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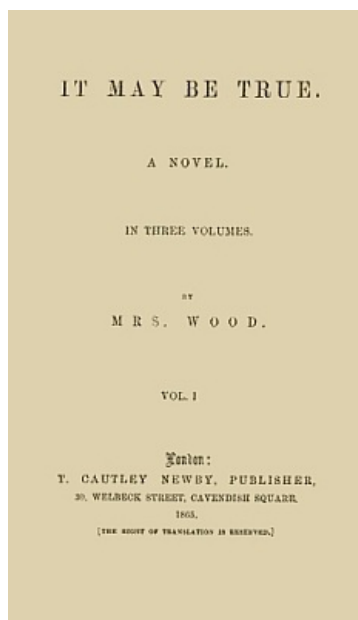
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## **IT MAY BE TRUE.**

**A NOVEL.  
IN THREE VOLUMES.  
BY MRS. WOOD.  
VOL. I.**

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**[THE RIGHT OF TRANSLATION IS RESERVED.]**

## **IT MAY BE TRUE.**

# CHAPTER I.

## ASHLEIGH.

Had'st thou lived in days of old,  
O, what wonders had been told  
Of thy lively countenance,  
And thy humid eyes that dance  
In the midst of their own brightness,  
In the very fane of lightness;  
Over which thine eyebrows, leaning,  
Picture out each lovely meaning;  
In a dainty bend they lie  
Like the streaks across the sky,  
Or the feathers from a crow,  
Fallen on a bed of snow.

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KEATS.

The village of Ashleigh is situated in one of the most lovely and romantic of the English counties; where mountains, valleys, woods and forest trees appear to vie with each other in stately magnificence. The village is literally embosomed amongst the trees. Lofty elms, majestic oaks, and wide-spreading beech trees grow in and around it. On one side, as far as the eye can reach, are mountains covered with verdure, with all their varied and lovely tints of green. On the other side the view is partially obstructed by a mass of forest trees growing in clumps, or forming an arch overhead, through which nevertheless may be gained a peep of the distant sea, with its blue waves, and sometimes the white sails of a ship; or, on a clear day, even the small fishermen's boats can be distinguished dotted here and there like small pearls.

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Ashleigh has its country inn and ivy-mantled church, with the small house dignified as the Parsonage, close by. Other houses are sprinkled here and there down the green lanes, or along the road, shaded by its lofty elms, at the end of which, on a small eminence, stands the Manor or "Big House," as the villagers call it.

It is a large, brick building, but with nothing grand or imposing about it; in fact, but for the lovely grounds and plantations on a small scale around, the clematis, jasmine and other beautiful creepers, too numerous to mention, trained up its walls, and hanging in luxuriant festoons about the porch, and the dark ivy which almost covers the roof, the whole of one side, and part of the front itself, it would be an ugly, unwieldy-looking edifice; as it was, everything appeared bright and gladsome.

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Before you reach the village, a bridge crosses a small stream which flows from the hill-side, and after winding gracefully and silently through the midst, passes by the mill and being just seen like a long thin thread of silver in the distance, is lost in the rich meadows beyond.

It was the beautiful spring time of the year:—

"The delicate-footed May,  
With its slight fingers full of leaves and flowers."

The sun was just setting in all its regal splendour beneath the deep rich crimson sky, throwing long dim shadows from the stately trees which over-arched the road along which a young girl was slowly wending her way. Her figure was slight, yet her step—although she appeared very young—had none of the buoyancy or elasticity of youth. It was slow; almost mournful. But either the graceful figure or step itself had a certain dignified pride, neither stately, haughty, nor commanding; perhaps it combined all three. Her face was very lovely. Fair golden masses of hair waved under the broad straw hat she wore, while her eyes were shaded by long, dark silken lashes. She had a clear, high forehead, and a delicately fair complexion. Such was Amy Neville. She paused as she reached the bridge, and, leaning against the low masonry at the side, looked back. Nothing could be lovelier than the scene she gazed on. The sun, as we have said, was just setting, and the sea, distinctly seen from the bridge, looked like one large, broad mirror, its waves dashing here and there like glittering diamonds. Far off, touched by the last rays of the sun, the white cliffs stood out grandly, while birds chirped and warbled among the leafy branches; groups of merry, noisy children played in the village, under the shade of the elms, through which here and there long thin white wreaths of smoke curled gracefully and slowly upwards.

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A cart, with its team of horses, roused Amy from her reverie, and she went into the lane where the hedge-rows were one mass of wild flowers. The delicate primrose, yellow cowslips, blue-bells, bryony, travellers' joy, and a number of others, almost rivalling in their loveliness the painted, petted ones in our own cultivated parterres, grew here in wild luxuriance, and as Amy sauntered slowly on, she filled the basket she carried on her arm with their beauty and fragrance. As she came in sight of one of the houses before mentioned, a child of about ten years of age came flying down the narrow garden-walk to meet her. Throwing her arms round her neck she upset Amy's basket of treasures, covering her dark hair with the lovely buds and blossoms. Leaving her to collect the scattered flowers, Amy passed into the cottage, her home.

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"You are late, Amy," said a voice, as she entered the little sitting room, "or otherwise I have wished to see you more than usual, and am impatient. Sarah has been eagerly watching the road ever since her return from her walk. Poor child! I fear she misses her young school companions."

"I think I am rather later than usual, mamma, but old Mrs. Collins was more than usually talkative; so full of her ailments and griefs, I really was quite vexed with her at last, as if no one in the world suffers as she does. Then the evening was so lovely, I loitered at the bridge to watch the sun set; you can have no idea how beautiful it was; and the wild flowers in the lane, I could not resist gathering them," and throwing her hat carelessly on the table, Amy seated herself on a low stool at her mother's feet.

"And why have you wished to see me so much, and what makes you look so sad, dear mamma?" she asked, as Mrs. Neville laid her hand caressingly on the masses of golden hair. [Pg 7]

Receiving no reply, she bent her eager, loving eyes on her mother's face. There was a sad, almost painful expression overshadowing the eyes, and compressing the lips, and it was some time ere Mrs. Neville met her gaze, and then tears had gathered under the long eyelashes, though none rested on her cheek.

"I have been for a drive with Mrs. Elrington, Amy."

Amy turned away her face; she dared not trust herself to meet those mournful eyes, expressing as they did all the grief she feared to encounter; so she turned away, lest she also should betray emotion which must be overcome, or be wanting in firmness to adhere to the plan she had formed, a plan she knew to be right, and therefore to be carried out; if the courage and resolution of which she had so boasted to Mrs. Elrington did not give way in the now wished for, yet half-dreaded conversation. [Pg 8]

"And she mentioned the letter to you, mamma?" asked Amy.

"She did. And much more beside. She tried to talk me over; tried to make me give my consent to parting with you, my dear child."

"And did you consent, dear mamma? Did Mrs. Elrington tell you how much I had set my heart upon going?"

"You wish to leave me, Amy?" asked Mrs. Neville reproachfully. "Think how lonely I should be. How I should miss the thousand kind things you do for me. And when I am sad, who will cheer me as you have done? I cannot part with you, my child. It is too hard a trial. I cannot bring myself to think of it!"

"But, mamma," replied Amy, pausing to stifle her rising emotion. "You have Sarah, and she is full of fun and spirits, and always laughing and merry, or singing about the house. And then, dear old Hannah will, I know, do her best to fill my place, so that after a while you will scarcely miss my sober face, and I am sure it is what I ought to do, dear mamma, instead of remaining here in idleness, and seeing you daily deprived of all the many comforts you have been accustomed to; and think of the pleasure it would give me to know and feel I am working for you, my own dear mother;" and Amy drew her mother's arm fondly round her neck. [Pg 9]

"Slaving for me, Amy! A governess's life is a life of slavery, though to you it may appear all sunshine. A path of thorns; no bed of roses, such as your excited fancy may have sketched out."

"No, mamma; you are wrong. I have thought over all the discomforts, mortifications, slavery, if you will, and it does not alter my opinion. I am willing to bear them all; and Mrs. Elrington, whom you love so much and think so highly of, told me she thought if you gave your consent it was the very best thing I could do. Nearly a month ago the idea entered my head; and she offered then to write to a friend who she thought might want a governess for her children, and I have pondered upon it ever since. Do consent, dear mamma, pray do. Indeed you must let me have my way in this." [Pg 10]

"Well, Amy dear, I will say no more; I half promised Mrs. Elrington before I came in; and now I give my consent; may I never have to regret it," and Mrs. Neville turned away and bent her head over her work that her daughter might not see the tears that were fast filling her eyes.

"Oh, thank you, again and again, dear mamma," said Amy, rising and kissing her pale cheek, "I will go at once and tell Mrs. Elrington; see it is not yet dusk, and I shall be back before Hannah has prepared the tea table; or if not, quite in time to make the tea."

Mrs. Neville, Amy's mother, was dressed in deep mourning, her once dark hair, now tinged with grey, smoothly braided beneath the close-fitting widow's cap. The large, dark mournful eyes, the small delicate features, the beautifully formed mouth, all told that Amy's mother must once have been gifted with no common share of beauty. Sorrow more than time had marked its ravages on her once fair face. [Pg 11]

She had married early in life, and much against the wishes of her friends, who did not approve of the poor but handsome Captain Neville. Some years after their marriage, by the sudden and unlooked-for death of an uncle and cousin, he came into a large property; but whether this unexpected accession of wealth, with the temptations with which he was surrounded in his new sphere, changed his heart, or whether the seeds were there before, only requiring opportunity and circumstances to call them forth into action; who can tell? Suffice it to say, he ran a sad

career of dissipation; and at his death little indeed remained for his widow and children. And now the once courted, flattered, and admired Sarah Barton, bred up and nurtured in the lap of luxury, with scarcely a wish ungratified; was living in a small cottage, and her beloved child on the eve of departing from her home, to be that poor despised being—a governess. Captain Neville had been dead about four months, and his widow mourned for him as the father of her children, thought of him as he had been to her in the first early days of their married life, the fond and loving husband.

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Amy did not return till late. Mrs. Elrington had promised to write to the lady that evening; and less than three days might bring the answer.

As day after day passed, poor Amy's heart beat fast; and her slight form trembled whenever she heard the little gate opened, leading into the small garden before the house; yet day after day passed by, and still Mrs. Elrington came not; and Amy almost feared her kind old friend had forgotten her promise, or, what was still worse, her application to the lady had failed.

About ten days afterwards, one morning, as Amy sat with her mother in the little sitting room, working and listening to the exclamations of delight that fell from the lips of her little sister Sarah, who was wondering how dear dolly would look in the smart new dress Amy was making for her, the sound of approaching carriage wheels was dully heard coming down the road. Presently a pony chaise drew up before the gate. Amy could hardly draw her breath as she recognized from the window the slow and measured step, the tall and stately figure of her kind old friend; and gently pushing away her sister, who attempted to detain her, probably disappointed at the unfinished state of dolly's frock, and not daring to look at her mother, she went and met the old lady at the door.

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"Dear Mrs. Elrington, I thought you would never come! Have you heard from the lady, and what does she say?"

"Yes, Amy, I have heard twice from the lady since I saw you; but I thought it best not to come until I had received a definite answer."

"It is very kind of you to come at all, dear Mrs. Elrington. But have you been successful? Is the answer favourable?"

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"Yes, Amy. The lady has engaged you, but there are three little girls, not two, as I at first thought; however they are very young, and I hope your trouble will be slight."

Poor Amy! What she had so long sighed and wished for, now seemed in its stern reality the greatest calamity that could have befallen her. She thought of her mother, whose comfort, solace, and companion she was, how lonely she would be; what could or would she do without her? Must she, indeed, leave her and her home where, for the last few months she had been so happy, and live amongst strangers, who cared not for her? Must she leave her birds, her flowers, all the thousand attractions and associations of home? Yes, she must give up all, and only bear them closer in her heart, not see and feel them every day; and as these thoughts crossed her mind, tears she could not keep down welled up into her eyes; they would not be controlled, and looking up and meeting Mrs. Elrington's pitying gaze bent full on her, with a smothered sob she hid her face on her kind friend's shoulder.

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Mrs. Elrington suffered her to weep on in silence, and some minutes elapsed ere Amy raised her head, and, smiling through her tears, took Mrs. Elrington's hand and led her to the door of the room she had just quitted and calling her sister, left the friends together.

An hour afterwards, when Amy entered the room, her mother was alone, Mrs. Elrington was gone.

The widow's head rested on her hand, and tears were falling fast upon a small miniature of Amy that her husband had had taken, for he had been proud of his daughter's beauty.

She heard not Amy's light step, and the daughter bent softly over her mother, and pressed her lips gently to her forehead. "My child." "My mother." And they were folded in one long, mournful embrace.

It was the first—the last time Amy ever gave way before her mother; she felt she must have strength for both; and nobly she bore up against her own sorrowful feelings, smothered every rising emotion of her heart, and prayed that her widowed mother might be comforted and supported during her absence, and her own steps guided aright in the new path which lay so gloomily before her.

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Mrs. Elrington was now almost constantly with them; Amy had begged it as a favour, for she felt she could not do without the kind old lady, who was ever ready with her cheerful voice and pleasant, hopeful words to cheer her mother's drooping spirits.

How fast the days flew by! It was Amy's last evening at home; in a few short hours she would be far away from all those she loved.

A heavy cloud seemed to hang over the little party assembled round the tea table, and scarce a word was spoken.

As the tea things were being removed, Mrs. Elrington went softly out, and the widow, drawing her chair near her daughter's, clasped her hand in hers, and in a low voice spoke long and

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earnestly words of love and advice, such as only a mother knows how to speak.

Often in after years did Amy call to remembrance the sad, sweet smile, the gentle, earnest voice with which her mother's last words of love were uttered.

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## CHAPTER II.

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### A PROUD LADYE.

Spring by Spring the branches duly  
Clothe themselves in tender flower;  
And for her sweet sake as truly  
All their fruit and fragrance shower:  
But the stream with careless laughter,  
Runs in merry beauty by,  
And it leaves me, yearning after  
Lorn to weep, and lone to die.  
In my eyes the syren river  
Sings and smiles up in my face;  
But for ever and for ever,  
Runs from my embrace.

MASSEY.

As we shall have occasion to speak of Mrs. Elrington often in these pages, some description of her is necessary, though a very slight one will suffice.

She lived in the large house called the Manor, before described, and had lived there for years in lonely solitude. She was a widow, and although the widow's cap had long ago been laid aside, yet in other respects her dress had altered little since the day she had first worn widow's weeds; it was always black; even the bonnet was of the same sombre hue, the cap, collar, and cuffs alone offering any relief to it. Her features were very handsome, and her figure tall, upright, and stately. Her hair was perfectly snow white, drawn off the high broad forehead, under a simple cap; she was greatly beloved, as also held in some slight awe; her voice was peculiarly soft, and when she spoke a pleasant smile seemed to hover about her face which never failed to gladden the hearts of those whom she addressed; but in general the expression of her features when in repose was sad.

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Mrs. Elrington and Mrs. Neville were old friends, which accounted perhaps for the latter's choice of Ashleigh as a home on her husband's death. They had both been severely tried with this world's sorrows; the one years ago, the other very recently, so that Amy's earnest entreaty that Mrs. Elrington would come and cheer her mother was comparatively an easy task to one who so well knew all the doubts, fears, and desponding feelings existing in the mind and harassing the thoughts of the widow, so lately afflicted, now so sorely tried. Early in the morning of the day on which Amy was to leave her home, Mrs. Elrington was at the cottage, encouraging the daughter, and speaking hopefully to the mother; the *return*, not departure, being what she dwelt on to both, but it was a painful task after all, and everyone looked sad. As Mrs. Neville left the room to see if everything was satisfactorily prepared for the coming departure, Amy drew near her old friend, and said—"Dear Mrs. Elrington, I do hope mamma will not fret much after I am gone; she seems very downhearted now, and full of sadness. I am keeping up as well as I can, but I dare not look in her tearful face." "I make no doubt she will feel your absence much, Amy; but she knows all is for the best and as it should be, and that, in time will help to make her happy again. After all it is but a temporary parting from one she loves. How many have had to bear a more lengthened, and in this world an eternal separation! Your mother has still one child left to love. I lost my only one—all I had." "It was a hard trial to you, and still harder to bear," replied Amy, as Mrs. Elrington's voice faltered—"Very, very hard to bear: God alone knows how I did bear it. But He who dealt the blow alone gave the strength. I fear my stricken heart murmured sadly at first; it would not be comforted nor consoled. The thought of my poor boy's broken heart was dreadful. Amy, child, do not trust too soon in the man who seeks your love; and oh! be very wary of an ambitious one. Ambition sunders, breaks many hearts, the coveting either rank or riches, whichever leads on to the one darling object of life only to be obtained by possessing either one or both of these, and thereby sacrificing your love or perhaps breaking your heart in the act of stepping over it to reach the goal he longs for; and which, when attained, must, under these circumstances bear its sting, and make him look back regretfully to the time gone by for ever; or, perhaps worse still, to days too painful to recall.

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"I would far rather it would be so; than that a man should love me for either my rank or riches, but having neither, perhaps no one will think me worth having, or take the trouble to fall in love with me."

Mrs. Elrington smiled as she looked at the lovely, almost scornful face now lifted to hers, and thought what a stumbling block it would prove in many a man's path in life.

"You are laughing at me," exclaimed Amy, as she caught the smile on the old lady's face. "Do let

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us talk of something else; of Mrs. Linchmore, for instance; I do so want to know what she is like, only you never will tell me."

"Because I cannot Amy; it is years since we met," replied Mrs. Elrington, in a hard tone; "so that what she is like now I cannot describe; you will have to do that when next we meet."

"But then," persisted Amy, "in that long ago time what was she like?"

"Very beautiful. A slight, tall, graceful figure, pliant as a reed. Eyes dark as jet, and hair like a raven's wing. Are you satisfied, Amy?"

"Not quite. I still want to know what her character was. I am quite satisfied that she must have been very beautiful."

"She was as a girl more than beautiful. There was a charm, a softness in her manner that never failed to allure to her side those she essayed to please. But in the end she grew vain of her loveliness, and paraded it as a snare, until it led her to commit a great sin."

"She may be altered now," exclaimed Amy, "altered for the better."

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"She must be grievously altered. Grief and remorse must have done their work slowly but surely, for I never will believe that her heart has been untouched by them."

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"I am afraid I shall not like her," replied Amy, "and I had so made up my mind that as your friend I should like her at once."

"We are not friends, Amy! Never can be now! Did we meet to-morrow it would be as strangers. Let us speak of her no more. I cannot bear it," exclaimed Mrs. Elrington in an agitated voice, but after a moment her face grew calm again, and she moved away looking more sorrowful than angry; but Amy could not help wishing with all her heart that her journey that day were miles away from Brampton Park; but there was scarcely time for thought, for in another moment the coach was at the door, and although bitter tears were shed when the last kiss was given, Amy tried to smile through her tears and to be sanguine as to the future, while Mrs. Neville was resigned, or apparently so, and little Sarah—the only one who gave way to her grief unrestrained—sobbed as if her heart would break, and when old Hannah took her by force almost, from her sister's arms, she burst into a perfect passion of tears, which lasted long after the coach was out of sight which conveyed Amy partly on her road to her future home.

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The morning was hot and sultry, one of those warm spring days, when scarcely a breath of air disturbs the hum of the bee, or interrupts the song of the birds; not a leaf stirred, even the flowers in the garden scarcely lent their sweet perfume to the light wind; and the rippling noise the little stream made gently gliding over the pebbly ground could be distinctly heard from the cottage.

In the lane just outside the gate were collected a number of men, women, and children; some out of curiosity, but by far the greater number to bid farewell to, and to see the last of their beloved Miss Amy; for although so recent an inhabitant, she was a general favourite in the village, and numberless were the blessings she received as she stepped past them into the coach, and with a fervent "God bless you," from Mrs. Elrington, she was gone.

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It was evening before she reached Brampton Park, her future home, and the avenue of trees under which she passed were dimly seen in the bright moonlight.

It was a long avenue, much longer than the elm tree road at Ashleigh, yet it bore some resemblance to it; the trees as large and stately, and the road as broad; but instead of the fragrant flowers in the little lane at one end, Amy could discern a spacious lawn stretching far away on one side, while the house, large, old fashioned, and gloomy rose darkly to view on the other; but within a bright lamp hung in the large, old handsome hall, illuminating a beautifully carved oak staircase. Pictures of lords and ladies, in old fashioned dresses, were hanging on the walls; Amy fancied they gazed sternly at her from out their time worn frames, as she passed by them, and entered a large handsome drawing-room, where easy couches, soft sofas, luxurious chairs of every size and shape, inviting to repose and ease, seemed scattered about in happy confusion. Crimson silk curtains hung in rich heavy folds before the windows; a carpet as soft as velvet covered the floor; alabaster vases and figures adorned the many tables; lamps hung from the ceiling; in short everything that taste suggested and money could buy, was there.

