine-trees.'

Mervyn's predictions began to lose their force, and Honor smiled.

'But,' said Phœbe, turning to her, 'I was longing to beg your pardon. I did not like to have any secret from you.'

'Ah! you cunning children,' said Honor, finding surface work easiest; 'you stole a march upon us

all.'

'I could not help it,' said Phœbe.

They both laughed, and turning to him, she said, 'Now, could I? When you spoke to me, I could only tell the truth.'

'And I suppose he could not help it,' said Honor.

'Of course not, if there was no reason for helping it,' he said. There could be no dwelling on the horrible things that he would perpetrate, while he looked so like the rightful squire, and while both were so fair a sight in their glad gratitude; and she found herself saying, 'You will bear our name.'

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There might be a pang in setting aside that of his father, but he looked at the glowing cheeks and glistening eyes beside him, and said, 'Answer for me.'

'It is what I should like best of all,' Phœbe said, fervently.

'If we can deserve to bear it,' he gravely added.

And something in his tone made Honora feel confident that, even if he should set up an engine-house, it would be only if Humfrey would have done so in his place.

'It will be belonging to you all the more,' said Phœbe. 'It is one great pleasure that now I shall have a right to you!'

'Yes, Phœbe, the old woman will depend on you, her "Eastern moon brightening as day's wild lights decline." But she will trouble you no longer. Finish your walk with Humfrey.' It was the first time she had called him by that name.

'No,' they said, with one voice, 'we were waiting to walk home with you, if we may.'

There was something in that walk, in the tender, respectful kindness with which she was treated, in the intelligent interest that Humfrey showed in the estate, his clear-headed truthfulness on the need of change, and his delicate deference in proposing alteration, that set her heart at rest, made her feel that the 'goodly heritage' was in safe hands, and that she had a staff in her hands for the first time since that Sunday in harvest.

* * * * *

Before the next harvest, Hiltonbury bells rang out, and the church was crowded with glad faces; but there was none more deeply joyful than that of the lonely woman with silvery hair, who quietly knelt beside the gray slab, lettered H. C., 1840, convinced that the home and people of him who lay there would be in trusty hands, when she should join him in his true inheritance. Her idols set aside, she could with clearer eyes look to that hope, though in no weariness of earth, no haste to depart, but still in full strength, ready to work for man's good and God's glory.

Beside her, as usual, was Owen, leaning on his crutch, but eminent in face and figure as the handsomest man present, and full of animation, betraying neither pain or regret, but throughout the wedding festivities showing himself the foremost in mirth, and spurring Hiltonbury on to rejoicings that made the villagers almost oblivious of the Forest Show.

The saddest face in church was that of the head bridesmaid. Even though Phœbe was only going as far as the Holt, and Humfrey was much loved, Bertha's heart was sore with undefined regret for her own blotted past, and with the feeling of present loss in the sister whose motherly kindness she had never sufficiently recognized. Bertha knew not how much gentler and more lovable she herself was growing in that very struggle with her own sadness, and in her endeavours to be sufficient protectress for Maria. The two sisters were to remain at the Underwood with Miss Fennimore, and in her kindness, and in daily intercourse with Phœbe and Cecily, could hardly fail to be happy. Maria was radiantly glad, in all the delight of her bridesmaid's adornments and of the school feasting, and above all in patronizing her pretty little niece, Elizabeth Acton, the baby bridesmaid.

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It was as if allegiance to poor Juliana's dislikes had hitherto kept Sir Bevil aloof from Phœbe, and deterred him from manifesting his good-will; but the marriage brought him at last to Beauchamp, kind, grave, military, and melancholy as ever, and so much wrapped up in his little girl and his fancied memory of her mother, that Cecily's dislike of long attachments was confirmed by his aspect; and only her sanguine benevolence was bold enough to augur his finding a comforter in her cousin Susan.

Poor man! Lady Bannerman had been tormenting him all the morning with appeals to his own wedding as precedents for Cecily's benefit! Her instructions to Cecily were so overwhelming as to reduce that meek little lady to something approaching to annihilation; and the simple advice given by Bertha, and backed by Phœbe herself, 'never to mind,' appeared the summit of audacity! Long since having ceased to trouble herself as to the danger of growing too stout, Lady Bannerman, in her brocades and laces, was such a mountain of a woman that she was forced to sail up the aisle of Hiltonbury Church alone in her glory, without space for a cavalier beside her.

The bridegroom's friend was his little seven years' old brother, whom he had sent for to place at a good school, and who fraternized with little Owen, a brisk little fellow, his *h's* and his manners alike doing credit to the paternal training, and preparing in due time to become a blue-gowned

and yellow-legged Christ's Hospital scholar—a nomination having been already promised through the Fulmort City influence.

Robert assisted Charlecote Raymond in the rite which joined together the young pair. They were goodly to look upon, in their grave, glad modesty and self-possession, and their youthful strength and fairness—which, to Honor's mind, gave the idea of the beauty of simple strength and completeness, such as befits a well-built vessel at her launch, in all her quiet force, whether to glide over smooth waters or to battle with the tempest. Peaceful as those two faces were, there was in them spirit and resolution sufficient for either storm or calm, for it was steadfastness based upon the only strong foundation.

For the last time was signed, and with no unsteady hand, the clear, well-made letters of the maiden Phœbe Fulmort, and as, above it, the bride read the words, 'Humfrey Charlecote Randolph Charlecote,' she looked up to her husband with a sweet, half-smile of content and exultation, as though his name were doubly endeared, as recalling her 'wise man,' the revered guardian of her imagination in her orphaned girlhood.

There are years when the buds of spring are nipped by frost or blight, and when summer blossoms are rent by hail and storm, till autumn sets in without one relenting pause. Then, even at the commencement of decline, comes an interval, a renewal of all that former seasons had proffered of fair and sweet; the very tokens of decay are lovely—the skies are deep calm blue, the sunsets soft gold, and the exquisite serenity and tranquil enjoyment are beyond even the bright, fitful hopes of spring. There is a tinge of melancholy, for this is a farewell, though a lingering farewell; and for that very cause the enduring flowers, the brilliant eaves, the persevering singing birds, are even more prized than those which, in earlier months, come less as present boons than foretastes of the future.

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Such an Indian summer may be Honor Charlecote's present life. It is not old age, for she has still the strength and health of her best days, but it is the later stage of middle life, with experience added to energy. Her girlhood suffered from a great though high-minded mistake, her womanhood was careworn and sorrow-stricken. As first the beloved of her youth, so again the darling of her after-age was a disappointment; but she was patient, and patience has met with a reward, even in this life. Desolateness taught her to rely no longer on things of earth, but to satisfy her soul with that Love which is individual as well as Infinite; and that lesson learnt, the human affection that once failed her is come back upon her in full measure. She is no longer forlorn; the children whom she bred up, and those whom she led by her influence, alike vie with one another in their love and gratitude.

The old house in Woolstone-lane is her home for the greater part of the winter and spring, and her chief work lies in her father's former parish, directed by Mr. Parsons and Robert, and enjoying especially the Sunday evenings that Owen constantly spends with her in the cedar parlour, in such converse, whether grave or gay, as men rarely seek save with a mother, or one who has been as a mother. But she is still the lady of the Holt. There she still spends autumn and Christmas, resuming her old habits, without feeling them a burthen; bemoaning a little, but approving all the while, Humfrey's moderate and successful alterations, and loving and delighting above all in Phœbe's sweet wisdom in her happy household rule. It is well worth all the past to return to the Holt with the holiday feeling of her girlhood.

FOOTNOTE.

[225] Terrify, to tease or worry.



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