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At the further end of this room, or rather an inner room beyond, connected by large folding doors, sat a lady reclining in a large arm chair; one hand rested on a book in her lap, the other languidly on the curly head of a little girl, kneeling at her feet; her dark hair lay in rich glossy bands, on either temple, and was gathered in a knot at the back of her small, beautifully shaped head, under a lace cap; a dark silk dress fitted tight to her almost faultless figure, and fell in graceful folds from her slender waist; a little lace collar, fastened by a pearl brooch (the only ornament she wore), completed her attire, which was elegant and simple. Her eyes were dark and piercing, the nose and chin well-shaped, but perhaps a little too pointed; and the mouth small and beautiful. Such was Mrs. Linchmore, the mother of two of Amy's pupils. She was generally considered handsome, though few admired her haughty manners, or the scornful expression of her face.

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Mrs. Elrington had sent Mrs. Linchmore a slight sketch of Amy's history, and had also mentioned that she was very young; yet Mrs. Linchmore was scarcely prepared to see so delicate and fragile

a being as the young girl before her. A feeling of compassion filled her heart as she gazed on Amy's sweet face, and her manner was less haughty than usual, and her voice almost kind as she spoke.

"I fear, Miss Neville, you must have had a very unpleasant journey; the weather to-day has been more than usually warm, and a coach—I believe you came part of the way in one—not a very agreeable conveyance." [Pg 29]

"I was the only inside passenger," replied Amy, seating herself in a chair opposite Mrs. Linchmore, "so that I did not feel the heat much; but I am rather tired; the after journey in the train, and then the drive from the station here, has fatigued me greatly."

"You must indeed be very tired and depressed, one generally is after any unusual excitement, and this must have been a very trying day for you, Miss Neville, leaving your home and all those you love; but I trust ere long you will consider this house your home, and I hope become reconciled to the change, though I cannot expect it will ever compensate for the one you have lost."

"Oh, not lost!" exclaimed Amy, raising her tearful eyes, "not lost, only exchanged for a time; self-exiled, I ought to say."

"Self-exiled we will call it, if you like; a pleasant one I hope it will be. Mr. Linchmore and I have promised Mrs. Elrington we will do all we can to make it so. I hope we may not find it a difficult task to perform. The *will* will not be wanting on my part to insure success, if I find you such as Mrs. Elrington describes." [Pg 30]

"She is a very kind person," murmured Amy.

"She was always fond of young people, and very kind to them, so long as they allowed her to have her own way; but she did not like being thwarted. Her will was a law not to be disobeyed by those she loved, unless they wished to incur her eternal displeasure. I suppose she is quite the old lady now. It is," continued Mrs. Linchmore, with a scarcely audible sigh, "nine long years since I saw her."

"She does not appear to me very old," replied Amy, "but nine years is a long time, and she may have altered greatly."

"Most likely not," replied Mrs. Linchmore, in a cold tone. "Life to her has been one bright sunshine. She has had few cares or troubles."

"Indeed, Mrs. Linchmore!" exclaimed Amy, forgetting in her haste her new dependent position. "I have heard Mamma say that the death of her husband early in life was a sore trial to her, as also that of her son, which occurred not so very long ago." [Pg 31]

"You mistake me, Miss Neville," replied Mrs. Linchmore, more coldly and haughtily, "those may be trials, but were not the troubles I spoke of."

Amy was silenced, though she longed to ask what heavier trials there could be, but she dared not add more in her kind friend's defence; as it was, she fancied she detected an angry light in Mrs. Linchmore's dark eyes as they flashed on her while she was speaking, and a proud, almost defiant curl of the under lip.

Amy felt chilled as she recalled to mind Mrs. Elrington's words, that she and Mrs. Linchmore never could be friends; and wondered not as she gazed at the proud, haughty face before her, and then thought of the gentle, loving look of her old friend. No; they could not be friends, they could have nothing in common. How often had Mrs. Elrington expressed a hope that Amy would learn to love her pupils, but never a desire or wish that she might love their Mother also; and then the description which Amy had so often eagerly asked, and which only that morning had been granted her; how it had saddened her heart, and predisposed her to think harshly of Mrs. Linchmore. [Pg 32]

There must be something hidden away from sight, something that had separated these two years ago. What was it? Had it anything to do with that dread sin Mrs. Elrington had lately touched upon, and of which Amy had longed, but dared not ask an explanation? If they had loved each other once, what had separated them now? Where was the charm and softness of manner which almost made the loveliness Mrs. Elrington had spoken of? Very beautiful Amy thought the lady before her, but there was nothing about her to win a girl's love, or draw her heart to her at first sight.

How strange all this seemed now. She had never thought of it before. It had never occurred to her. Her thoughts and feelings had been too engrossed, too much wrapt up in regret at leaving her home, and arranging for her Mother's comfort after her departure, to think of anything else; but now, the more she pondered, the more extraordinary it seemed, and the more difficult it was to arrive at any satisfactory conclusion, and the impression her mind was gradually assuming was a painful one. [Pg 33]

A light, mocking laugh from her companion startled Amy; it grated harshly on her ears, and snapped the thread of her perplexing thoughts.

"I doubt," said Mrs. Linchmore, as the laugh faded away to an almost imperceptible curl of the lip; while her head was thrown haughtily back, and she proudly met Amy's astonished gaze; "I doubt if Mrs. Elrington would recognise me; nine years, as you wisely remark, may effect—"

though not always—a great change. It has on me; many may possibly think for the better; *she* will say for the worse. But time, however hateful it may be for many reasons, changing, as it does sadly, our outward appearance; yet what wonderful changes it effects inwardly. It has one very great advantage in my eyes, it brings forgetfulness; so that the longer we live the less annoying to us are the faults and follies of youth; they gradually fade from our vision. I could laugh now at Mrs. Elrington's bitter remarks and sarcastic words; they would not cause me one moment's uneasiness."

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Amy was spared any reply by little Alice suddenly rising, and claiming her mother's attention.

"This is the youngest of your pupils, Miss Neville. Alice dear, put down my scissors, and go and speak to that lady."

The little girl, who had been staring at Amy ever since she entered, now looked sullenly on the floor, but paid no attention to her mother's request.

"Go, dear, go! Will you not make friends with your new governess?"

"No I won't!" she exclaimed, with flashing eyes. "Nurse says she is a naughty, cross woman, and I don't love her."

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"Oh, fie! Nurse is very wrong to say such things. You see how much your services are required, Miss Neville. I fear you will find this little one sadly spoilt; she is a great pet of her papa's and mine."

"I trust," replied Amy, "we shall soon be good friends. Alice, dear, will you not try and love me? I am not cross or naughty," and she attempted to take the little hand Alice held obstinately beneath her dress.

"No, no! go away, go away. I won't love you!"

At this moment the door opened, and Mr. Linchmore entered. He was a fine, tall looking man, with a pleasing expression of countenance, and his manner was so kind as he welcomed Amy that he won her heart at once. "Hey-day!" he exclaimed, "was it Alice's voice I heard as I came downstairs? I am afraid, Isabella, you keep her up too late. It is high time she was in bed and asleep. We shall have little pale cheeks, instead of these round rosy ones," added he, as the little girl climbed his knee, and looked up fondly in his face.

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"She was not in the least sleepy," replied his wife, "and begged so hard to be allowed to remain, that I indulged her for once."

"Ah! well," said he, smiling, and glancing at Amy. "We shall have a grand reformation soon. But where are Edith and Fanny?"

"They were so naughty I was obliged to send them away up stairs. Fanny broke the vase Charles gave me last winter."

"By-the-by, I have just heard from Charles; he has leave from his regiment for a month, and is going to Paris; but is coming down here for a few days before he starts, just to say good-bye."

"One of his 'flying visits,' as he calls them. How sorry I am!"

"Sorry! why so?"

"Because he promised to spend his leave with us. What shall we do without him? and how dull it will be here."

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A cloud passed over her husband's face, but he made no reply; and a silence somewhat embarrassing ensued, only broken some minutes after by the nurse, who came to fetch Alice to bed, and Amy gladly availed herself of Mrs. Linchmore's permission to retire at the same time.

They went up a short flight of stairs, and down a long corridor, or gallery, then through another longer still, when nurse, half opening a door to the left, exclaimed,—

"This is to be the school-room, miss. I thought you might like to see it before you went to bed. Madam has ordered your tea to be got ready for you there, though I'm thinking it's little you'll eat and drink to-night, coming all alone to a strange place. However you'll may be like to see Miss Edith and Miss Fanny, and they're both in here, Miss Fanny at mischief I warrant."

Then catching up Alice in her arms, after a vain attempt on Amy's part to obtain a kiss, she marched off with her in triumph, and Amy entered the room.

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On a low stool, drawn close to the open window, sat a fair-haired girl, her head bent low over the page she was reading, or trying to decipher, as the candles threw little light on the spot where she sat. Her long, fair curls, gently waved by the soft evening breeze, swept the pages, and quite concealed her face from Amy's gaze on the one side; while on the other they were held back by her hand, so as not to impede the light.

A scream of merry laughter arrested Amy's footsteps as she was advancing towards her, and turning round she saw a little girl, evidently younger than the one by the window, dancing about with wild delight, holding the two fore paws of a little black and white spaniel, which was dressed up in a doll's cap and frock, and evidently anything but pleased at the ludicrous figure he cut, although obliged to gambol about on his hind legs for the little girl's amusement. Presently a

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snap and a growl showed he was also inclined to resent his young mistress's liberties, when another peal of laughter rewarded him, while, bringing her face close to his, she exclaimed,—

"Oh, you dear naughty little doggie! you know you would not dare to bite me." Then, catching sight of Amy, she instantly released doggie, and springing up, rushed to the window, saying in a loud whisper—

"Oh, Edith, Edith! here's the horrid governess."

Edith instantly arose, and then stood somewhat abashed at seeing Amy so close to her; but Amy held out her hand, and said—

"I am sorry your sister thinks me so disagreeable; but I hope Edith will befriend me, and teach her in time to believe me kind and loving."

"She is not my sister, but my cousin," replied Edith, drooping her long eyelashes, and suffering her hand to remain in Amy's.

"Is Alice your sister?"

"No; she is my cousin, too. I have no sister."

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The tone was sorrowful, and Amy fancied the little hand tightened its hold, while the eyes were timidly raised to hers.

Sitting down, she drew the child towards her, while Fanny stood silently by, gazing at her new friend. They chatted together some time, and when nurse came to fetch them to bed, Edith still kept her place by Amy's side, while Fanny, with Carlo in her lap, was seated at her feet, nor did either of the little girls refuse her proffered kiss as she bade them "good night."

How lonely Amy felt in that large long room.

Notwithstanding the evening was a warm one, the young girl drew her shawl closer round her shoulders, as she sat down to her solitary tea; and tears, the first she had shed that day, rolled slowly over her cheeks as she thought of her mother's calm, loving face, and her sister's merry prattle. How she missed them both! Although but a few short hours since they parted, since she felt the warm, silent pressure of her mother's hand, and Sarah's clinging embrace, yet the hours seemed long; and oh, how long the months would be! But youth is hopeful, and ere Amy went to bed, she had already begun to look forward to the holidays as nearer than they were, to image to herself the warm welcome home and the happy meeting hereafter with those she loved.

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## CHAPTER III.

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### MORE ABOUT BRAMPTON.

Alas!—how changed that mien!  
How changed these timid looks have been,  
Since years of guilt and of disguise,  
Have steel'd her brow, and arm'd her eyes!  
No more of virgin terror speaks  
The blood that mantles in her cheeks;  
Fierce and unfeminine are there  
Frenzy for joy, for grief despair.

SCOTT.

Mrs. Linchmore had married for money, yet money had not brought the happiness she expected. At its shrine she had sacrificed all she held dearest on earth, and with it her own self-esteem and self-respect. In the first few months she had tried to reconcile the false step to herself, had tried to hush the still, small voice within that was constantly rising to upbraid her. Was not wealth hers? and with it could she not purchase everything else? Alas! the "still, small voice" would be heard. She could not stifle it; it pursued her everywhere: in her pursuits abroad, in her occupations at home—Home! the name was a mockery. It was a gilded prison, in which her heart was becoming cold and hard, and all the best feelings of her woman's nature were being turned to stone.

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Ten years had passed away since Mrs Linchmore stood at the altar as a bride; ten, to her, slow, miserable years. How changed she was! Her husband, he who ought to have been her first thought, she treated with cold indifference; yet he still loved her so passionately that not all her coldness had been able to root out his love. Her voice was music to him, her very step made his heart beat more quickly, and sometimes brought a quick flush to his face; all that she did was his delight, even her faults he looked on with patient forbearance. But although he loved her so devotedly, he rarely betrayed it; his face might brighten and flush when he heard her step, yet by the time she had drawn near, and stood, perhaps, close by his side as he wrote, it had paled again, and he would even look up and answer her coldly and calmly, while only the unsteadiness of his hand as he bent over the paper again, would show the tumult within; while she, his wife, all

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unconscious, would stand coldly by, and pass as coldly away out of his sight, never heeding, never seeing, the mournful longing and love in his eyes.

To her children Mrs. Linchmore appeared a cold, stern mother, but in reality she was not so. She loved them devotedly. All her love was centred in them. She was blind to their faults, and completely spoiled them, especially Alice the youngest, a wilful affectionate little creature, who insisted on having, if possible, her own way in everything. She managed it somehow completely, and was in consequence a kind of petty tyrant in the nursery. Nothing must go contrary to her will and wishes, or a violent burst of passion was the consequence. These paroxysms of temper were now of such common and frequent occurrence, that Nurse Hopkins was not sorry the young governess had arrived, and Alice been partially transferred to the school-room, where Amy found it a hard task to manage her, and at the same time win her love. Whenever she reproved, or even tried to reason, Alice thought it was because she disliked her. "Mamma," she would say, "loves me, and she never says I am naughty."

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Her sister Fanny was the veriest little romp imaginable, almost always in mischief. Chasing the butterflies on the lawn, or sitting under the shade of the trees, with her doll in her lap, and Carlo by her side, was all she cared for, and Amy could scarcely gain her attention at all. She was a bright, merry little creature, full of laughter and fun, ready to help her young playmates out of any scrape, and yet, from utter thoughtlessness, perpetually falling into disgrace herself. Tearing her frock in climbing trees, and cutting her hair to make dolls' wigs of, were among her many misdemeanours, and a scolding was a common occurrence. But she was always so sorry for her faults, so ready to acknowledge them, and anxious to atone further. Amy's kind yet grave face could sober her in a moment, and, with her arms thrown round her neck, she would exclaim, "Oh, dear Miss Neville, I am so sorry—so sorry." She was a loveable little creature, and Amy found it one of her hardest trials to punish her. She hated books. Nothing pleased her so much, when the morning's task was done, as to put (so she said) the tiresome books to sleep on their shelves. She showed no disinclination to learn, and would sit down with the full determination of being industrious; but the slightest accident would distract her attention, and set her thoughts wandering, and Edith had generally nearly finished her lessons before Fanny had learnt her daily tasks.

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Edith, a child of ten years old, was totally dissimilar, and of a reserved, shrinking nature, rendered still more so from her peculiar position. She was the orphan daughter of Mr. Linchmore's only sister, bequeathed to him as a sacred trust; and he had taken her to his house to be looked upon henceforth as his own child; but no kind voice greeted her there, no hands clasped the little trembling one in theirs, and bade her welcome; not a single word of encouragement or promise of future love was hers, only the cold, calm look of her new aunt; and then total indifference. Sad and silent, she would sit night after night in the twilight by the nursery window, her little thoughts wandering away in a world of her own, or more often still to her lost mother. None roused her from them; even Fanny, giddy as she was, never disturbed her then. Once nurse Hopkins said—

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"Miss Edith, it isn't natural for you to be sitting here for all the world like a grown woman; do get up, miss, and go and play with your cousins."

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But as nurse never insisted upon it, so Edith sat on, and would have remained for ever if she could in the bright world her fancy had created. It was well for her Amy had come, or the girl's very nature would have been changed by the cold atmosphere around her, so different from the home she had lost, where all seemed one long sunshine. It was long ere Amy understood her; so diligent, so attentive to her lessons, so cautious of offending, so mindful of every word during school hours, and yet never anxious to join Fanny in her play; but on a chair drawn close to the window, and with a book in her lap, or her hands clasped listlessly over the pages, and her eyes drooping under their long lashes—so she sat. But a new era was opening in the child's history.

Some few weeks after Amy's arrival, as she sat working very busily (Edith, as usual, had taken her seat at the window), she felt that the child, far from reading, was intently watching her. At length, without looking up, she said—

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"Edith, dear, if you have done reading will you come and tidy my workbasket for me? My wools are in sad confusion. I suspect Alice's fingers have been very busy amongst them."

She came and busied herself with her task until it was completed. Then, still and silent, she remained at her governess' side.

"Who is this shawl for, Miss Neville, when it is finished?" asked she.

"For my mother."

Edith drew closer still.

"Ah!" said she, "that is the reason why you look so happy; because, though you are away from her, still you are trying to please her; and you know she loves you, though no one else does."

"Yes, Edith; but I should never think *no one* loved me, and if I were you I am sure I should be happy."

"Ah, no! It is impossible."

"Not so; I should be ever saying to myself would my dear mamma have liked this, or wished me to

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do that. Then I should love to think she might be watching over me, and that thought alone would, I am sure, keep me from idleness and folly."

"What is idleness?"

"Waste of time. Sitting doing nothing."

"And you think me idle, then?"

"Often, dear Edith. Almost every day, when you sit at the window so long."

"But no one minds it. No one loves me."

"I mind it, or I should not have noticed it; and I will love you if you will let me."

For an instant the child stood irresolute, then, with her head buried in Amy's lap, she sobbed out, "Oh! I never thought of that. I never thought you would love me—no one does. I will not be idle any more," and she was not; someone loved her, both the living and the dead; and the little craving heart was satisfied.

And so the days flew by. The summer months passed on, only interrupted by a visit from Charles Linchmore. He was very unlike his brother; full of fun and spirits, as fair as he was dark, and not so tall. He seemed to look upon Amy at once as one of the belongings of the house, was quite at home with her, chatted, sang duets, or turned the pages of the music while she sang. Sometimes he joined her in her morning's walk with the children. Once he insisted on rowing her on the lake; but as it was always "Come along, Edith, now for the walk we talked of," or, "Now then, Fanny, I'm ready for the promised lesson in rowing;" what could Amy say? she could only hesitate, and then follow the rest. She felt Mrs. Linchmore look coldly on her, and one evening, on the plea of a severe headache, she remained up stairs; but so much consideration was expressed by Mrs. Linchmore, such anxiety lest she should be unable to go down the next evening, that Amy fancied she must have been mistaken; the thought, nevertheless, haunted her all night. The next morning she had hardly commenced studies when Charles Linchmore's whistle sounded in the passage.

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He opened the door, and insisted on the children having a holiday, and while Amy stood half surprised, half irresolute, sent them for their hats and a scamper on the lawn, then returned, and laughed at her discomfiture. He had scarcely gone when Mrs. Linchmore came in; she glanced round as Amy rose.

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"Pray sit down, Miss Neville, but—surely I heard my brother here."

There was something in the tone Amy did not like, so she replied, somewhat proudly,

"He *was* here. Madam."

"*Was* here? Why did he come?"

"He came for the children, and I suppose he had your sanction for so doing."

"He never asked it. And I must beg, Miss Neville, that you will in future make him distinctly understand that this is the school-room, where he cannot possibly have any business whatever."

With flushed cheeks, for a while Amy stood near the window, just where Mrs. Linchmore had left her; and then, "Oh! I will not put up with it!" she said, half aloud, "I will go and tell her so." But on turning round there stood Nurse Hopkins.

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"It's a lovely place, miss, isn't it? such a many trees; you were looking at it from the window, weren't you, miss? And then all those fields do look so green and beautiful; and the lake, too; I declare it looks every bit like silver shining among the trees."

"It is indeed lovely; but, Nurse, I was not thinking of that when you came."

"No, miss? Still it does not do to sit mopy like, it makes one dull. Now I've lived here many a year, and yet, when I think of my old home, I do get stupid like."

"Where is your home Nurse?"

"I've no home but this Miss, now."

"No home? But you said you had a home once."

"Yes Miss, so I had, but it's passed away long ago—some one else has it now; such a pleasant cottage as it was, with its sanded floor and neat garden; my husband always spent every spare hour in planting and laying it out, and all to please me. I was so fond of flowers. Ah! me," sighed she, "many's the time they've sent from the Park here to beg a nosegay—at least, John, the gardener has—when company was coming."

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"Your cottage was near here, then?"

"Yes Miss, just down the lane; why you can see the top of it from here, right between those two tall trees yonder."

"Yes. I can just catch a far off glimpse of it."

"You've passed it often too, Miss. It's the farm as belongs to Farmer Rackland."

"I know it well. But why did you give it up?"

"My husband, or old man, as I used joke like to call him, died," and Nurse's voice trembled, "he was young and hearty looking too when he was took away; what a happy woman I was Miss, before that! and so proud of him and my children." [Pg 55]

"How many children have you?"

"I had three Miss; two girls and a boy. I seem to see them now playing about on the cottage floor; but others play there now just every bit as happy, and I've lost them all. I'm all alone," and Nurse wiped her eyes with the corner of her white apron.

"Not all alone Nurse," said Amy, compassionately.

"True Miss; not all alone; I was wrong. Well, I sometimes wish those days would come again, but there, we never knows what's best for us. I'm getting an old woman now and no one left to care for me. But I wasn't going to tell you all about myself and my troubles when I began; but somehow or other it came out, and I shall like you—if I may be so bold to say so—all the better for knowing all about me; but I want, begging your pardon, Miss, to give you a piece of advice, if so be as you won't be too proud to take it from me; you see I know as well as you can tell me, that you and the Madam have fallen out; and if it's about Miss Alice, which I suppose it is, why don't be too strong handed over her at first; she will never abide by it, but'll scream till her Mamma hears her, and then Madam can't stand it no how; but'll be sure to pet her more than ever to quiet her." [Pg 56]

"But Nurse, I do not mean to be strong-handed with Miss Alice, that is, if you mean severe; but she is at times naughty and must be punished."

"Well Miss, we should most of us be sorry to lose you: you are so quiet like, and never interferes with nobody, and they do all downstairs agree with me, that it ain't possible to cure Miss Alice altogether at first; you must begin by little and little, and that when Madam isn't by."

"But that would be wrong, and I cannot consent to punish Miss Alice without Mrs. Linchmore's free and full permission; neither can nor will I take charge of any of the children unless I am allowed to exercise my own judgment as to the course I am to pursue. I am not I hope, harsh or severe towards your late charge; but I must be firm." [Pg 57]

"I see Miss, it's no use talking, and I hope Madam will consent to let you do as you wish; but I fear—I very much fear—" and nurse shook her head wisely as she walked away.

"Well, I've done all I could, Mary," said she to the under housemaid, as she went below, "and all to no purpose; there's no persuading Miss Neville, more's the pity; she thinks she's right about Miss Alice, and she'll stick to it. I wish I'd asked her not to go near Madam to-day. I'm positive sure she was going when I surprised her after passing Mrs. Linchmore in the passage. *She* came from the school-room too, I know, and vexed enough she was, or she'd never have had that hard look on her face. Well, I only hope the Master will be by when they do meet again, or there'll be mischief, mark me if there isn't."

"Law! Mrs. Hopkins, how you talk. I wouldn't wait for the master neither, if I were Miss Neville. I'd speak at once and have done with it, that's my plan; see if I would let Miss Alice come over me with her tantrums, if I was a lady!" [Pg 58]

"She speaks every bit like that lady you were reading about in the book last night; she'd make you believe anything and love her too. Well, I hope no harm will come of it, but I don't like that look on Madam's face, nor on Miss Neville's, neither, for the matter of that."

But nurse was wrong. Perhaps Amy changed her mind, and never spoke to Mrs. Linchmore. At all events, things went on as they did before Charles Linchmore came—whose visit, by the way, was not quite such a flying one—and continued the same long after he had gone away.

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## CHAPTER IV.

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### THE BOOK SHELVES

"O my swete mother, before all other  
For you I have most drede:  
But now adue! I must ensue,  
Where fortune doth me lede.  
All this make ye: now let us flee:  
The day cometh fast upon;  
For in my minde, of all mankynde  
I love but you alone."

Amy spent the summer holidays with her mother. Mrs. Neville had grown pale and thin, while a careworn expression had stolen over her face, supplanting the former sad one; and she had a certain nervous, restless manner unusual to her, which Amy could not fail to remark. Mrs. Elrington attributed it to anxiety on her daughter's account during her absence. It was a trying time for Mrs. Neville; she felt and thought often of what her child might suffer, all that one so sensitive might have to undergo from the neglect or taunts of the world; that world she knew so little of, and into the gay circles of which only two short years ago she had been introduced. How she had been admired and courted! Perhaps some of those very acquaintances she might now meet, and how would it be with her? How would they greet her? Not with the grasp of friendship, but as one they had never seen, or having seen, forgotten. She was no longer the rich heiress, but a governess working for her own and others' support. She was no longer in the same society as themselves, no longer worthy of a thought, and would be passed by and forgotten; or, if remembered, looked on as a stranger.

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Mrs. Neville thought her daughter altered. She had grown quieter, more reserved, more womanly than before, and more forbearing with little, exacting Sarah.

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Would Amy do this, or look at that? show her how to cut out this, or paint that—always something new; but Amy seldom expostulated or refused assistance, but was, as her mother told Mrs. Elrington, a perfect martyr to her sister's whims and fancies. She had changed. But why? Her mother watched her narrowly, and doubted her being happy, and this thought made her doubly anxious, and imprinted the careworn look more indelibly on her face. A few mornings before Amy returned to Brampton, at the close of the holidays, she went over to Mrs. Elrington's, and found her busy in the garden tying up the stray shrubs, and rooting up the weeds.

"I am afraid, Amy dear, you have come to say 'good-bye,' so I must finish my gardening to-morrow, and devote my time for the present to you."

"I shall be very glad, Mrs. Elrington, for indeed I have a great deal to say. I am so anxious about mamma."

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"Anxious, Amy! Well, come in and sit down, and tell me all about it. Sit here close by me, and tell me what is the matter, or rather, what you fancy is; as I think the anxiety is all on your account."

"It's mamma, Mrs. Elrington. I am so dissatisfied about her; she is so changed."

"Changed! In what way?"

"In every way. She is not so strong, the least exertion tires her, and I so often notice the traces of tears on her face. Then she is so dull; and will sit for hours sometimes without saying a word, always busy with that everlasting knitting, which I hate; it is quite an event if she drops a stitch, as then her fingers are quiet for a little. If I look up suddenly, I find her eyes fixed on me so mournfully: at other times, when I speak she does not hear me, being evidently deep in her own thoughts. She is so different from what she used to be, so very different."

"I cannot say I have noticed any change, and I am constantly with her."

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"Ah! that is just why you don't see it. Hannah does not."

"But, my dear, she never complains: I think she would if she felt ill."

"Mamma never complains, dear Mrs. Elrington; I wish she would, as then I might question her, now I feel it impossible. Does she seem happy when I am away?"

"Quite so; and always especially cheerful when she has your letters."

"I will write much oftener this time; and you will also, will you not? and tell me always exactly how she is, and do watch her, too, Mrs. Elrington, for I am sure she is not so strong as she was."

"I will, indeed," and Mrs. Elrington pressed Amy's hand, "but you must not fidget yourself unnecessarily, when there is not the least occasion for it. I assure you I see little change in your mother—I mean in bodily health, and I hope, please God, you will find her quite well when you come again, so do not be low-spirited, Amy."

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And so they parted. Mrs. Elrington's words comforted without convincing Amy; and her face wore a more cheerful expression for some days after her return to Brampton.

Mr. Linchmore greeted her very kindly; even Mrs. Linchmore seemed pleased to see her; while the children, especially Fanny, were boisterous in their welcome, and buzzed about her like bees, recounting all the little events and accidents that had happened since she left, until they were fetched away; when Mrs. Linchmore and Amy were alone.

"I trust you enjoyed your visit home, Miss Neville?"

"Thank you, yes; it was a great treat being with my mother and sister again."

"We missed you sadly, and are not sorry to welcome you back again. Edith and Fanny have both grown weary of themselves and idleness; as for Alice, only yesterday, while I was dressing for dinner, having taken the child with me into my room, she amused herself by scrubbing the floor with my toothbrush, having managed to turn up a piece of the carpet in one of the corners; indeed, I should weary you, did I recount half she has been guilty of in the way of mischief."

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Amy smiled, and Mrs. Linchmore continued,

"Did you ever leave home before for so long a time?"

"Never. My mother and I had never been parted until I came here."

"You must have felt it very much. I trust Mrs. Neville is well?"

"No. I regret to say I am not quite satisfied with my mother. I do not see any very material change, neither can I say she is ill, but I notice a difference somewhere. I fear she frets a great deal, she is so much alone."

"But your sister?"

"She is too young to be much of a companion to mamma, and I think tries her a great deal. She has been rather a spoilt child, being so much younger than I." [Pg 66]

"Younger children always are spoilt. Have you no friends besides Mrs. Elrington?"

"Yes; several very kind ones: there are many nice people living near, but none like clear, good Mrs. Elrington; she is so true, so unselfish, so kind, and devotes a great deal of her time to mamma."

"Does she notice any change in your Mother?"

"She assured me not. But then they meet so constantly, she would not be likely to notice it so much as I, who only see her seldom. She has promised to let me know if she does see any alteration for the worse, so with that I must rest satisfied, and hope all is well, unless I hear to the contrary."

"How is Mrs. Elrington?"

"Quite well, thank you, and looks much the same."

"She asked about me, of course?" and Mrs. Linchmore half averted her face from Amy's gaze. [Pg 67]

"Yes, often; and as she has not seen you for so many years, I had much to tell her. She seemed pleased to hear of the children, and asked a great many questions about them."

"You *thought* she seemed pleased to hear about them. I suspect curiosity had a great deal to do with it, if not all. You will grow wiser some day, Miss Neville, and learn to distinguish the true from the false—friends from foes," and Mrs. Linchmore's eyes flashed. "Did you give her my message, the kind remembrances I sent her, with the hope that—that she had not forgotten me? Did she send no message in return?"

The question was sternly asked; Amy hesitated what to say. What was the mysterious connection between the two? and why was it Mrs. Linchmore never spoke of Mrs. Elrington without a touch of anger or bitterness? even the latter, who seemed ever careful of wounding the feelings of others, never spoke of Mrs. Linchmore in a friendly manner, though she appeared to know or have known her well at some earlier period of life. [Pg 68]

The question embarrassed Amy, "I was so hurried," said she, "in coming away that I forgot—I mean she forgot—."

Mrs. Linchmore rose haughtily, "I dislike equivocation, Miss Neville, and here there is not the slightest occasion for it. I did not expect a message in return; I think I told you so, if I remember aright, when I entrusted you with mine," and very proudly she walked across the room, seated herself at the piano and sang as if there was no such thing as woe in the world, while Amy sat, listened, and wondered, then softly rose and went upstairs to the school room.

"Here we are! so busy, Miss Neville," cried Fanny, "putting all the things to rights. It's so nice to have something to do, and I'm sorting all the books, although I do hate lessons so," with which assertion Fanny threw her arms round her governess' neck, while Alice begged for a kiss, and Edith pressed closer to her side and passed her small hand in hers. [Pg 69]

Certainly the children were very fond of her; Fanny had been so from the first; it was natural for her to love everybody, she was so impulsive, but the other two she had won over by her own strong will and gentle but firm training. Carlo, Fanny's dog, seemed as overjoyed as any of them, leaping, barking, and jumping about until desired rather severely by his young mistress to be quiet. "You are making a shameful noise, sir," she said, giving him a pat, "will you please let somebody else's voice be heard; and do sit down, dear Miss Neville, and let us tell you all we have done since you have been away; we have lots of news, we have not told you half yet, have we, Edith?"

So they began all over again, totally forgetting what they had said or left unsaid, Amy patiently listening, pleased to think how glad they were to see her. Each tendered a small present, to show that their little fingers had not been quite unprofitably employed; half pleased, half frightened lest it should not be liked. They told her amongst other things that uncle Charles had been to Brampton again, but only for three days; he would not remain longer, although Mrs. Linchmore had wished him to; he had brought his dog "Bob" with him, such an ugly thing, who growled and showed his teeth; they were all afraid of it, and were glad when it went away. [Pg 70]

"Bob used to come up here, Miss Neville, and sit in the window while uncle was at work."

"At work! what work, Edith?"

"The book shelves. Oh! have you not seen them? do come and look, they are so nice. See, he put them all up by himself, and worked so hard, and when they were done he made us bring all your books; then he set them up, and desired us not to meddle with them as they were only for you. Was it not kind of him? We told him it was just what you wanted."

"How could you? I did not want them at all."

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"Yes, Miss Neville, indeed you did; you said long before you went away how much you should like some."

But Amy thought she neither wanted nor liked them, and felt vexed they had been put up.

"Ah!" said Fanny, catching the vexed expression, "you can thank him for them when he comes again; we were to tell you so, and that he would be here in November, and this is August Miss Neville, so it's only three months to wait."

"You can tell him Fanny when he comes, that I am much obliged to him, lest I should forget to do so."

And Amy turned away, feeling more vexed than she liked to acknowledge to herself; she had had nothing to do with putting up the shelves, but would Mrs. Linchmore think so if she knew it? And did she know it, and what had she thought? "Mamma was right," said she to her self. "It is very hard to be a governess; and *he* has misinterpreted and misjudged me."

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A thorn had sprung up in Amy's path, which already wounded her slightly.

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## CHAPTER V.

### VISITORS ARRIVE.

O! if in this great world of strife,  
This mighty round of human life,  
We had no friends to cheer,  
O! then how cold the world would seem!  
How desolate the ebbing stream  
Of life from year to year!

J. B. KERRIDGE.

Autumn passed away, and winter spread its icy mantle over the earth. Abroad all looked bleak, cold, and desolate. Trees had lost their leaves, flowers their blossoms, and the beautiful green fields were covered with snow; while here and there a snowdrop reared her drooping head from under its white veil, or a crocus feebly struggled to escape its cold embraces. Within doors, things wore a brighter aspect than they had done for some time past. Visitors had arrived at Brampton, who, it was hoped, would enliven the old Hall, and dissipate the dulness of its haughty mistress. Rooms long unoccupied had bright, cheerful fires blazing in the grates; footsteps hurried to and fro, echoing through the long, lofty passages, where all before had been so still and silent. The old, gloomy, melancholy look had totally disappeared, and the house teemed with life and mirth.

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Mrs. Hopkins was no longer nurse, but had been installed as housekeeper in the room of one who had grown too old for the office; and was all smiles and importance, much to the disgust of Mason, the lady's maid, who, having always considered herself a grade above the *Nurse*, now found herself a mere cipher next to the all-important *Housekeeper*, who seemed to sweep everything before her as she walked grandly down the long corridor; Mason's pert toss of the head, and still perter replies, were met with cool disdain, much to her disappointment, as she tried to discomfort her; but all to no purpose, as Mrs. Hopkins' sway continued paramount; and she wielded her sceptre with undiminished power, notwithstanding all the arts used to dislodge her.

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It was a half-holiday; Amy had fetched her hat, and was on her way out; in the corridor she met Mrs. Hopkins, who was always fond of a chat when she could find the opportunity; besides, she had long wished for some one to whom to unburden all Mason's impertinences. She immediately courtesied, and began—

"Good morning, Miss. Isn't the old house looking different? it does my heart good to see it, we havn't been so gay for many a year. I am so glad Madam has given up going to foreign parts; it ain't good for the young ladies, and I'm certain sure it ain't no good for servants, Mason's never been the same since she went; I havn't patience with her airs and graces!" Here she broke off abruptly, as Mason crossed the passage, her flowing skirts sweeping the floor, and a little coquettish cap just visible at the back of her head. "Only look at her, Miss, thinking herself somebody in her own opinion, when in most everybody's elses' she's a nobody. Why, Miss, a Duchess couldn't make more of herself," said Mrs. Hopkins, testily.

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"Indeed, I do not believe she could," replied Amy, smiling, "and I am sure would not *think* more of

herself."

"Think, Miss! Why, it's my belief she dreams at night she's found the hen with the golden egg, and so builds castles on the strength of it all day long; and airy ones she'll find them, I know," and Mrs. Hopkins laughed at the idea of Mason's supposed downfall.

"I suppose, Nurse, you have been very busy?"

"Yes, Miss, just what I like. I don't care to sit with my hands before me. I'm always happy when I'm busy. It isn't natural for me to be idle."

"How many strangers are here, Nurse? You must forgive me for calling you Nurse, but I am so accustomed to it."

"Forgive you, Miss! I'm Nurse to you and the children if you please, always, I'm proud of the title; but to Mason and the rest I'm Mrs. Hopkins," said she with firmness. "As to how many are here, why I can't exactly say; they're not all come yet, there are several empty rooms, but I suppose they'll be filled to-day or to-morrow at the latest; then the young Master's to come; but his room's always ready; he comes and goes when he likes. We call him the young Master, because he's to have the Hall by-and-by. He's a thorough good gentleman, is Mr. Charles, and will make a good master to them as lives to see it. But it is a pity, Madam has no son."

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"Excuse me for interrupting you, Miss Neville," said Mrs. Linchmore's voice close behind, "but I wish, Mrs. Hopkins, another room prepared immediately; one of the smaller ones will do," and Mrs. Linchmore passed on. Amy followed; while nurse shrugged her shoulders, shook her head, and muttered, "Another man! Humph! I don't like so many of 'em roaming about the place; it ain't respectable."

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Mrs. Linchmore, on reaching the hall, was turning off to the library, when Edith and Fanny ran past, closely pursued by a young girl, who stopped suddenly on perceiving them, and, addressing Mrs. Linchmore, exclaimed,

"Pray do not look at me, Isabella, I know my toilette is in dreadful disorder. I have had such a run that I really feel quite warm."

"Your face is certainly rather flushed," replied Mrs. Linchmore, as she looked at the young girl's red face, occasioned as much by the cold wind outside, as by her run with the children.

"I know I'm looking a perfect fright," she added, vainly endeavouring to smooth the dishevelled hair under her hat.

"Your run has certainly not improved your personal appearance. Allow me, Miss Bennet, to introduce you to Miss Neville, whom I fear you will find a sorry companion in such wild games."

"I don't know that!" and she gazed earnestly at Amy. "A romp is excusable in this weather, it is so cold outside."

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"A greater reason why you should remain in the house, and employ your time more profitably;" so saying, Mrs. Linchmore walked away, leaving the two girls together.

"That is so like her," observed Miss Bennet, "she takes no pleasure in a little fun herself; consequently thinks it's wrong any one else should. Now, children, be off," she continued, looking round, but they were nowhere to be seen, having fled in dismay at the first sight of Mrs. Linchmore.

"Are you going out?" asked she, placing her hand on Amy's arm.

"Only for a short time."

"Then for that short time I will be your companion,—that is if you like."

Amy expressed her pleasure, and they were soon walking at a brisk pace round the shrubbery.

Julia Bennet had no pretensions to beauty, though not by any manner of means a plain girl. She had a very fair, almost transparent complexion, and small, fairy hands and feet. She was a good-natured, merry girl, one who seldom took any pains to disguise her faults or thoughts, and consequently was frequently in scrapes, from which she as often cleverly extricated herself. If she liked persons they soon found it out, or if she disliked them they did not long remain in ignorance of it; not that she made them acquainted with the fact point blank, but no trouble was taken to please; they were totally overlooked. Not being pretty, no envious belles were jealous of her, and young men were not obliged to pay her compliments. Nor, indeed, had she been pretty, would they have ventured to do what she most assuredly would have made them regret; yet she was a great favourite with most people, never wanted a partner at a ball, but would be sought out for a dance when many other girls with greater pretensions to beauty were neglected. She was a cousin of Mr. Linchmore's, the youngest of five sisters, only one of whom was married. Julia gazed over her shoulder at her companion's hat, dress, and shawl; nothing escaped her penetrating glance. She was rarely silent, but had always something to say, although not so inveterate a talker as her sister Anne. The latter, however, insisted that she was more so, and had resolutely transferred the name of "Magpie" or "Maggy," with which her elder sisters had nicknamed her, to Julia.

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"I have quite spoilt Isabella's temper for to-day," began Julia. "She will remember that romp, as



she calls it, for ages to come. I cannot help laughing either, when I think of the figure I must have been when I met her. Now confess, Miss Neville, did I not look a perfect fright?"

"You looked warm and tired, certainly,"

"Warm and tired! Now do not speak in that measured way, so exactly like Isabella, when I was as red as this," and she pointed to the scarlet feather in her hat, "and as for tired, I was panting for breath like that dreadful old pet dog of hers. Well, I am glad I have made you laugh; but do not, please, Miss Neville, if we are to be friends, speak so like Isabella again. I hate it, and that's the truth."

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"I will not, if I know it, but will say yes or no, if you like it best, and wish it."

"And I do wish it, and that was not said a bit like Isabella, so I will forgive you, and we will make up and be friends, as the children say," and she gave her hand to Amy. "And now tell me, Miss Neville, by way of changing the subject, where, when, and how you became acquainted with my cousin."

"I am governess to her children," replied Amy, quietly.

Julia stopped suddenly, and looked at her in surprise.

"And are you really the governess of whom Edith and Fanny have talked to me so much? Why, you cannot be much older than I."

"Do you not consider yourself old enough to be a governess?"

"Well, yes, of course I do; but you are so different to what I always pictured to myself a governess ought to be. They should be ugly, cross old maids, odious creatures, in fact I know mine was."

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"Why so?" asked Amy.

"Oh, she did a hundred disagreeable things. All people have manias for something, so there is, perhaps, nothing surprising in her being fond of *bags*. She had bags for everything; for her boots and shoes, thimble and scissors, brushes and combs, thread, buttons,—even to her india-rubber. A small piece of coloured calico made me literally sick, for it was sure to be converted into a bag, and a broken needle into a pin, with a piece of sealing-wax as the head."

"She was not wasteful," said Amy, who could not forbear laughing at the picture drawn.

"Wasteful! Truly not. It was 'waste not, want not,' with her; she had it printed and pasted on a board, and hung up in the school-room, and well she acted up to the motto."

"But I dare say she did you some good, notwithstanding her peculiarities."

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"Well! 'the proof of the pudding is in the eating,' another of her wise sayings; and it is early days to ask you what you think of me, so I shall wait until we are better acquainted, which I hope will be soon. How glad I was to get rid of her! I actually pulled down one of the bells in ringing her out of the house, and would have had a large bonfire of all the backboards and stocks, if I had dared. I could not bear her, but I am sure I shall like you, and we will be friends, shall we not? do not say no."

"Why should I? I will gladly have you as my friend."

"That is right; you will want one if Frances Strickland is coming: how she will hate you. She likes me, so she says, so there is something to console me for not being born a beauty; so proud and conceited as she is too, everything she says and does is for effect. Her brother is as silly as she is proud, and as fond of me as he is of his whiskers and moustaches."

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"I need not ask you if you like him."

"I shall certainly not break my heart if you are disposed to fall in love with him."

"Nay, your description has not prepossessed me in his favour. And who are the other guests?"

"I cannot tell you, for their name is legion, but you will be able to see them soon, and review them much better than I can," and Julia turned out of the shrubbery into one of the garden walks leading up to the house.

"Here is Anne," added she, in a tone of surprise, "all alone too, for a wonder. See!" and she pointed to a young girl seemingly intent on watching John the gardener, who was raking the gravel, and digging up a stray weed here and there.

"Look here, John," cried she, as they approached unperceived, "here is a weed you have overlooked. Give me the hoe, and let me dig it up. What fun it is!" added she, placing a tiny foot on the piece of iron, "I declare I would far rather do this than walk about all by myself. There! see! I have done it capitally; now I'll look for another, and just imagine they are men I am decapitating, and won't I go with a vengeance at some of them," and then turning she caught sight of Julia and Amy.

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"Well, Maggie," said she, "here I am talking to John, in default of a better specimen of mankind, and really he is not so bad. I declare he is far more amusing than Frank Smythe, and has more brains than half the men I have danced with lately, and that's not saying much for John," and she

pouted her lips with an air of disdain.

"This is my sister Anne, Miss Neville," said Julia, introducing them, "and so this," and she pointed to the hoe still in her sister's hand, "is your morning's amusement, Anne?"

"Yes," said she, carelessly, "I was thoroughly miserable at first, stalking about after John, and pretending to be amused with him, but all the time looking towards the house out of the corners of my eyes; I am sure they ache now," and she rubbed them, "but all to no purpose, not a vestige of a man have I seen, not even the coat tail of one of them. I was, as I say, miserable until I spied John's hoe, and then a bright thought struck me, and I have been acting upon it ever since, and should have cleared the walk by this time, if you had not interrupted me."

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"Pray go on," said Julia, "it is very cold standing talking here, and I have no doubt John is delighted to have such efficient aid."

"Now Mag, that is a little piece of jealousy on your part, because perhaps you have not been spending the morning so pleasantly. But there is the gong sounding for luncheon, come away," and she threw down the hoe; "let us go and tidy ourselves; I am sure you want it," and she pointed to her sister's hair; then went with a bounding, elastic step towards the house.

"Good-bye, Miss Neville; I must not increase my cousin's bad temper by being late. My sister Anne is a strange girl, but I think you will like her by-and-by, she is so thoroughly good natured."

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Amy watched Julia's light graceful figure as she went up the walk, then turned and retraced her steps round the Shrubbery.

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## CHAPTER VI.

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### "GOODY GREY."

"A poore widow, some deal stoop'n in age,  
Was whilom dwelling in a narwe cottage  
Beside a grove standing in a dale.  
This widow which I tell you of my Tale  
Since thilke day that she was last a wife  
In patience led a full simple life;  
For little was her cattle and her rent."

CHAUCER.

The country round Brampton was singularly beautiful and picturesque. A thick wood skirted the park on one side, and reached to the edge of the river that wound clearly, brightly, and silently through the valley beyond, and at length lost itself after many turnings behind a neighbouring hill, while hills and dales, meadows, rich pastures and fields were seen as far as the eye could reach, with here and there cottages scattered about, and lanes which in summer were scented with the fragrance of wild flowers growing beneath and in the hedges, their blossoms painting the sides with many colours, and were filled with groups of village children culling the tiny treasures, but now were cold and deserted.

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To the right, in a shady nook, stood the village church, quiet and solemn, its spire just overtopping some tall trees near, and its church-yard dotted with cypress, yew, and willow trees, waving over graves old and new.

Further on was the village of Brampton, containing some two or three hundred houses, many of them very quaint and old-fashioned, but nearly all neat and tidy, the gardens rivalling one another in the fragrance and luxuriance of their flowers.

In the wood to the left, and almost hidden among the trees, stood a small thatched cottage with a look of peculiar desolate chilliness; not a vestige of cultivation was to be seen near it, although the ground round about was carefully swept clear of dead leaves and stray sticks, so that an appearance of neatness though not of comfort reigned around. It seemed as if no friendly hand ever opened the windows, no step ever crossed the threshold of the door, or cheerful voice sounded from within. Its walls were perfectly bare, no jasmine, no sweet scented clematis, no wild rose ever invaded them; even the ivy had passed them by, and crept up a friendly oak tree.

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Within might generally be seen an old woman sitting and swaying herself backwards and forwards in a high-backed oak chair, and even appearing to keep time with the ticking of a large clock that stood on one side of the room, as ever and anon she sang the snatches of some old song, or turned to speak to a large parrot perched on a stand near: a strange inhabitant for such a cottage. Her face was very wrinkled and somewhat forbidding, from a frown or rather scowl that seemed habitual to it. Her hair was entirely grey, brushed up from the forehead and turned under an old fashioned mob cap, the band round the head being bound by a piece of broad black ribbon. A cheap cotton dress of a dark colour, and a little handkerchief pinned across the bosom completed her attire.

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The floor of the room was partly covered with carpet; the boards round being beautifully clean

and white. A small table stood in front of the fire-place, and a clothes' press on the opposite side of the clock, while on a peg behind the door hung a bonnet and grey cloak. The only ornaments in the room, if ornaments they could be called, were a feather fan on a shelf in one corner, and by its side a small, curiously-carved ivory box.

The owner of the cottage was the old woman just described. Little was known about her. The villagers called her "Goody Grey," probably on account of the faded grey cloak she invariably wore in winter, or the shawl of the same colour which formed part of her dress in summer. The cottage had been built by Mr. Linchmore's father, just before his death, and when completed, she came and took up her abode there; none knowing who she was or where she came from; although numberless were the villagers' conjectures as to who she could be; but their curiosity had never been satisfied; she kept entirely to herself, and baffled the wisest of them, until in time the curiosity as well as the interest she excited, gradually wore away, and they grew to regard her with superstitious awe; as one they would not vex or thwart for the world, believing she had the power of bringing down unmitigated evil on them and theirs; although they rarely said she exercised any such dark power. The children of the village were forbidden to wander in the wood, although "Goody Grey" had never been heard to say a harsh word to them, nor indeed any word at all, as she never noticed or spoke to them. The little creatures were not afraid of her, and seldom stopped their play on her approach as she went through the village, which was seldom. Unless spoken to, she rarely addressed a word to any one. Strangers passing through Brampton looked upon her—as indeed did the inmates at the Park—as a crazy, half-witted creature, and pitied and spoke to her as such, but she invariably gave sharp, angry replies, or else never answered at all, save by deepening if possible the frown on her brow.

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As she finished the last verse of her song, the parrot as if aware it had come to an end flapped his wings, and gave a shrill cry. "Hush!" said she, "Be still!"

Almost at the same instant, the distant rumble of wheels was heard passing along the high road which wound through a part of the wood near. She rose up, went to the window, and opened it, and leaning her head half out listened intently. Her height was about the middle stature, and her figure gaunt and upright.

She could see nothing: the road was not distinguishable, but the sound of the carriage wheels was plainly heard above the breeze sighing among the leafless trees. She listened with an angry almost savage expression on her face.

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"Aye, there they come!" she exclaimed, drawing herself up to her full height, "there they come! the beautiful, the rich, and the happy. Happy!" she laughed wildly, "how many will find happiness in that house? Woe to them! Woe! Woe! Woe!" and she waved her bony arms above her head, looking like some evil spirit, while, as if to add more horror to her words, the bird echoed her wild laugh.

"Ah, laugh!" she cried, "and so may you too, ye deluded ones, but only for awhile: by-and-by there will be weeping and mourning and woe, which, could ye but see as I see it, how loath would ye be to come here; but now ye are blindly running your necks into the noose," and again her half-crazed laugh rang through the cottage. "Woe to you!" she repeated, closing the window as she had opened it. "Woe to you! Woe! Woe!"

Ere long the excitement passed away, or her anger exhausted itself; and she gradually dropped her arms to her side and sank on a bench by the window; her head dropped on her bosom, and she might be said to have lost all consciousness but for the few unintelligible words she every now and again muttered to herself in low indistinct tones.

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Presently she rose again, opened the clothes-press, and took out some boiled rice and sopped bread, which she gave to the parrot.

"Eat!" said she in a low, subdued tone, very different to her former wild excited one, "Eat, take your fill, and keep quiet, for I'm going out; and if I leave you idle you're sure to get into mischief before I come back."

The bird, as she placed the rice in a small tin attached to his perch, took hold of her finger with his beak, and tried to perch himself upon her hand. She pushed him gently back and smoothed his feathers, "No, no," said she. "It's too cold for you outside, you would wish yourself at home again, although you do love me, and are the only living thing that does." And another dark expression flitted across her face.

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She put on the bonnet and grey cloak, and taking a thick staff in her hand, went out.

The air was cold and frosty. The snow of the day before had melted away, and the ground in consequence of the thaw and subsequent frost was very slippery; but she walked bravely and steadily on, with the help of her staff, scarcely ever making a false step. At the outskirts of the wood was a small gate leading on to a footpath which ran across the park, making a short cut from the valley to the village. Here she paused, and looked hastily about her.

Now Goody Grey had never been known or seen to enter the Park, yet she paused evidently undecided as to which path she should pursue, the long or the short one. At length she resolved upon taking the long one; and shaking her head she muttered, "No, no; may be I'll be in time the other way;" and on she went as steadily as before, on through the village and up by the church-yard; nor stayed, nor slackened her walk until she gained the large gates and lodge of

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Brampton Park; then she halted and gazed up the road.

Notwithstanding the time it had taken to come round, probably half an hour, yet the carriage she had heard approaching in the distance had only just reached the bottom of the hill, the road taking a long round after leaving the wood. It came on slowly, the coachman being evidently afraid to trust his horses over the slippery road. Slowly it approached, and eagerly was it scanned by the old woman at the gates. Presently it was quite close, and then came to a stand still, while the great lodge bell rang out; and Goody Grey advanced to the window, and looked in.

On one side sat two rather elderly ladies; on the other an effeminate looking young man and a girl. These were evidently not the people she expected to see, for a shade of vexation and disappointment crossed her face. After scanning the countenances of each, she fixed her eyes on the young girl with an angry, menacing look, difficult to define, which the latter bore for some moments without flinching; then turning her head away, she addressed one of the ladies sitting opposite her.

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"Have you no pence, Mamma? Pray do give this wretched being some, and let us get rid of her."

"I do not think I have, Frances, nor indeed if I had would I give her any. I make a point of never encouraging vagrants; she ought to be in the Union, the proper place for people of her stamp. I have no doubt she is an impostor, she looks like it, there are so many about now; we are overrun with them."

"Well, Mamma, if you won't give her any, pray desire Porter to drive on. What is he waiting for?"

"My dear, they have not opened the gates. There goes the bell again."

"Really, Alfred," said the girl, turning towards the young man at her side, "one would think you were dumb, to see you sitting there so indifferent. I wonder you have not more politeness towards Miss Tremlow if you have none for your mother and sister. Do not you see?" continued she, taking the paper he was reading from his hand and holding it so as to partly screen her face. "Do not you see what an annoyance this dreadful old woman is to us?"

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He yawned and stretched himself, giving at the same time a side glance at Goody Grey, as if it was too much trouble to turn his head. "Ha! yes. Can't say I admire her. What does she want?"

"Want! We want her sent away, but one might as well appeal to a post as you."

"I shall not exert my lungs in her behalf; but you are wrong as regards your polite comparison of 'post,'" and, putting down the window, he gave a few pence into the old woman's hand, intimating at the same time that he should be under the painful necessity of calling the porter;—and he pointed to the man at the gates—unless she moved away.

"Take my blessing," said she, in reply. "The blessing of an old woman—"

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"There, that will do. I do not want thanks."

"And I do not thank you," replied she, putting both hands on the window so as to prevent its being closed. "I don't thank you. I give you my blessing, which is better than thanks. But I have a word for you;" she pointed her finger at Frances Strickland, "and mark well my words, for they are sure to come to pass. Pride must have a fall. Evil wishes are seldom fulfilled. Beware! you are forewarned. And now, drive on!" she screamed to the coachman, striking at the same moment one of the horses with the end of her staff; it plunged and reared violently, the other horse became restive, and they set off at full speed up the avenue. Fortunately, the road was a gradual ascent to the house, for had there been nothing to check their mad career, some serious accident might have happened; as it was, one of the windows was broken against the branch of a tree, the carriage narrowly escaping an upset on a small mound of earth thrown up at the side of the road.

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The travellers were more or less alarmed. Miss Tremlow, who was seated opposite Alfred, seized hold of him, and frantically entreated him to save her, until he was thrown forward almost into her lap—"All of a heap," as that lady afterwards expressed herself—as the carriage swerved over against a tree, when she gradually released her hold, and sank back into a state of insensibility.

"I hope she is dead!" said Alfred, settling himself once more in his place by his sister, and rubbing his arm.

"Dead!" echoed his mother. "Who is dead?"

"Only that mad woman next you in the corner; there! let her alone, mother; don't, for Heaven's sake, bring her round again, whatever you do. I have had enough of her embraces to last me a precious long time."

The horses now slackened their speed, and were stopped by some of the Hall servants not far from the door.

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Mr. Linchmore was at the steps of the Terrace, and helped to lift out Miss Tremlow, who was carried into the house still insensible; while Mrs. Strickland, who had been screaming incessantly for the last five minutes, now talked as excitedly about an old witch in a grey cloak; while Frances walked into the house scarcely deigning a word, good, bad, or indifferent to any one—her pale face strangely belying her apparent coolness—leaving her brother to relate the history of their misadventure.

## AMY GOES FOR A WALK.

"Such is life then—changing ever,  
Shadows flit we day by day;  
Heedless of the fleeting seasons,  
Pass we to our destinies."

THOMAS COX.

All the visitors had now arrived at Brampton Park, and were amusing themselves as well as the inclement weather would allow of, the snow still covering the ground, and the cold so intense as to keep all the ladies within doors, with the exception of Julia Bennet, who went out every day, accompanied by the three children, as Amy's spare time was quite taken up with Miss Tremlow, who had continued since her fright too unwell to leave her room.

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Julia Bennet often paid a visit to the school-room in the morning, and sadly interrupted the studies by her incessant talking. Often did Amy declare she would not allow her to come in until two o'clock, when the lessons were generally ended for the afternoon's walk; but still, the next morning, there she was, her merry face peeping from behind the half-opened door, with a laughing, "I know I may come in; may I not?" and Amy never refused. How could she?

One morning, after getting her pupils ready for an earlier walk than usual, and giving them into Julia's charge—who vainly tried to persuade her to go with them—she bent her steps, as usual, to Miss Tremlow's room. On entering, she was surprised to see that lady sitting up in a large arm chair propped with cushions and looking very comfortable by the side of the warm fire. On enquiry, she learnt that Julia had been busy with the invalid all the morning, and had insisted on her getting out of bed.

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"I am so very glad to see you looking so much better, and really hope you will soon be able to go down stairs; it must be so dull for you being so much alone," began Amy, as she quietly took a seat near.

"Miss Bennet wished to persuade me to do so to-day; but I really did not feel equal to it, though I do not think she believed me; she has her own peculiar notions about most things, and especially about invalids; I dare say she means it all kindly, but I cannot help thinking her very odd and eccentric."

"She is a very kind-hearted girl, it is impossible not to help liking her."

"She is very different from you, my dear, in a sick room, very different."

And well might she say so. Amy was all gentleness, so quiet in her movements; there was something soft and amiable about her; you loved her you scarcely knew or asked yourself why. Julia was all roughness, bustling about, setting the room to rights—Miss Tremlow's,—whenever she entered it; talking and laughing the while, and endeavouring to persuade the unfortunate individual that it was not possible she could feel otherwise than ill, when she never exerted herself or tried to get better. Her too you loved, and loving her overlooked her faults; but she obliged you to love her, she did not gain a place in your heart at once as Amy did. Very different they were in temper and disposition; Julia hasty and passionate; Amy forbearing and rarely roused; but at times her father's proud, fiery spirit flashed forth, and then how beautiful she looked in her indignation.

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"I think I read to the end of the sixth chapter," said Amy, taking up a book and opening it; "for I foolishly forgot to put in a mark."

Amy read every day to Miss Tremlow, and thus whiled away many a weary hour that would have passed wearily for the invalid.

"You need not read to-day, my dear, you will tire yourself; so never mind where we were. I hope myself to be able to read soon."

[Pg 108]

"I shall not be in the least tired; I like reading. Shall I begin?"

Miss Tremlow fidgeted and moved restlessly among the cushions, and then said wearily—

"Do you know, my dear, I think it will be too much for me; I feel so tired with the exertion of getting up."

The book was instantly closed, Miss Tremlow feeling quite relieved when it was laid down.

"You are not vexed, Miss Neville, I hope. Your reading has been such a treat to me, when otherwise I should have been so dull and stupid."

"Indeed, no, it has been quite a pleasure to me; but you do look weary and tired. Shall I pour you out a glass of wine?"

"No, my dear, no; there is not the slightest occasion for it. And now let us talk of something else;

you shall tell me all about the visitors, so that they may not be quite strangers to me when we meet." [Pg 109]

"I have not seen any of them, except Mrs. Bennet and her daughters, and Mrs. Strickland and hers."

"But you go down of an evening, and surely there are other visitors."

"I always used to spend my evenings with Mrs. Linchmore; but within the last week I have remained upstairs, thinking I should be sent for if wanted, and as no enquiries have been made, I conclude my absence is not noticed; or if noticed I am only doing what is usual in such cases."

"Mrs. Linchmore is very foolish, and ought to have you down; you are too pretty and young to be allowed to mope upstairs by yourself. You may smile, but youth does not last for ever; it too soon fades away, and then you will become a useless, fidgetty old maid, like myself; no one to love or care for you, and all those who ought to love and take care of you wishing you dead, that they may quarrel for the little money you leave behind." [Pg 110]

"But I have very few distant relations, and those I have do not love or care for me."

"More reason why you should have a husband who would do both; but that will come soon enough, I have no doubt. In the meantime you seem very young to have the care of these three girls, the youngest a perfect torment, if I remember aright; so spoilt and humoured."

"I am nearly nineteen," replied Amy.

"Too young to be sent out into this cold world all alone; but your mother has, of course, advised you for the best."

"Yes, she gave me her advice; and love, and blessing, as well; the latter was highly prized, but the first I did not follow. She did not wish me to be a governess, but advised me strongly against it; still I cannot think I have done wrong," added Amy, answering the enquiring look Miss Tremlow bent on her. "Because—because—Oh! it would take too long a time to tell you all I think, and you are weary already." [Pg 111]

"Not so," and she took Amy's hand in hers. "I am interested in my kind young friend, so shall prove a good listener, though perhaps I am too tired to talk; so tell me your history, and all about yourself and those you love."

Yet Amy sat silent, so that Miss Tremlow, who watched her, was troubled, and added hastily, "never mind, my dear, I am sorry I asked you. It was foolish and thoughtless of me."

"No, indeed, Miss Tremlow; it is I who am foolish; mine is but the history of an every day life. There is little to tell, but what happens, or might happen, to anyone; still less to conceal."

And Amy drew her chair closer still, and with faltering voice began the history of her earlier years. A sad tale it was though she glanced but slightly at her father's extravagance; but to speak of her mother's patience, long suffering, and forbearance through it all, she wearied not, forgetting that as she did so her father's conduct stood out in all its worst light, so that when she had finished Miss Tremlow exclaimed hastily— [Pg 112]

"He must, nay, was a bold, bad man, not worthy of such a wife! It's a mercy he is dead, or worse might have happened."

"Do not say that, Miss Tremlow; my mother loved him so dearly."

"That is the very reason why I cannot excuse him; no woman would; but there now I have pained you again, and quite unintentionally; so please read to me, and then there will be no chance of my getting into another scrape, because I must hold my tongue, and I find that no very easy task now, I can assure you."

Amy silently took up the book she had previously laid down, but had scarcely read three pages when the door opened, and in walked Julia with a glass of jelly in her hand.

"I have been looking for you everywhere, Miss Tremlow," she said.

"Why did you not come here? Had you forgotten I was ill?"

"Certainly not, witness this glass of jelly; but your room was the last place in the world I thought of looking for you in, considering I made you promise you would rouse yourself, and go below." [Pg 113]

"I wish I could rouse myself," sighed Miss Tremlow, "but I am not equal to it, or to go down stairs amongst so many strangers."

"Not equal to it? All stuff! You never will feel equal to either that, or anything else, if you remain much longer shut up in this close room; you will make yourself really ill; and now please to drink this glass of wine, but first eat the jelly, and see how you feel after that."

"I will drink the wine my dear, but I could not touch the jelly. I do really think it is the fourth glass you have brought me to-day, and—no, I could not touch it."

"Well, you must take your choice between this, and some beef tea. Will you toss up, as the boys do, which it shall be?"

"No, no; I'll have nothing to do with the tossing. I suppose I must take the jelly," and she sighed as she contemplated it. [Pg 114]

"Yes, and eat it too, and hate me into the bargain; when I do it entirely for your good, because as long as you remain up here, and complain of weakness, you must be dosed, and treated as an invalid, and made to take strengthening things; so be thankful you have two such nurses as Miss Neville and myself; one to talk and recount your pains and aches to; and the other to insist upon rousing, and making you well, whether you will or no, by forcing you to take and eat what is good for you, and scolding you into the bargain when you require it, which is nearly every day. Now, I am sure you are better after the jelly?" continued she, taking the empty glass from her hand.

"It is of no use saying I am not," replied Miss Tremlow wearily.

"Not the slightest," said Julia, sitting down by Amy. "Why, you don't mean to say that Miss Neville has been reading to you?" and she took the book off Amy's lap, where it had lain forgotten. "After all my injunctions, and your promises." [Pg 115]

Miss Tremlow looked somewhat abashed.

"You really ought to be ashamed of yourself; as for Miss Neville, she looks fagged to death; for goodness sake go out and take a walk, and try and get a little colour into your cheeks, or there will be jelly and beef tea for you to-morrow," and Julia laughed merrily. "And now," she added, addressing Miss Tremlow, as Amy left the room, "Why did you allow her to read? Did I not tell you it was bad for her; and that, not being strong, the air of this close, hot room, is too much for her."

"Do not scold, or go on at such a rate, my dear; I really am not strong enough to bear it. I did refuse to hear the reading; but in the course of conversation I made an unfortunate remark, and she looked so pained, that to get out of the scrape I asked her to read; but she had scarcely opened the book when you entered."

"Never mind how long she read, you disobeyed orders; so as a punishment, I shall put you to bed; and then I will read the whole book to you if you like." [Pg 116]

Miss Tremlow was delighted; she really was beginning to feel sadly tired, and in no humour for Julia's chattering, so submitted without a murmur; fervently hoping Julia would not persevere in the reading, or that some one else in the house might be taken ill, and receive the half of Julia's attentions.

As Amy quitted Miss Tremlow's room, she almost fell over Fanny, who came bounding down the corridor, never heeding or looking where she went. Fanny never walked; her steps, like her spirits, were always elastic. Amy's lectures availed nothing in that respect. Her movements were never slow—never would be—everything she did was done hastily, and seldom well done; half a message would be forgotten, her lessons only imperfectly said, because never thoroughly learnt.

"Of course it is Fanny," said Amy, turning to help up the prostrate child. "Have you hurt yourself, and why will you always be in such a hurry?" [Pg 117]

"I was right, though, this time, Miss Neville," said the child, rising, "because Miss Bennet told me you were going out as soon as she came in, and Mamma wants you; so you see I am only just in time to catch you, because you are going out, you know."

"You would have plenty of time had you walked, instead of running in that mad way. I am not yet dressed for walking. Are you hurt, child?"

"Oh, no, Miss Neville, not a bit. I think I have torn my frock, though. Isn't it tiresome? Only look!"—and she held up one of the flounces, nearly half off the skirt.

"I do not see how you could expect it to be otherwise. It must be mended before you go to bed, Fanny."

"Yes, Miss Neville; I suppose it must. Oh, dear! my fingers are always sewing and mending. I wish Mamma would not have my dresses made with flounces." [Pg 118]

"You would still tear them, Fanny."

"Yes, I suppose I should; well, I have pinned it up as well as I can; and now shall we go to Mamma; she is in her room, and Mason is so busy there," said Fanny, forgetting all about her frock. "Do you know we are going to have such a grand dinner party to-night; mamma is to wear her pink silk dress, with black lace. I saw it on the bed; and such a lovely wreath beside it. How I do wish I was big enough to have one just like it!"

"And tear the flounce like this," replied Amy, laughing, and knocking at Mrs. Linchmore's door.

"Come in, Miss Neville; I am sorry to trouble you, but I heard from Fanny you were going out, and I wished to know if you would like to come down into the drawing-room this evening, after dinner, it is both Mr. Linchmore's wish and mine that you should do so; moreover, we shall be glad to see you. The children will come and you could come down with them, if you like." [Pg 119]

"Thank you, but if I am allowed a choice, I would far rather remain away. I am so unaccustomed to strangers; still if you wish it I—"

"No, you are to do just as you like in the matter, we shall be very glad to see you if you should alter your mind, and I hope you will. And now what news of Miss Tremlow? Is she really getting better, or still thinking of Goody Grey?"

"She sat up to-day for the first time, and is I think decidedly improving, but her nerves have been sadly shaken. Miss Bennet tried to persuade her to go downstairs to-day; but I really must say she had not strength for the exertion."

"I miss Julia sadly this dull weather, and I wish she would think of others besides Miss Tremlow; she devotes nearly the whole day to her."

"Is not her sister as merry and cheerful?"

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"Anne is all very well, but thinks only of pleasing herself, she never helps entertain; you will scarcely see her in Miss Tremlow's, or anybody else's sick room. And now if you are going out, I will not detain you any longer. Perhaps you will kindly look into the conservatory as you return, and bring me one or two flowers, and you, Fanny, can come with me," and taking Fanny's hand she left the room, as Amy went to put on her bonnet.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

[Pg 121]

### THE FLOWER.

"I saw the light that made the glossy leaves  
More glossy; the fair arm, the fairer cheek,  
Warmed by the eye intent on its pursuit;  
I saw the foot that, although half erect  
From its grey slipper, could not lift her up  
To what she wanted; I held down a branch  
And gathered her some blossoms."

LANDOR.

Amy went for a walk in the grounds; there being plenty of time before the evening closed in, as Julia had purposely returned early. A solitary walk is not much calculated to raise and cheer the spirits, and Amy's, though not naturally dull or sad, were anything but cheerful during her ramble. Miss Tremlow's questions had recalled sad scenes and memories which she had tried to forget; but some things are never forgotten; out of sight or laid aside for a time they may be, until some accident, or circumstance slight and trivial perhaps in itself, recalls them; and then there they are as vivid and fresh as ever, holding the same place and clinging round the heart with the same weight and tightness as ever; until again they fade away into the shade; crossed out, as a pen does a wrong word, yet the writing is there, though faintly and imperfectly visible, whatever pains we take to erase it.

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How Amy's thoughts wandered as she walked along over the frosty ground! Time was when she had been as gay as Julia, and as light-hearted; but she began to think those were by-gone days, such as would never come again, or if they did, she would no longer be the same as before, and therefore would not enjoy them as she once had. Then she sighed over the past, and tried to picture to herself the future; *tried*, because very mercifully the future of our lives, the foreseeing things that may happen, is denied us. What a dark future it appeared! To be all her life going over the self-same tasks, the same dull routine day by day; her pupils might dislike their lessons, but how much more distasteful they were to her. What a dull, dreary path lay before her! She passed into the conservatory as these thoughts filled her heart. It was getting dusk, and entering hastily, she gathered a few flowers, and was turning on her way out, when she was attracted by a beautiful white Camellia, ranged amongst a number of plants rather higher up than she could reach. She stretched her arm over those below—in vain, the flower was beyond her still. She made a second attempt, when an arm was suddenly passed across her, and it was severed from its stem by some one at her side.

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"It was a thousand pities to have gathered it," said a tall, gentlemanly-looking man; "but I saw you were determined to have it," and he picked up the flower, which had fallen, and held it for her acceptance.

"Thank you," said Amy, nervously. He had startled her; his help had been so unexpected. She told him so.

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"You did not perceive me? and yet I am by no means so small as to be easily overlooked. I wish I could be sometimes; but I regret I frightened you."

"Not exactly frightened; only, not seeing you or knowing you were there, it——" and Amy stopped short.

"Frightened you," said he, decidedly.

She did not contradict him. It was evident he did not intend she should, for he scarcely allowed her time to reply as he went on,



"There is another bud left on the same plant. Will you have it? I will gather it in a moment."

"Oh, no, by no means. Perhaps I ought not to have taken this; but John is not here to guide me; I am rather sorry I have it now."

"Never mind; it is I who am the culprit, not you. Will you have the other? Say the word, and it is yours. It is a pity to leave it neglected here, now its companion is gone," and he moved towards the flower.

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"Indeed I would rather not. One will be quite enough for Mrs. Linchmore, and, besides, I have so many flowers now."

"They are not for yourself, then? I could almost quarrel with you for culling them for anyone else."

"I never wear flowers," replied Amy, somewhat chillingly, with a slight touch of hauteur, as she moved away.

But he would not have it so, and claimed her attention again.

"Why do you pass over this sweet flower? just in your path, too; I do not know its name, I am so little of a gardener, but I am sure it would grace your bouquet; see what delicate white blossoms it has."

"Yes it is very pretty, but I have enough flowers, thank you."

"You will not surely refuse to accept it," and at the same moment he severed it from its stem.

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"Will you give me the Camellia in exchange?"

"No. I would rather not have it."

"It is a pity I gathered it," and he threw it on the ground, and made as though he would have crushed it with his foot.

"Do not do that," said Amy hastily; "give it to me, and I will place it with the other flowers in my bouquet."

"But those flowers are for some one else, not for yourself. You said so; and I gathered this for you. Will you not have it?"

"You have no right to offer it," replied Amy, determined not to be conciliated, "and I will only accept it on the terms I have said; if you will pull it to pieces I cannot help it."

"No. I have not the heart to kill it so soon; I will keep it for some other fair lady less obdurate," and he opened the door to allow of her passing out. "I suppose we are both going the same way," said he, overtaking her, notwithstanding she had hurried on.

"I am going home," replied Amy, now obliged to slacken her steps, and hardly knowing whether to feel angry or not.

[Pg 127]

"So am I; if by home you mean Brampton House. How cold it is! are you not very lightly clad for such inclement weather? The cold is intense."

"This shawl is warmer than it looks. We feel it cold just leaving the conservatory; it was so very warm there."

"True; but we shall soon get not only warm, but out of breath if we hurry on at this pace."

Amy smiled, and slackened her steps again. She felt she had been hurrying on very fast.

"I think I saw you the day the Stricklands arrived?"

Then as Amy looked at him enquiringly; he added, "you were coming up the long walk with the children and helped Miss Tremlow upstairs when she was able to leave the library."

"I did," replied Amy, "but you? I do not remember you in the least. Oh! yes I do, you were at the horses' heads. Yes, I remember quite well now; it was you who first ran forward as they came up at that headlong pace and stopped them. How stupid of me not to recollect you again."

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"Not at all. I scarcely expected you would."

"Yes, but I ought to have, because out of the number of men collected you were the only one who led the way; the only one it seemed to me who had any presence of mind; there were plenty who *followed*, but none who took the lead." Amy was quite eloquent and at home with him now, and he smiled to himself as she went on. "I had not patience with all those men, talking, screaming to one another, ordering here, calling there, none knowing what ought to be done, all talking at random as the horses dashed on, when suddenly you sprung from among them, the only one silent amongst all the noise; the horses were stopped; the carriage stood still; and the bystanders had nothing to do but cease talking, and follow the example you set them."

"Really you will make me out a hero; I only did a very simple action." Amy was silent, she was afraid she had said too much. "Do you know how Miss Tremlow is?" continued he; "poor lady, I fear she was seriously alarmed."

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"She was indeed, but is now getting better, and I hope will soon make her appearance

downstairs."

"I am not surprised she was frightened, my only wonder is the accident did not end more seriously. This Goody Grey, whoever she is, is greatly to blame; mad she undoubtedly must be, and I cannot understand Mr. Linchmore's allowing her to go at large."

"I believe she is quite harmless. I am going to see her some day; she lives in a cottage down in the wood yonder."

"This was no harmless action, it looks like malice prepense, unless indeed they excited her anger unintentionally."

"That is exactly what I have been thinking, and I intend finding out more about it when I see her." [Pg 130]

"I should be cautious how I went to see her; she may not be so harmless as you imagine. At all events do not go alone; I will accompany you with pleasure if you will allow me?"

"Thank you, I am not afraid. What harm could she do me? and as for her foretelling future events I simply do not believe it, and should pay little or no heed to anything she told, whether for good or ill," said Amy, laughing as they reached the Terrace, when, wishing him good-bye, she went in.

"I hope you have had a pleasant walk with Miss Neville, Mr. Vavasour," said Anne Bennet, coming up just behind as Amy disappeared, "Mr. Hall and I have been close to you nearly all the way home, but you were too busily engaged to perceive us."

"I hope you also have had a pleasant walk. Have you been far?" asked Mr. Vavasour, evading a direct answer.

"An awful distance!" answered her companion, evidently a clergyman, by the cut of his coat and white neck band. [Pg 131]

"You know nothing at all about it," exclaimed Anne, turning sharp round, "or I am sure you would not call it far; why we only went across the fields round by the church and so home again. I thought you said you enjoyed it extremely?"

"I am ready to take another this moment if you like. What say you? shall we make a start of it?"

"No, decidedly not, it is too dark; but I will hold you to your word to-morrow. I know of a lovely walk; only three or four hedges to scramble through, but that is a mere nothing, you know. The view when we do reach the hill is charming, you can form no idea of it until you have seen it," and laughing merrily at Mr. Hall's disconsolate look, Anne left him.

She peeped into the drawing-room; there was no one there but Mrs. Linchmore.

"What all alone! where's Julia?" asked she abruptly. [Pg 132]

"I fancy in her own room, or with Miss Tremlow; she was here a few minutes ago, and was enquiring for you. Have you had a pleasant walk?"

"Oh! very. Everybody asks me that question, or insinuates it, so that I shall begin to imagine I have been in Paradise; here comes my Adam," added she sarcastically, as Mr. Hall entered, "and really I can stand him no longer, the character of Eve is odious to me. I cannot play it out another moment, so leave it for you if you like to assume it."

Away went Anne, her anger or ill temper increasing as she went up the stairs. Flinging the door of their room wide open, and then closing it as sharply, she quite astonished Julia, who sat with her feet on the fender before the fire reading.

"She's a flirt, Mag!" exclaimed she, throwing her hat on the table, and flinging herself into an arm chair, close to her sister. "Yes, you need not look at me in that way; I say she's a flirt; I am certain of it!" [Pg 133]

Julia burst out laughing.

"You may laugh as much as you like, it will not annoy me. I shall hold to that opinion as long as I live, and you may deny it as much as you please; but I shall still say she's a flirt. Nothing will convince me to the contrary, and now I think I have exhausted my rage a little; I felt at fever heat when I came in," said she, putting her hair off her face.

"I cannot think what your rage is all about, Anne," said Julia. "Of course she is a flirt, no one ever asserts otherwise; it makes me laugh to hear you go on; when not a soul, and least of all I, would take the trouble of contradicting you."

"More shame to you then, that is all I can say, when you pretend to be so fond of her; I am sure I expected you to fly into a tremendous temper at my assertion of her being a flirt. If I had a friend I would stand up for her, no one should accuse her of sins in my presence." [Pg 134]

"I fond of her! well I think your walk has turned your head. I fond of Isabella, indeed! You must be mad, when I begged mamma to leave me at home, because I so much dislike her goings on."

"Isabella! who talked of Isabella? I am sure I did not; I said as plain as possible, Miss Neville."

"Miss Neville! she is no flirt, and never will be," said Julia decidedly.

"Ah! there it is, I knew you would say so, although only a minute ago you said no one would take the trouble of contradicting me."

"Neither shall I. You can hold a solitary opinion if you like."

"Stuff and nonsense about solitary opinions! I shall just convince you."

"You will never do that."

"How can you tell, seeing I have not tried? but only listen to my story, and I am certain you will be convinced."

"I am all attention," and Julia closed her book.

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"You must know then that after luncheon I asked Mr. Vavasour to chaperon me out walking, or rather I gave a hint he might go with me if he liked, and really I think it was the least he could do, considering Isabella being 'nowhere.' I had devoted myself to him all the morning, and positively went so far as to fetch the paper knife for him; when whom should I find awaiting me when I came down dressed for walking, but that dreadful Mr. Hall, his best hat and coat on. I felt just mad with vexation, and should have given him an answer that would have sent him flying; only I fortunately caught sight of that Vavasour's face at the window, watching our departure, with a smile at the corners of his mouth. I was in such a rage, but managed to wave him a smiling adieu, before I vented it out by walking my friend Hall through all the gaps in the hedges by way of finding short cuts; until he was in a thorough state of disgust and despair about his new coat, etc., and not anxious to take another walk in a hurry; when whom should I see in the distance, as we came home, but that wretch Vavasour and Miss Neville, laughing and talking together as thick as two peas. No wonder he would not go out with me, when he had a walk in perspective with her."

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"Do stop Anne, you have talked yourself quite out of breath; and have not convinced me either, for I still think you are wrong, and that most likely he met her accidentally in the grounds. I sent her out myself; she was very loath to go, so could not have promised to walk with anyone."

"Accidental fiddlestick. I am a woman, and do you suppose I do not know a woman's ways. They looked as if they had known one another for years; she must be a desperate flirt if they are only recently acquainted."

"Perhaps they have met before. Suppose you ask her, instead of condemning her unheard."

"What a goose you are, Julia! You will never make your way in the world. Ask, indeed! and be laughed at by both her and Mr. Vavasour for my pains. I have not patience with you, Mag."

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"I have not patience to listen to you; so I shall go on with my book, if you will let me."

"No, I will not, Mag! I feel desperately annoyed, and will talk, whether you like it or no, because if I do not, I shall feel in a rage all the evening, and I am determined Mr. Vavasour shall not see how he has disgusted me."

"I dare say he does not think about it. Had you asked him point blank, of course he would have walked with you; but most likely he never understood your hint."

"Upon my word, Julia, you are Job's comforter, and make me more vexed than ever. I feel inclined to do something desperate, and have half a mind to go down and torment that Mr. Hall afresh. I would if I thought I should find him in the drawing-room."

"Don't, Anne; stay where you are, and do try and leave that unfortunate Mr. Hall alone. I am sure you tease his very life out, poor man! I do not believe he is quite so stupid as he looks, and expect he will turn round upon you some day."

[Pg 138]

"I wish he would; there would be a little excitement in it; and as for teasing him, I am sure I do not care if I do. Men wear the very life out of us poor women."

"Not all of them, Anne."

"Yes, all of them; even Mr. Hall,—who is as simple as—as—I am sure I do not know anything half bad enough to compare him to—would tyrannise over a woman the moment he found out she loved him. Men are all alike in that respect. Even he has sense enough for that, or, rather, it is a man's nature, born in him, and he can no more get rid of it than he can fly."

"You will change your opinion some day, Anne."

"Never! If ever I fall in love, I shall make a fool of myself, as most women do, and be paid out the same; but my opinion will remain unaltered all the time I am allowing myself to be trodden on. But there, thank goodness, I am not in love, and not likely to be. My thralldom is far off, I hope. Besides, I am wiser than I was a few years back. 'A burnt child dreads the fire,' Mag. They will find it a hard task to entice me into mischief. I like to pay them out. No retaliation provokes me."

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"Not Mr. Vavasour's?" laughed Julia.

"Oh, Mag," said Anne, rising, "how tiresome you are! You will be an old maid, I prophesy, you are so prosy, and then we will both live together and enjoy ourselves."

"I do not look forward to any such lot," replied Julia. "I should be miserable."

"Then I will live by myself. No nephews or nieces, mind, to torment me. That would be anything but enjoyment. How slowly the time goes! I declare it is only five o'clock. Just call me when it is time to dress, will you?" and she walked across the room and threw herself on the bed, first throwing a large warm railway wrapper on the top.

"There," said she, drawing it over her. "I am perfectly comfortable, and intend forgetting that wretched Miss Neville and Vavasour in the arms of Somnus, so you can go on with your book, Mag." [Pg 140]

She remained perfectly still for a few moments, then sitting bolt upright, and throwing off the shawl, she exclaimed,—

"I have thought of a capital plan, Mag, of annoying that wretch, Vavasour. How glad I am I lay down; it might never have entered my head, sitting there by that cosy fire. Just watch his face, please, to-night, will you, towards the end of the evening? I say, Maggie, do you hear? or am I talking to a stone? Why don't you answer?"

"Yes, yes; I hear you, I thought you were asleep."

"Then do not think any such thing until you hear me snore; and now, good-night, or rather good-bye, until six o'clock. Just stir up the fire, it is awfully cold over here; do not forget we dine at seven, and I must have an hour to dress, as I intend making myself quite killing. And now for my bright idea again," and once more she drew the wrapper over her, and composed herself to sleep afresh. [Pg 141]

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## CHAPTER IX.

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### WHAT BECAME OF THE FLOWER.

"A true good man there was there of religion,  
Pious and poor, the parson of a town:  
But rich he was in holy thought and work;  
And thereto a right holy man; a clerk  
That Christ's pure gospel would sincerely preach,  
And his parishioners devoutly teach.  
Benign he was, and wondrous diligent,  
And in adversity full patient.

"Tho' holy in himself, and virtuous,  
He still to sinful men was mild and piteous;  
Not of reproach, imperious or malign;  
But in his teaching soothing and benign.  
To draw them on to heaven, by reason fair,  
And good example was his daily care.  
But were there one perverse and obstinate  
Were he of lofty or of low estate,  
Him would he sharply with reproof astound,  
A better priest is nowhere to be found."

CHAUCER.

Mrs. Linchmore was in the drawing-room, where she had been sitting ever since Anne went off so abruptly, leaving her with Mr. Vavasour and the curate.

The latter *was* awkward and ungainly; and we question much if he would have tyrannised over a wife: certainly not, unless some unforeseen event accidentally discovered to him that he might make a woman who loved also fear him, and jealous; this latter thought had never entered his head—perhaps it was to come. [Pg 143]

As Mrs. Linchmore and Robert Vavasour sat chatting and laughing, he remained perfectly silent; sitting firmly upright in the chair he had drawn close by, his long legs drawn up under him, trying in vain to find an easy position for his hands; and those long arms, which he never seemed to know what to do with, they certainly were too long for his body, just like two sails of a windmill. He looked, as he sat, decidedly like a man who could be thoroughly and completely henpecked—notwithstanding the sometimes stern look on his brow—by any woman possessing only half the amount of Anne Bennet's spirit; and she would not have been edified had she returned to the drawing-room as she threatened, and as no doubt Mr. Hall wished she would, for he looked thoroughly uncomfortable and out of place; evidently in the way of the two that sat there, who never addressed a single syllable to him, but left him totally unnoticed, he all the time wishing to join in the conversation, yet not knowing how to set about it. [Pg 144]

In the pulpit he was a different creature altogether. No longer the timid, awkward curate, but, to all intents and purposes, a straightforward, honest man, unswerving in exhorting to the right, unshrinking in pointing out the wrong. There, his long, ungainly legs hidden, his face lighted up, as he warmed with his subject, he became decidedly handsome; even taken at his worst, he could

never be called plain.

He was much liked in his parish, a small country village some few miles distant from Brampton; smiles and kindly words greeting him whenever he passed by the cottages; and such deep courtesies! A clergyman can generally tell by the latter the kind of estimation in which he is held by his parishioners. If liked, a deep courtesy and friendly voice speaks to him. If otherwise, a slight reverence and scarcely a good morrow is vouchsafed. Friendly voices always greeted Mr. Hall, even the children ran to the doors to make a courtesy, and glance half slyly at his pleasant, good humoured face.

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Whether he had fallen in love with Anne or no, was not quite certain; if he had, she took the most sure way of curing him, by laughing at him, and turning him into ridicule; not from ill nature, but simply because she had nothing better to do, and found the time hung heavy on her hands. Not an idea had she that he was pained by it, or indeed perceived it; but there she was wrong; he did see it, and inwardly vowed each time it happened should be the last; yet somehow or other he would be sure soon again to find himself either next her at table, or by her side out walking, or told off as her partner in a round game; and so his vow was broken, and would have been had he made twenty such.

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Strange it was, that being a clever, well-read man, his powers of conversation were so limited, but as long as those about him talked, he did not appear to think it necessary to exert himself to amuse others, so he passed as a dull, stupid, slow man.

Perhaps his silent, reserved habits had grown upon him imperceptibly, from living so much alone as he had done for the last five years, with only an elderly woman to look after his house, and act as housekeeper; and a boy to wait on him.

The conversation of the two near him had sunk almost to a whisper, it was so low; but they were mistaken if they suspected he was a listener. He was not; his thoughts were with Anne, wondering at the time she took in taking off her hat, and expecting every moment to see the door open.

What would he have said, had he known she was then sound asleep, with no thought for anyone in the whole world, least of all for him. Still his eyes kept wandering towards the door, and at length it did open, but it was Frances Strickland who came in and seated herself on a sofa just behind him.

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"You are doing nothing, Mr. Hall," said she presently, "so do come here, I want my skein of wool held."

Mr. Hall did not like the dictatorial manner in which this was said; still, having no excuse to offer, he advanced.

"Pray bring a chair and sit down. How can I wind it, with you towering above me in that way."

"I am tired of sitting," replied Mr. Hall, mildly resenting this speech, "so will stand if you will allow me."

"I should never have supposed you tired of sitting, after the hedges I saw you scrambling through with Anne Bennet."

Mr. Hall coughed uncomfortably. "I enjoyed my walk and am accustomed to the country. It would be well if all young ladies were as active as Miss Bennet."

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"Or as masculine, which?"

"The former, certainly. I see nothing of the latter about her," replied he rather decidedly.

"How strange! Everybody else does. I suppose you will not attempt to deny she is a very *fast* girl."

"I am not sufficiently acquainted with Miss Bennet to be able to form, or rather give an opinion as to her character; most young ladies of the present day are *fast*, and perhaps your friend is not an exception to the general rule."

"Pray do not call her my friend. I am unlike the generality of girls in that respect, and am hand and glove with no one."

"Do you mean you have no friend?"

"None, I am happy to say."

"I pity you, Miss Strickland," replied Mr. Hall.

"Reserve your commiseration," she said proudly, "for those who require it. I should dislike having a friend even as active and *fast* as Miss Bennet, who, according to your idea," said Frances sarcastically, "should have been born a grade lower in life; a housemaid for instance; no amount of hard work would have been too much for her."

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"She would have struggled bravely through it all, I make no doubt," replied he. "I have no mean opinion of Miss Anne's courage."

"Or have worked herself into a consumption, and so become a heroine, as she appears to be already in your estimation. Pray take care, Mr. Hall, you have let half a dozen threads drop off

your fingers. How excessively careless!"

"Yes. I do not understand holding it; excuse me," and he laid the tangled mass in her lap.

Was he as stupid as Anne pictured him; or would she, as Julia said, some day find out her mistake.

"What hopeless confusion, Miss Strickland," said Mr. Vavasour, advancing a step, as he passed by. "Is this your doing, Hall?" and he laughed, while Frances's eyes flashed with mortification and anger. [Pg 150]

"I am afraid so," replied he quietly. "The fact is Miss Strickland enlisted my services, without making the least enquiry as to my capabilities, hence this unfortunate failure. But I have resigned the post I have filled so badly; will you take my place and do better?"

"I am very sorry to refuse, but I have promised to have a game of billiards with Strickland, and the time's up," said he, looking at his watch. "Many thanks to you all the same, my dear fellow, for making me the offer of such a Penelope's web to unravel." And he passed on. Mr. Hall followed.

"Tiresome, abominable man!" exclaimed Frances, gathering up the wool apparently hopelessly entangled, and advancing towards the fire where still sat Mrs. Linchmore. "Is not that Mr. Hall too bad; just see what he has done—quite spoilt my skein."

"How was it managed?" asked Mrs. Linchmore carelessly. [Pg 151]

"I asked him to hold it; of course I ought to have known better, such a stupid creature as he is; his fingers are as awkward as his legs. I cannot think how it is you invite him here, unless it is to be in the way and make himself disagreeable; as in this instance."

"Disagreeable! You are the first person, Frances, I ever heard apply that epithet to Mr. Hall; no one ever thinks of him, and had you left him alone, it would not have happened."

"I know that; but I took compassion on him; you and Mr. Vavasour were so deeply engaged," she said maliciously; "you never gave him a thought, and because I did, this is my thanks. I shall be wiser for the future."

"As most people are. Learn wisdom, and yet commit foolish actions every day of their lives."

"Perhaps I shall be different from most people," and she commenced trying to disentangle the wool.

"A hopeless task," said Mrs. Linchmore, "only waste of time and temper; better let it alone, there are plenty of wools upstairs in my work basket; I have no doubt Mason will find you a match for this, if you ask her, you are most welcome to any I have," and she took up the book she had laid down, as a hint to Frances she wished the conversation to end. [Pg 152]

So at least Frances thought, and left her alone, after first putting away the wool in the sofa table drawer.

But Mrs. Linchmore did not read, she laid the book carelessly in her lap, and was soon, apparently, deep in thought, from which she was only aroused by her husband's entrance; drawing a half sigh at the interruption, she took up her book again, and gave no reply to his greeting.

"I am afraid I have disturbed you, Isabella; you were dozing, were you not? or very nearly so."

"Never mind. It is almost time to dress for dinner." She shut up the book, and was rising, when he said,

"Do not move yet, Isabella; I came here to seek you; wishing to have a few moments' conversation." [Pg 153]

She looked at him enquiringly

"I have been thinking it would be as well if you wrote and invited Mrs. Elrington to come and spend this Christmas with us."

"Mrs. Elrington!" cried she, in astonishment.

"Yes, I think it would be the right thing to do; nay, I am sure of it, and wonder it has never struck either of us before."

"It would be the last thing I should think of; as I am sure there is not the slightest use in asking her."

"Why not?"

"She would never come; but would send a refusal, perhaps not couched in very civil terms."

"I think you may be wrong. I hope so, at least. It is true she held aloof when we married, why, or wherefore, I never knew; and has continued estranged ever since; but surely her sending Miss Neville is a proof she might be conciliated; at all events, there can be no harm in attempting it." [Pg 154]

"She will never be conciliated, never! Besides, why should she be; you surely are not at all

anxious about it?"

"She brought you up, Isabella; was as a mother to you when you lost your own; surely you are in her debt for that, and owe her some kindness for all she bestowed on you."

"She has never taken the slightest notice of me during my ten years of married life; therefore, however deep my debt of gratitude, I consider it to have been cancelled after so much neglect and coldness."

"But recollect the kindness that went before. You owe her some gratitude and kindly feeling for that; however misjudging, or mistaken, she may be; at least, I think so."

"I cannot see it."

"I am sorry you do not, Isabella, and that I have failed in convincing you; little as I know of Mrs. Elrington," continued he, rather decidedly, "I cannot believe she, or indeed any woman, would bear malice so long, and not be anxious at some time during their life to make amends; it is unlike their nature; besides, she is no longer young, years are creeping on her slowly, but surely; depend upon it she will take the invitation kindly."

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"Never!" said his wife again; "she does not think herself in the wrong, and is so different from most women; she is sternness itself; and I hope, Robert, you will give up the idea of asking her."

"I cannot do that. You know, Isabella, I never speak, or express a wish, unless I have fully considered the question at stake. It is my wish you should write, and I cannot but think the reply will be different from what you seem to expect."

"Do not force me to write, Robert. It is disagreeable to me."

"Force you!" exclaimed he, in surprise. "Certainly not; but I wish it, Isabella, most decidedly."

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"How can I write, or what can I say? when she has never addressed a line to me for such a length of time, or taken the slightest notice of me whatever," said she half pettishly, half mournfully, very different from Mrs. Linchmore's usual haughty tone.

He looked half irresolute as he noticed it; her anger and coldness would only have made him more stern; but one symptom of softness melted him at once.

"Isabella, dear," and he came near, and took her hand, "I am sorry to have to ask you to do anything disagreeable, and what is evidently so painful to you; you will forgive me, dear one, will you not?"

But she looked up coldly in his face, and drawing away her hand, returned not the pressure of his; and his irresolution faded away while he said,

"You must not forget, Isabella, she opened a correspondence with you, after her long neglect and silence, and sent us Miss Neville; surely that was a sign her coldness was giving way."

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"She heard we wanted a governess through Mrs. Murchison. I never had a line from her on the subject; our correspondence was carried on entirely through a third person, from first to last."

"You forget the letter she wrote when Miss Neville came?"

"No; I remember that perfectly. A very cold, stiff letter, I thought it."

"A very cold one, certainly. Well, perhaps it would be better I should write; I will if you wish it; I am quite decided in my opinion that one of us ought to do so."

"No, no, by no means," replied Mrs. Linchmore, hurriedly. "I will do as you like about it; and write to-morrow morning, since you think I ought, and you wish it so much."

"Thank you, Isabella." He stooped down over her again, and kissed her forehead; but she received it coldly as before, her face half averted. "I fear," he added, "it will give you pain; but it is right."

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"Pain! He little knows or even guesses how much," said Mrs. Linchmore half aloud when he was gone, "or how much misery he has raked up during the one short half-hour he has been here. I wish he had never come; or rather never thought about the invitation."

With a sigh she arose slowly, and went to dress for dinner. To be gay and light, with a secret woe gnawing and tearing at her heart strings.

Seated at the glass, Mason brushing and plaiting her hair, the book still in her hand, apparently Mrs. Linchmore read, but it was not so; her thoughts wandered; several times she turned back the pages, and re-read what had gone before.

Presently Amy came in, bringing the flowers she had gathered.

"Come in, Miss Neville. What a lovely bouquet you have brought me. I hope you have changed your mind about coming down this evening, and that we are to have the pleasure of seeing you after all."

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"No indeed, Mrs. Linchmore, I have not. I should much prefer remaining away, unless, as I said before, you particularly wish me to go down."

"No, you must please yourself entirely, and do just as you like. But I think Mr. Linchmore will be disappointed if you do not. He wished it; as he said you must find it so especially dull all alone by yourself."

"I do not, I assure you; and have several letters to write to go by to-morrow's post. I am glad you like the flowers Mrs. Linchmore," and she laid them on the table with the Camellia.

"Thank you. How beautifully you have arranged them! But the Camellia, why not place it with the rest?"

"I thought you would wear it in your hair as you did the other evening. Is it not beautiful? so purely white."

"Mason has taken out this Italian spray," and she took up an elegant silver ornament of Maltese work, "but I do not intend wearing it, neither can I this lovely Camellia; kindly place it amongst the other flowers you have arranged so nicely," and she gave the bouquet into Amy's hand. [Pg 160]

"What a thousand pities, Ma'am!" said Mason. "It would look beautiful; far better than the ornament."

"Tastes differ," replied her mistress. "Thank you, Miss Neville, that will do very nicely; I thought, or rather feared, you would have to take the bouquet to pieces, but you have managed it admirably."

"I had not secured the flowers so very tightly, or perhaps the string had become loose."

"How tiresome the weather is, keeping so very cold; everyone seems out of temper with it, and must find Brampton especially dull. I am sure I scarcely know what to suggest as an amusement by way of novelty. Can you think of anything, Miss Neville? for I have exhausted all my ideas."

"I cannot imagine how any one can find it dull here," replied Amy, "so many to talk to, and so much to do." [Pg 161]

"Everyone is not so easily satisfied. I am quite weary of it, and think I must give a ball. That will afford a little excitement for some time to come, and please everybody except Mr. Hall; and he can go and look after his parishioners for that day."

Mason had now finished the last plait, and inquired what ornament her mistress intended wearing in her hair, as she must arrange it accordingly.

Mrs. Linchmore turned to Amy.

"Would you kindly bring the flowers on my work table yonder? and Mason wind the plaits round my head so as to hang rather low."

Amy crossed the room, and took the flower out of the tumbler. Could it be possible? She examined it closely. Yes, there was no mistaking it. It was the self-same spray Mr. Vavasour had gathered, and offered her an hour or two before; there were the delicate white blossoms he had so admired. A beautiful little flower, or rather spray, it was; but too small, too insignificant to be worn in that rich dark hair. [Pg 162]

An unconscious smile hovered on her lips as she returned and gave it to Mason, who turned up her eyes on beholding it. *That* miserable little piece of green and white to adorn the plaits she had arranged? It was not worthy of a place there, but Mason dared not say so; she merely ventured on the enquiry as to whether Miss Neville had brought the right flower.

"Certainly," was the reply. "Place it on the left side, and almost as low down as the hair itself."

But Mason was cross, and pinned it in badly, she would not understand Mrs. Linchmore's directions.

"What are you doing! Mason; I never knew you so awkward. How badly you have arranged it; not in the least as I like."

"Mrs. Linchmore wishes the spray to hang a little lower," suggested Amy.

"Perhaps, Miss Neville, you will very kindly pin it; as Mason seems to be so excessively stupid." [Pg 163]

"I never pinned in such a flower before Ma'am," replied Mason, shrugging her shoulders, while she made way for Amy to take her place, who soon arranged it to Mrs. Linchmore's satisfaction.

The dress was put on, its rich silk folds falling round her graceful figure. Her dark hair, almost throwing the black lace trimmings into the shade, wound round her small head in thick bands. Very beautiful she looked; and so Amy thought, as she stood gazing at her, while Mason fastened the bracelets round the fair white arms, and drew a shawl round the still fairer shoulders.

"You will find it cold, Ma'am, going down the corridor and stairs."

"I dare say. Good night, Miss Neville. I regret we are not to have the pleasure of seeing you," and with a proud, firm step, Mrs. Linchmore went out.

Would she have entered the drawing room so haughtily, had she known she was wearing a flower that had been offered; nay, gathered for her governess! The room was a blaze of light, as with a proud, yet graceful step, a slight, haughty movement, perceptible about the small beautiful head, [Pg 164]



Mrs. Linchmore bowed, and shook hands with her guests.

Even in that shake there was haughtiness. It was no cordial grasp of the hand, but a slight, very slight pressure, as the small taper fingers met yours, and they were withdrawn, while a smile just curled the corner of the lips, and she passed on; each tiny foot firmly, gracefully, yet proudly planted on the ground: the same mocking smile, the same haughty bend repeated, ere, gathering the rich silk dress in one hand, and dropping at the same moment the splendid Cashmere that had partially concealed her beautiful figure, she leant back, as if tired of the exertion, amongst the soft crimson cushions of the sofa.

"What a beautiful, cold-hearted creature she is," thought Robert Vavasour, as he watched her. [Pg 165]

"What airs she gives herself," muttered Sotto Voce, a rather pretty woman, and a neighbour, "coming in as if she were an Empress, after we have all been assembled here the last ten minutes! For my part, I wonder she condescends to come at all."

How fortunate it is opinions differ, as well as tastes; but I am not so sure this lady was singular in hers; certain I am, it would not have caused Mrs. Linchmore one moment's uneasiness; she did not care a straw what women thought of either her pride or her looks; she knew well that by far the greater number envied her, therefore she could afford to laugh at such speeches; but it was a rule with her—perhaps a studied one—not to make her appearance until nearly all her guests were assembled.

She was never, even when an invited guest, early, but always amongst the late comers; never actually unpunctual, but generally last, when she would walk in as she had done now, haughty and graceful, the perfection of ease in every slow and measured movement, totally unmindful of, or apparently careless and unconcerned at the glances of admiration or the many eyes bent on her as she passed. [Pg 166]

Few could have entered a room filled with company so calmly and gracefully, with the *lady* stamped in every step she took, every turn of the head, every bend of the swan-like throat, or easy, graceful figure: the pretty neighbour might have practised it for hours—nay, days, and failed. It was innate in Mrs. Linchmore: it was impossible to conceive her doing anything awkwardly, or out of place. Even now, as she leant amongst the soft cushions, she was grace itself; while a lady near, sat stiffly upright, looking most uncomfortable, though the self-same cushions were behind and around her, inviting to repose and ease.

"My flower is highly honoured," said Robert Vavasour, as he drew near, and partly leant over the back of the sofa. [Pg 167]

"Your flower!" exclaimed Mrs. Linchmore, with a well-acted glance of astonishment.

"It is scarcely worthy of a place amongst those rich dark braids," added he, softly.

"Ah, yes," replied she, raising her hand to her head, "I had quite forgotten all about it. It is a lovely spray."

"It would have looked better in the bouquet. Those braids require no addition to set them off."

"So Miss Neville said when she pinned it in. I am sorry she has done it awkwardly, and that it does not please you," said she carelessly, "It is too late to remedy the defect now."

"Defect," said he, rather hastily, "the word is unwisely chosen; it is impossible to find fault. The only defect, since you will it so, is the unworthiness of the flower itself."

"Do you condemn my poor bouquet also?"

"It is exquisite," he said, taking it from her hand, "and a great deal of taste displayed in its arrangement; the colours harmonize so well. The flowers are lovely." [Pg 168]

"I suppose they are lovely; everything that costs money is. I used to be just as well pleased once with the wild flowers growing in the hedges. Take care, Mr. Vavasour, you will crush my poor Camellia. See, it has fallen at your feet."

"Not for worlds!" replied he, stooping and raising it from the ground; "how loosely it was tied in; see, the stem is not broken, but has been cleverly fastened with a piece of thread. I may keep it, may I not?" asked he, as she stretched out her hand for it.

"It is not worth the keeping."

"Say not so, for I prize it highly. Is it to be mine?"

"Yes, if you wish it," replied Mrs. Linchmore, with a faint attempt at a smile, while the thought flashed across her mind that she wished she had thrown his flower away.

Then she rose and led the way in to dinner, anything but pleased with the result of her conversation either with Robert Vavasour or her husband, and it required a great effort on her part to fulfil her character of hostess for that evening; and many noticed how far more haughty she was than usual, and how absent and at random the answers she gave. [Pg 169]

"So I have the Camellia at last," thought Mr. Vavasour, "and Miss Neville pinned in the flower I gathered, which she refused to accept; well, strange things happen sometimes; I am certain she never foresaw this."

## CHAPTER X.

### A PASSING GLANCE.

"And what is life?—An hour glass on the run,  
A mist retreating from the morning sun,  
A busy, bustling, still-repeated dream,  
Its length?—A minute's pause, a moment's thought;  
And happiness?—A bubble on the stream,  
That, in the act of seizing, shrinks to naught.  
What is vain hope?—the puffing gale of morn,  
That robs each flow'ret of its gem,—and dies;  
A cobweb, hiding disappointment's thorn,  
Which stings more keenly through the thin disguise."

JOHN CLARE.

The eight o'clock train came whizzing and puffing into the Standale station; Standale was a large town about ten miles distant from Brampton, and the nearest railway station to the Park. Charles Linchmore had barely time to step on to the platform, ere it was off again and out of sight, puffing as hard and fast as ever.

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"Tom has sent me a horse?" questioned he of the porter.

"Yes, Sir. Waiting for you the last ten minutes, Sir."

Charles Linchmore passed out, and was soon wending his way along the road to Brampton Park. The moon had not yet risen, and owing to the slippery state of the roads, on account of the heavy fall of snow and recent frost, he rode on leisurely enough.

"Come along, Bob," said he to a shaggy Scotch terrier, who kept close to the hind legs of the horse; "come along, old fellow, I'd give you a run after your pent-up journey, only the roads are so confoundedly slippery, and her majesty is determined to hide herself behind the clouds to-night."

The dog wagged his tail as though he understood his master, and kept on as before. He was not much of a companion, but what with an occasional puff at his cigar, and talk to his dog, Charles Linchmore went on comfortably enough. As the smoke curled about his handsome mouth, his thoughts wandered. What were they doing at the Hall? Was Miss Neville still there, or absent as when he last paid his visit? and if there, had any of the numerous visitors found out what a nice girl she was?

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"Of course they think her pretty, of that there can be no doubt," thought he, "and I dare say she has found it out too by this time, and gives herself airs; unless such an example as my brother's wife before her eyes gives her timely warning, and she steers on another tack. There's no being up to the girls now-a-days; as to prying into their hearts it's impossible, and not to be imagined for a moment; they are growing too deep for us men, and beat us out-and-out in deceit and manœuvring."

"She has magnificent hair," thought he after a pause, "I suppose it's all her own—just the colour I like, though she has a ridiculous fashion of binding it up about her head. Perhaps she thinks it makes her look like a Madonna;" here he took a long puff at his cigar. "Well, I could not fall in love with a Madonna, it's not my style, and I do not think she is like one either; an angel's eyes don't flash like hers do sometimes. Perhaps Robert thinks his wife an angel, there is no accounting for tastes, but if Miss Neville has grown one iota like her, I'll—" here he paused again, "I'll have a flirtation with her, and—and then go back to my regiment."

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The idea made him savage, and throwing away his cigar, he halted until the groom who rode behind came up.

"You can ride on, home, Tom, I don't want you," said he, and then he listened to the clatter of the horse's hoofs on the hard frosty ground, until they faded away in the distance out of hearing.

"We are all selfish," mused he, "that man would have ridden more slowly and carefully had it been his own horse. I dare say though, I am just as selfish if I only knew it."

He lit another cigar, and rode on some miles without interruption, until stopped by the Brampton Turnpike Gate.

"Hulloa!" called he.

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But no notice was taken of his repeated shouts, although a faint gleam of light shone partly across the road from a slight crack in one of the shutters, showing that some of the inmates were at least awake.

"Confound the fellow!" muttered Charles as he called again.

When the door suddenly opened, and the figure of a man stood in the doorway.

"I tell yer I can undo it very well myself, and will too, so just stand fast," said he in a thick voice, to somebody inside the cottage, while and with anything but a steady gait he managed somehow between a shuffle and scramble to get over the one step of the cottage,—lifting his legs at the same time, as if the steps was so many feet, instead of inches high,—and reach the gate. Here, steadying himself by leaning both arms across the top, he looked up to where Charles Linchmore stood.

"I say young, man!" exclaimed he. "What do yer mean by hollering and bawling in that way? Havn't yer any patience. If ye're in sich a mortal hurry, why don't yer take and jump the gate? Eh!" [Pg 175]

"Open the gate, you blockhead, or I will make you," exclaimed Charles, angrily.

"Speak civil, can't yer? I ain't going to open the gate with them words for my pains."

Just then the moon emerged from behind a cloud, and shone full on Charles Linchmore's face. The man recognised him in a moment, notwithstanding his tipsy state.

"In course, Sir, I'll open, who says I shan't? Bless yer sir, I'll open it as wide as ever he'll go. Dang me! if I can though," muttered he, as he fumbled at the fastening.

"Bring a lanthorn, Jem, can't yer," called he, turning his face towards the cottage, the door of which still remained open. "Bring a light; yer was mighty anxious just now to come out when yer wasn't wanted, and now yer are, yer don't care to show yer face."

He had scarcely finished speaking when another man emerged from the cottage, a hand was placed on the lock, and with a clatter the gate swung back to the other side of the road. [Pg 176]

"I've half a mind to give you a sound horsewhipping," said Charles, passing through, followed by Bob, the latter venting his displeasure in a low suppressed growl, "but I hope your wife will save me the trouble, so I shall reserve it for some future opportunity."

"Thank yer Sir. She takes to it kindly she do, and don't want no 'swading."

"I hope she will give you an extra dose of it at all events," said Charles. "Is that you, Grant?" he added, addressing the other man. "It's scarcely safe for you to be out so late, is it?"

"You've heard all about the trial then, Sir?" questioned Grant.

"I read an account of it in the papers, and was sorry enough for poor Tom."

"Most everybody was Sir, and the parson gave us a fine discourse the Sunday after his funeral; but somehow preaching don't heal a broken heart, and Susan do take on awful at times; she haven't forgotten him, and it's my belief never will." [Pg 177]

"Poor thing! Her husband's was a sudden and sad death, shot down like a dog by the poachers. The gang are still prowling about, so they say."

"Yes, Sir, and will do more mischief yet, they're a bad, desperate set, the lot that's here this year."

"I suppose you are keeping this man company, or looking after him in his drunken state. You would scarcely be going home alone at this late hour of the evening?"

"No, Sir. I am going home. I've been up to the Hall, and stayed there longer than I ought."

"It is too late a great deal for you to be out, and the whole country round about swarming with poachers."

"True, Sir. But I shan't go before my time—"

"Nonsense!" interrupted Charles. "Come, I tell you what; I'll see you home, I have nothing better to do; but first get that man safely housed somewhere, do not leave him out here to be run over." [Pg 178]

"Oh! I'll soon settle him, sir."

And while Charles Linchmore struck a light and lit another cigar, Grant went once more into the cottage.

Opening a door, he called up the stairs, "Mrs. Marks! Here's your husband. I've brought him home rather unsteady on his pins; you'd better come down and see after him at once afore he gets into mischief."

"He is! Is he?" screamed a shrill voice from the top. "I expected as much. I warrant I'll soon make him steady again!"

With which satisfactory reply Grant rejoined Charles Linchmore, and they left the 'pikeman singing a drunken song, and vainly trying to shut the gate, the opening of which had previously so baffled his endeavours.

Turning off the high road, they struck into a side path or narrow lane, the tall hedges towering above them on either side, while here and there a tree loomed like a giant overhead. [Pg 179]

"So you have been gossiping up at the Hall, Grant?" began Charles, encouraging his companion to talk.

"Yes, Sir; and a sight of company there is there now; not a man or maid able or willing to talk to you; so it's not much in the way of a gossip I've had. No, sir, I went to see my daughter Mary, but she was busy with the young ladies, getting them ready for a big dinner. Such a sight of carriages in the yard, and the dogs barking like mad. You'd scarce know the place again, Sir. It's so changed."

"I'm glad of it. It used to be as dull as ditch water."

"Lord love ye, Sir! You won't find it dull or lonesome now. Why afore the frost set in, the roads were all alive with ladies and gentlemen riding over them. Matthew the Pikeman hadn't no time scarce to eat his victuals, let alone take a drop. So there's some excuse, Sir, for him getting muddled a bit now, and he didn't forsee the party up at the Hall to-night."

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"I see," replied Charles, smiling, "he was overworked, poor man, I've no doubt it is so."

"Well, as to that Sir, I can't say he's got much to worry himself about on that score. His wife says he's an idle dog; but then that's her way, she never says he's over-burthened with brains."

"A vixen, eh? It's a good thing all women don't resemble Mrs. Marks."

"Yes, Sir, it is. Which same is a comfort if you're thinking of taking a wife; I ask your pardon, Sir, for being so bold."

"I Grant! I take a wife! That is anything but a sensible speech of yours, and requires a great deal of thought."

"Well, Sir, I dare say when your time comes, you'll get one as'll suit you, as Mrs. Marks suits her husband, he'd be nothing without her, and though he brags and bullies about awful behind her back, he's like a tame cat afore her. To every word he gives, she lets fly more than a dozen. It's my belief she'd talk any man dumb in half an hour."

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"A pleasant life for Marks, upon my soul! I no longer wonder he frequents the public house."

"He don't go there often, Sir, don't think it. No, he most allays manages to go on the sly, and it ain't so easy to 'scape her eyes. Sometimes when he thinks she's safe at the wash-tub, he sneaks off; but he darn't for the life of him go on if he hears her voice calling out after him behind. Then he's forced to turn tail, and go back home with it 'tween his legs, with scarce even a growl. But it 'grees with him, he don't get so *very* thin; most others would be worn to skin and bone afore this. And now I'm in sight of the cottage, sir, so I needn't trouble you to come any further, and I'm much beholden to you, Sir, for coming so far."

But Charles Linchmore saw him safe to the door, then turned his horse's head once more towards the Hall.

This time he had not long to wait at the Turnpike Gate. It was swung open by a tall, bony, masculine looking woman,—apparently quite a match for the thin, spare Pikeman—who wished him good night in a loud, shrill voice.

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"Mrs. Marks," thought Charles. "Her voice sounds hoarse, as though she had been pitching into that unfortunate husband of hers pretty considerably. I hope there's no second Mrs. M. to be had, or reserved for me, as Grant half hinted, in some snug corner."

As he entered the Lodge gate, he wondered if Miss Neville had joined the guests at dinner; who had taken her in, sat next her, and talked to her; and whether he should find her the centre of an admiring circle, or flirting in some "snuggery," or on the "causeuse," where he had had such a desperate flirtation with his cousin, Frances Strickland, only a year ago.

But he had scarcely taken half-a-dozen steps in the Hall, before he saw her standing at the further end, by the large roaring Christmas fire.

He crossed at once to where she was; holding out his hand cordially, forgetting in a moment all his savage thoughts and suspicions.

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"Good evening, Miss Neville. You have not forgotten an old friend?"

Amy gave him her hand, but not quite so eagerly as it was clasped in those strong fingers of his.

"The sight of the fire is quite cheering. I am half frozen with the cold," continued he, drawing nearer to it.

"It is a bleak drive from the station; and I always fancy colder on that road than any other."

"I rode it; and should have been warm enough if the frosty roads would have allowed of a gallop. I met Grant, the head Keeper, as I came along, and saw him home; it was too late for him to be out alone, and a price set on his head by those cowardly ruffians, the poachers."

"You heard about the fight then. What a sad affair it was from beginning to end. It has made us all nervous and fearful for Grant, as he gave the principal evidence against the unfortunate man who was hung; and they have vowed to be revenged on him; but Mr. Linchmore has doubled the number of Keepers nearly, so we hope that will intimidate them."

[Pg 184]

"I hope it may; and now suppose we talk about something more lively; the dinner for instance. How many people are here?"

"About thirty altogether. But they have all left the dining-room now some little time. You are late."

"I meant to be. I hate dinners," he said crossly, half inclined to be out of temper again, as of course she must be waiting for somebody out there; otherwise why all alone?

"Here Bob," said he aloud, "here's room for you, old fellow; come and warm your toes. He's no beauty, Miss Neville, is he?" and he glanced inquiringly in her face. "Would she think him a horror, as his Cousin Frances had done?"

"Decidedly not," replied Amy, "but I like dogs."

"I am glad of it. I am very fond of Bob, I believe he is the only creature who cares for me. By-the-by how is my sister's fat pet? Poor beast, what a specimen of a dog he is! Bob and he never got on well together." [Pg 185]

"He is as asthmatic as ever, and has not had a fit for an age. I cannot say what the sight of your dog may do, especially if he turns the right side of his face towards him."

"Yes. That eye is certainly rather so-so; and the lip uncomfortably short; but I am proud of those marks, and so is he; they are most honourable wounds, and show he has borne the brunt of many a battle without flinching."

While Amy and he both laughed, Frances Strickland came into the hall. She glanced at the two in surprise, and stood for a moment irresolute. Once she made as though she would have gone towards them, then turning, went swiftly into the music-room; came back as softly, and with another look re-entered the drawing-room.

Closing the door, her eyes wandered restlessly until they fixed their gaze on Mrs. Linchmore, who, seated on the music stool, was carelessly turning the pages of a book, while two or three young men seemed eagerly proffering their services, or selecting from among a number of songs the one she was to sing. [Pg 186]

An expression of disappointment flitted over Frances' face while going towards the piano. One of the gentlemen had just moved away to another part of the room. So laying down the music she held in her hand, she advanced towards the vacant seat, and had nearly secured it, when it was filled by another, just as Mrs. Linchmore began one of the airs from "Lurline."

Again that vexed, baffled look, with a dimly perceptible frown. As she turned away, Anne Bennet rose and seated herself by Julia.

"Look at Frances, Maggie," whispered she, "and tell me what you see in her face."

"What should I see?" laughed Julia, "but pride. I have never been able to find any other expression."

"Then you are a greater simpleton than I; and if I had the stick the fool gave to the king on his death bed, you should have it; for I see a great deal more." [Pg 187]

"Wise sister Anne. What do you see?"

"An angry, spiteful, vexed look; as if she had seen a ghost in the music-room, where I know she went just now."

"Nonsense! Even if she had it would not frighten her, she would think it had only made its appearance to fall down and worship her; and would spurn it with her foot."

"I am certain she saw something out there, and I am determined to see what it was."

"Of course," said Julia demurely, "and here comes Mr. Hall to help you."

"Always coming when he is not wanted," exclaimed Anne crossly. "I shall not say a word to him; or if I do, I will be abominably rude."

Quite unconscious of what was awaiting him Mr. Hall advanced, and said good humouredly,

"I have been thinking Miss Anne, where we shall go to-morrow for the walk you have so kindly threatened me with." [Pg 188]

"It will most likely pour in torrents," replied she.

"I do not anticipate it, the glass is rising, so there is every prospect of our walk coming off; and if I might be allowed to choose, I know of a very lovely one, even in winter time."

"That is impossible," said she sharply, "everything looks cold and bleak."

"Not while the snow remains in the branches of the trees; even then the Oak Glen can never look ugly; the large rocks prevent that."

"The Oak Glen! Oh, pray do not trouble yourself to take me there; I will lead you blind-fold." That will settle him, thought she.

But no, Mr. Hall was not to be defeated in that style, and went on again quite unconcernedly.

"You have sketched it, perhaps. It would make a lovely painting."

"I do not paint; that is to say only caricatures of people that make themselves ridiculous." That must finish him, thought she, as Julia gave her dress a slight pull. [Pg 189]

But Mr. Hall had not the slightest idea of leaving, and seemed as though he heard not; and quite out of temper Anne said;

"What are you pulling at my dress for, Julia? I think she has a secret to tell me Mr. Hall, so you really must go away."

"I dare say it will keep until to-morrow," replied the impenetrable Mr. Hall; "young ladies never have any very serious secrets."

"You are quite right, Mr. Hall," said Julia, "my secret will keep very well until to-morrow."

"What a wretch he is!" thought Anne, tapping her tiny foot impatiently on the ground; "Isabella will have finished that song soon, and then it will be too late. How tiresome I cannot get rid of him, when every moment is so precious."

"Mr. Hall," said she aloud, "If Julia's secret will keep, mine will not; and since you are determined to remain here, why you must be a sharer in it; there is no help for it."

"By all means," replied he, coolly, "I am all attention."

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"You will only hear part of it; but men are so curious, I dare say you will soon ferret out the rest. Can I trust you?"

"Of course. It is only the fair sex that are not to be trusted."

"I have no time to quarrel with you, or I would resent such a rude speech. Now will you attend, please. I am going to ask you to help me—that is if you will."

"Certainly I will. I am all attention."

"I am desirous of leaving the room without Miss Strickland's knowledge; can you help me to manage it?"

"Is that all? You shall see."

He went over to where Frances still stood by the piano; with huge, ungainly strides, as though a newly ploughed field was under his feet, instead of the soft velvet carpet.

"What an awkward bear he is!" said Anne to her sister, as she watched him; "I shall give him a hint to get drilled, or become a volunteer parson, he would be sure to shoot himself the very first time he handled a rifle; do only look at him Mag, he is like a large tub rolling along." [Pg 191]

"Do not abuse him Anne, see how quickly he has done what you wished; I am sure he deserves praise for that."

"I wish he always would do what I wish; and then I should not be tormented with him so often," replied Anne.

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## CHAPTER XI.

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### THE MEETING IN THE SCHOOL-ROOM.

Thus, when I felt the force of love,  
When all the passion fill'd my breast,—  
When, trembling, with the storm I strove,  
And pray'd, but vainly pray'd, for rest;  
'Twas tempest all, a dreadful strife  
For ease, for joy, for more than life:  
'Twas every hour to groan and sigh  
In grief, in fear, in jealousy.

CRABBE.

Frances did not look very well pleased when she saw Mr. Hall advancing; in fact turned away her head almost rudely, so that any very timid man would have taken the hint and retreated.

But Mr. Hall, however simple he looked, was not timid; he had a way of always carrying his point. That strong unflinching will of his would have subdued a much more formidable enemy than a proud, weak woman. I say weak, because when a woman gives way to or does not strive against any besetting sin, she lays herself open to attack, and is easily wounded when that most palpable fault is assailed. So it was with Frances. [Pg 193]

Her mother and Mrs. Bennet were sisters, the first had married a rich merchant, the other a

comparatively poor man, whose five daughters did not conduce to enrich him, however much they might his family fireside. Mrs. Linchmore's mother was an elder sister, she had died young leaving her only child to the care, as has been seen, of Mrs. Elrington. Frances and Mrs. Linchmore somewhat resembled one another. The same haughty look, and at times, scornful expression appeared in both, but with this difference, that the former could command hers at will almost, while the latter was either not so well versed in the art of concealment or scorned to use means to prevent its being visible.

They were both rich. Riches do not of necessity bring pride, although they in a great measure foster and increase it. They make the seeds bear fruit which otherwise would remain dormant for ever, and Frances being an only daughter had been early taught to believe she was a magnet, towards which all hearts would turn, and that wealth was necessary to happiness, while her cousins the Bennets were quoted as examples of poverty, until she thoroughly learnt to despise and pity them, believing in her ignorance that they and all must envy her and her parents wealth.

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Mr. Hall, in her ideas, was a poor simpleton almost beneath her regard, and she would have taken no notice of him had it not been for his admiration of Anne. She could not bear another should receive worship while she was present. He was simply a being to be made useful, as in the instance of the skein of wool; though that little episode had in some slight measure induced her to think he was not quite such a Simon Pure as he looked, and although Mr. Hall on this occasion really exerted himself to be agreeable, the tangled mass lying in the sofa table drawer, was too recent an injury to be easily forgotten; and he only received monosyllables in reply to his remarks.

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But he was not to be defeated. Anne had asked him to help her, and help her he would; so notwithstanding Frances' ungraciousness he talked on, and so engrossed her attention that he soon had the satisfaction of watching Anne's unobserved escape from the room, and of thinking that perhaps she would like him a little better for his clever management.

Alas! Anne had far too much curiosity to think of anything but gratifying that. Until that had been satisfied not a thought had she for anything else. Her inquisitiveness was as great almost as Frances' pride. There never was a plot concocted at home, or a pleasure planned as a surprise for her, but she had found out all about it before it was in a fair way of completion. Her sisters were constantly foreboding scrapes and troubles for her, but nothing as in this instance daunted her. She would not be baffled. She guessed from Frances' face that something had annoyed her; that trouble was in consequence in store for some one, and she was resolved to find out what that something was.

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As she stood outside in the hall, she saw at a glance Frances' ghosts, and ever impulsive, was beside them in a moment.

"Good evening, Charles. There are at least a dozen cousins in there," and she pointed in the direction of the drawing-room, "waiting to say the same to you."

"Then let them wait, until I have warned and nerved myself to encounter such an immense array of females."

"Most men would have been roasted in less time; but you have had very pleasant company," and she glanced at Amy, "to perform your deed of martyrdom in."

"I had a cold ride," replied he drily, "and only arrived a short time ago from the Brampton Station."

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"In these fast days even the clocks are somehow in the fashion, and go faster than they did formerly. I remember when I used to think half-an-hour an awful long time to wait for anybody, and I suspect Mrs. Linchmore's patience is fast evaporating."

"Nonsense! How should she know I have arrived?"

"Because all ill news travels fast."

"Do not be surprised, Miss Neville," said Charles, apologetically, "at any thing you hear fall from Miss Bennet's lips, she is—," he hesitated a moment, "rather peculiar."

Anne's laugh rang loud and clear through the hall; then coming close beside him, and standing on tiptoe, she whispered a few words in his ear, evidently by the sudden start he gave and the quick flush that succeeded it, something that annoyed him; for while Anne still laughed he wished Miss Neville good-night, and, whistling to his dog, went away upstairs.

Then Anne no longer laughed, but with a sigh turned suddenly to Miss Neville, and as she did so caught sight of Mr. Hall's face at the half-open drawing-room door.

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"Is it possible!" exclaimed she, "that I caught sight of Mr. Hall's ugly phiz peeping through the door?"

"Yes; he was there not long ago; at least I saw him when you were whispering to Mr. Linchmore."

"Upon my word, I am losing all patience with that man. How I do wish Charles had been a little more cousinly; how astonished he would have been, and what a lecture he would have read me. Keep a secret, indeed! Not he. Why he is a thousand times worse than I. Good-bye, Miss Neville, I am sorry to have interrupted your cosy chat, but I could not possibly help it; you will forgive me,

won't you."

Amy told her there was nothing to forgive. That she had promised the children she would take them upstairs, and was merely waiting for them.

"Then do not wait any longer," Anne said, "but take my advice, go to bed, and send Mary. You do not know Mrs. Linchmore as well as I do, *she is peculiar* in some things; and—now do not be angry—but I doubt if she would like your being here." And without waiting to see the effect of her speech, Anne went off. [Pg 199]

"You *cannot* keep a secret, Mr. Hall," said she, stumbling upon him as she entered the drawing-room. "I have tried you, and you are not to be trusted in the very slightest."

"You forget, Miss Anne, you did not trust me, otherwise—"

"You would not have peeped," she said, finishing the sentence.

"True. I should not."

"But a secret is no secret when it is entrusted to a multitude. If you have found out mine—which, mind, I doubt—do not divulge it."

Ten minutes later Mrs. Linchmore herself left the room with the children, and Anne again enlisted Mr. Hall's services, asking him to see if Miss Neville was in the Hall. "Do not trouble to come and tell me, I do not wish it; but just shake your head, or nod as the case may be, yes or no; I shall understand you." [Pg 200]

"I have found it all out, Mag," said she, crossing the room as Mr. Hall disappeared; and with no little pride Anne once more seated herself in the still vacant chair.

"I do not doubt you, Anne. Was it worth the trouble?"

"I should think so. There would have been a flame before now, the train was laid and the match all ready, but before it could be set fire to I dispersed it. So you see curiosity is not always a fault, but in some instances praiseworthy."

Julia laughed. "What reasoning," she said.

"It is sound, good reasoning though, Mag; and now do tell me if Mr. Hall is in the room?"

"Yes, and looking at you, Anne."

This should have satisfied her, and she should have given Mr. Hall the chance of making the promised signal; but no, she could not resist the pleasure of tormenting him a little, so went on talking to her sister and giving no heed. [Pg 201]

Presently, a few minutes later, she again asked, "What is Mr. Hall doing Mag? Has he left off looking in this direction?"

"No, he is still looking," replied Julia, laughing.

"Oh what a wretch; and how foolish he is. I suppose he will go on looking until everybody in the room sees him," and slowly raising her eyes she received the promised shake, and really felt happy at having extricated Amy out of some trouble, though she hardly knew what. She remained where she was for the rest of the evening, expecting every moment to see her cousin Charles come in at the opposite door, but he never made his appearance. Frances' eyes were also constantly wandering in the same direction; perhaps she too expected him, but he disappointed them both. They saw no more of him until the next morning at breakfast, when approaching Anne as she stood at the window inwardly abusing the unpromising state of the weather—it was snowing fast—he asked who had told her of his arrival the evening before. "I am determined to know," said he, "so you had better make a clean breast of it at once, and tell me who acted as I am inclined to think so spitefully." [Pg 202]

But Anne pretended not to understand him. He had been asleep and dreaming since. She had never even hinted that any one had been spiteful; it was a pure invention of his brain, and leaving him, she went to the table. There seeing Mr. Hall busy helping some cold fowl, she walked round and took a seat as far off from him as she possibly could. But what was her astonishment at seeing him, as she began cutting a piece of bread, deliberately walk round to where she was; and taking the knife from her hand, cut a slice which he put on her plate, and then seat himself beside her. She dared not look at her sister, knowing full well she was laughing, and that was sufficient to make her feel angry and indignant, so turning her face away, she vouchsafed him not one word, but listened to the conversation going on around. [Pg 203]

"I am very glad to see you, Charles," Mrs. Linchmore was saying. "How early you must have arrived. Did you sleep at Standale? I believe the place does boast of an hotel of some kind."

"No. I arrived last night, but having indulged in a cigar as I came along, with Bob for a companion,—two of your abominations—I had to divest myself of my travelling costume lest you should detect the first; see Bob safely housed for the second, and take a glass of brandy and water for the third; and by the time I had finished that, I thought the bed looked uncommonly comfortable, so just tried it to see if it was, and suppose I was right, for I only awoke about twenty minutes ago, and have had a scramble to get down in time."



"Three very poor excuses. I did hear a whisper that you were here, but could not believe it, as I thought you would of course come and make yourself agreeable to my visitors, if not to myself and your cousins," said Mrs. Linchmore, with a slight symptom of annoyance in her tone, "however, Bob, if he was your only companion was, I have no doubt more pleasant company. By what train did you arrive?"

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"By one of the late trains," replied he, catching a glimpse of Anne's face, the expression of which rather puzzled him, but he fancied it told him to be on his guard, so he added, "I was not in a fit state to be seen by any lady just from that dusty, smoky railway."

"I saw you," said Frances, quietly looking up, "but you were too busily engaged to perceive me."

"And—" Mr. Hall was on the point of adding "I—" and perhaps telling that he had seen Amy also; but before the latter word had escaped his lips Anne, turned round quickly and catching his arm whispered,

"My secret! Beware, beware!"

"Is that your secret?" asked Mr. Hall, "Remember I am still in ignorance; you only half trusted me. Pray forgive me."

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Anne felt astonished and abashed. A great tall man like Mr. Hall ask her pardon so humbly; she thought she should like him a little better from that time forth. So full of wonderment was she, that she failed to notice the quick triumphant glance Charles flashed at her across the table, on hearing Frances' words.

It did not snow incessantly; some days were fine enough, and what with hunting, riding, shooting and skating, they passed pleasantly for the visitors, notwithstanding Mrs. Linchmore's fears that they were finding Brampton Hall dull and stupid.

The ball had not as yet been talked of, except in the housekeeper's room, where of course Mason carried the news, to the no small vexation of Mrs. Hopkins, who thought the place quite gay enough as it was; and sighed for the good old times, when she could walk about without being obliged to drop a courtesy at every step she took, as she encountered some fair girl, or man with fierce moustaches and whiskers; these latter she regarded as so many birds of prey, waiting for some unfortunate victim to pounce down upon and bear away in their fierce talons.

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Charles Linchmore did not apparently care much for any of the gay party assembled, and often loitered away half the morning in the library, where setting the door ajar, and seating himself so that he could catch a glimpse of any one passing, he lounged impatiently until the gong sounded for luncheon. Then throwing down his book, with a gesture half of weariness, half of vexation, he either remained where he was, and took no notice of the summons, or went into the dining-room with anything but a happy or contented expression of face; feeling uncomfortably out of sorts and out of temper with himself and the whole world, and in no mood for Frances' soft smiles—who, proud as she was, could and did unbend to him—or for Anne's sharp retorts.

What had become of Miss Neville? Where was she? Did she never go out? It was an unheard-of piece of eccentricity, remaining so long shut up in the house; besides it was bad for the children. Surely a cold walk was better than none at all? These and many other questions Charles asked himself, until he grew tired and out of patience, and tried to think of other things, but it was useless; his thoughts always came back to the one starting point, Miss Neville; she was evidently uppermost in his mind; although he stood a good chance, or seemed to do so, of returning to his regiment, without even the flirtation he had threatened her with as a punishment, if he should find her at all resembling his brother's wife, or spoilt with mixing amongst the small world at Brampton.

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Had he only wandered near the door leading out into the shrubbery from the flight of stairs in the wing appropriated to the children and Miss Neville, he would have seen her every day, and not wasted his mornings in vain wishes and surmises as to what had become of her.

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One cold, raw day after a gallop with his cousin Frances, and almost a renewal of his old flirtation—she was a fearless horsewoman, and he could never help admiring a woman who rode well—he walked round to the stables to have a look at the horses.

As he passed in sight of the school-room window, he could not resist the temptation of looking up, and saw Amy, whom a few minutes ago he had almost forgotten, standing by the window. Scarcely knowing whether she noticed him or not, he raised his hat. She bowed slightly ere she moved away out of his sight.

Was it his fancy, or did he really detect a mocking smile on her lips? Was it possible she was glorying in having deluded him so successfully ever since the night of his arrival? The idea aroused him at once; he would no longer be inactive. The chase was becoming exciting, since she would not leave the citadel, he would storm it.

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Instead of going to the stables, he turned back, and went to his own room, changed his thick, heavy riding boots, and then made for the school-room, passing Mrs. Linchmore's door on his way with a defiant, determined step; but he was uninterrupted in his journey; he met no one. He soon reached the corridor, stood before the school-room door and knocked. But the soft voice he had expected to hear in reply was silent.

Again he knocked. No reply still. He grew bolder, opened the door softly, and with Bob at his heels, walked in.

The room was tenantless. Amy and her pupils were nowhere.

So she had guessed his intention, perhaps seen him from the window turning back, and divining his motive, flown. He was angry, indignant, but his time was his own, he would wait where he was half the day; he would see her, she should not elude him thus.

Being in a bad temper, he vented it on unoffending Bob.

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"How dare you follow me here, Sir?" The poor animal looked up wistfully, not knowing in what he had offended, since his master patted his head so caressingly as they stood outside the door together.

On the table was a half finished drawing, the paper still damp with the last touches, the brushes all scattered about; one had fallen on the edge of the paper; Charles took it up, carefully washed out the mark it had left, and laid it by carefully.

Amy's work-box stood invitingly open. He looked in, and turned over the contents: there was a piece of embroidery; small holes that had been cut out and sewn over, the "*holy work*," as he called it, that he hated so much.

Somehow this small piece appeared to have a curious interest in his eyes, he looked at it, put it down and then looked at it again. There was the needle still in the half finished flower, and a small mark as though the finger had been injured in the sewing. This decided him, and with a half frightened, guilty look he put it in his pocket, just as Bob, evidently with the view of making friends, rubbed against his legs.

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"Ah! my friend," said Charles, looking down, "Your warning comes too late. The deed is done."

"What is too late?" asked Frances advancing into the room, "and what have you done?"

"You here," stammered Charles.

"Yes, why not? since Mr. Charles Linchmore designs to come."

"Then I came—, that is you forget," said he recovering himself, "I sometimes take my nieces for a walk."

"I forget nothing," replied she, "my memory serves me well."

"Why are you here?" asked he, "surely you can have no excuse for coming."

"It was chance directed my footsteps," replied she carelessly.

This was scarcely true. Ever since Frances had seen Amy talking with her cousin on the evening of his arrival, a strange fascination to speak with the governess had taken possession of her; why she hardly knew or questioned; but now at this moment, as she stood so unexpectedly face to face with Charles and marked his confusion, a jealous hatred crept slowly, yet surely over her heart, a jealousy that was to be the bane of her after life, to influence her every action, almost thought, and lead her to follow blindly all its revengeful promptings, undeterred either by the oft-times whispered voice of conscience, or the evident and consequent sufferings of others.

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What woman is not jealous of the one she fears is supplanting her, or obtaining an interest in the heart of him she loves? but here Frances had barely reason for her jealousy, Charles never having given her sufficient cause to think he cared for her, beyond a cousinly regard; yet she loved him as much as her proud heart was capable of loving.

"This drawing is beautifully done," said she, advancing and examining it closely. "What have you done with the copy?"

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The copy? What if she had named the "Holy Work?"

He cast a furtive glance at his pocket as he replied, "I have not seen it. I suppose Miss Neville draws without one."

"I have never heard Isabella say she was an artist."

"I suspect my 'brother's wife.'" This was a favourite term of Charles's; he generally spoke of Mrs. Linchmore as my 'brother's wife.' "I suspect my brother's wife knows very little about Miss Neville's accomplishments; she is not in her line; no two people could be more dissimilar."

"No. They are very different."

"Very."

"But you are wrong, Charles, in thinking Isabella does not trouble her head about her governess; she laughingly told me one day that she thought her rather inclined to flirt."

"Indeed!" said he, consciously. "When was that?"

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"I almost forget—last month I think, she noticed it, so you see she must know something about her."

"Or next to nothing," replied he.

"I believe she thought *that* her only fault; and you know it did not look very well to see her come home so late with Mr. Vavasour."

"With Vavasour! When was that."

"Oh! I forget when; just a few days before you came."

"Flirting with Vavasour!" exclaimed Charles, thrown off his guard by the suddenness of the announcement. "I won't believe it!"

"You had better ask Anne, then; she can tell you all about it, as she and Mr. Hall walked home behind them, and talked about it afterwards; it made quite a stir at the time."

"I dare say. I don't doubt you," said Charles, whistling apparently quite unconcerned, when in reality he was infinitely disgusted.

"Well, if you do, you have only to come to the window," said Frances triumphantly, "and judge for yourself." [Pg 215]

With quick, hasty footsteps he was by her side in a moment. Yes, there was Miss Neville, picking her way over the snow with Vavasour beside her, the children some few yards ahead, so that the two were alone. *He* had found out a way of meeting and joining her, though Charles had not; no doubt they had been carrying on this game for days, while he had been wasting his in hopeless guesses and surmises as to what had become of her, imagining her miserably dull, shut up in the school room.

Yes, the secret was out now. It was for him she had left the drawing so hastily, and all her things ruthlessly scattered about. For this he himself had waited so patiently, and had thought to wait half the day. He would have snatched the "Holy work" from his pocket and torn it into shreds if he could, but other eyes than Bob's were on him now, and without another word he strode away, passing through the door which separated these rooms from the large corridor, just as Amy's and the children's voices were heard on the stairs leading from the garden. [Pg 216]

Frances watched his exit with a triumphant look; had she given him a bad opinion of Amy Neville? and had he believed her?

She remained where she was, still and silent, until the door opened and Amy came in, her face lighted up with smiles, and her cheeks glowing with a faint tinge of colour from her walk. Frances' face flushed hotly as she thought how beautiful she was; and passing by her with a scornful bend of the head in acknowledgment of the governess's greeting, she gained her own room, and bolted the door.

There throwing herself on her knees, she clasped her hands over her face as she murmured passionately, "I hate her! But he shall not love her! He shall not love her!"

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## CHAPTER XII.

 [Pg 217]

### THE ACCIDENT.

"All shod with steel,  
We hissed along the polished ice, in games  
Confederate, imitative of the chace  
And woodland pleasures."

WORDSWORTH.

"I will forget her! All dear recollections  
Pressed in my heart, like flowers within a book,  
Shall be torn out, and scattered to the winds!  
I will forget her!"

LONGFELLOW.

Alfred Strickland had chosen the breakfast-room as being the least likely to be visited by any one after the morning's meal had been despatched, and had made himself tolerably comfortable before the fire in a large easy chair with a book, where he remained undisturbed by the rustling of dresses and crinolines.

No two people were more dissimilar than Alfred and his sister. Their features were as unlike as their tastes, disposition, and temper. Indolence, not pride, was his failing; he seldom troubled his head about any one but himself, not that he was selfishly inclined; he was not, excepting on this one point of laziness, but would help any one out of a difficulty so long as it cost him little or no trouble, but if that "loomed in the distance," then his aid was very reluctantly given; advice you were welcome to, and might have plenty of it; it required no bodily exertion to talk, he could lie down and do that; but what inward sighs and groans if his legs were put into requisition! [Pg 218]

Good-natured to a fault, his sister's taunts, and she gave him plenty of them—failed to rouse the lion within him, so he generally came off victorious in their pitched battles, and was just as friendly as ever the next time they met, whereas she would nurse her ill feeling for days.

He had been brought up to no profession. His father's hardly amassed wealth descended to him as only son, and perhaps the idea of having as much money at command as he could possibly want, first fostered his indolence and made him gradually sink into a state of quiet laziness which soon grew habitual, and from which as yet he had been roused but on one occasion.

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If the book he happened to be reading accidentally fell to the ground, there it might remain until some one by chance saw it, and placed it on the table again. He was good looking, somewhat of a fop, and had rather a good opinion of himself, as most men of the present day have; and was always dressed with scrupulous regard as to taste and fashion.

The one occasion on which he had been aroused was, when returning home one day by the river side in his dog-cart, he saw a boy struggling in the water, evidently for life.

In a moment the reins were on the horse's neck, he had plunged in and brought him safe to land; then had to walk about a mile in his wet things, his horse having taken fright at the cries of the boy's companions.

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Frances never believed this story, but always declared he had been thrown into the river by the jerk the horse gave when starting off.

Alfred Strickland was not the only one who had chosen the breakfast room as being the least likely to be interrupted by visitors. Julia had persuaded Miss Tremlow at last to come down stairs, and was even now advancing with the invalid on her arm to invade his fancied peace and quietness. As their voices sounded at the door, Alfred turned in dismay, and with no little disgust saw the two approach the fire near which he had made himself so comfortable, and as he thought secure from all invaders.

"We scarcely expected to find anyone here," Julia said, "but you will not interfere with my patient, being too lazy to move."

Alfred took the hint, and remained quiet, watching Julia as she first wheeled a chair nearer the fire, then placed some soft cushions, and a footstool and small table in readiness, all so nicely, and without the least exertion or trouble to the invalid, who seemed a mere puppet swayed about at the other's will; and he could not help thinking what a nice wife she would make.

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"I don't mind having a cushion too, Julia," said he, "if you have one to spare."

"A cushion, you lazy creature. I've half a mind to throw it at your head. The idea of my waiting on you!"

"Thank you," replied Alfred, inwardly thinking what a vile temper she had, and how foolish it was to form hasty opinions.

"You will be paid out some day," said Julia. "I shall live to see you a perfect martyr to your wife's whims and fancies."

"God forbid that I should ever be so foolish as to marry at all, much less an invalid wife—of all things the most detestable."

"Well I will ask Goody Grey next time I see her what she prophesies."

"My dear," exclaimed Miss Tremlow, "pray do not mention that name; it sets me all of a tremble. I have not forgotten that dreadful day, and how the horses ran when she struck them. Have you, Mr. Strickland?"

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"I? No indeed, I am not likely to forget it in a hurry, I shall be reminded of it for some time to come," and he rubbed his arm as though he still felt the grasp of her fingers.

"Let us talk of something else," said Julia; "this conversation is against orders, and strictly prohibited. I am going to fetch your port wine, Miss Tremlow, as I think you need it; now read your book, and do not think of anything else, least of all of that horrid old woman."

"She does it all out of kindness, I dare say," said Miss Tremlow as the door closed on Julia, "but I do so dislike being dosed."

"What an ungrateful being," said Alfred, "why, you ought to think yourself in luck at being so waited on. I wish I was."

"I wish you were, with all my heart."

"Here she comes," said Alfred, "armed to the teeth," as a few minutes after Julia returned with the wine in one hand and a shawl in the other.

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"And your tormentor following in my train," laughed Julia, "my sister Anne, most anxious to persuade you to join the skaters."

There was no resisting Anne, who had made up her mind to stay and torment him, unless he gave up his book and went; so with many a sigh of reluctance, he slowly rose and prepared to accompany her.

"Here is your hat and coat," said she. "I do not mind getting them as a kind of preparatory recompense for fixing our skates, which you will have to do presently. Good bye, Miss Tremlow, I am glad to see you down again; how cosy you look! just like a dormouse wrapped up in flannel."

"Here's Charles," said Alfred, as they stumbled upon him in the passage. "Will not he do as well; he is partial to all these kind of amusements."

No; Charles was going for a ride, his horse already waiting for him at the door; besides he was in no mood for joining a party of pleasure; he had felt in a restless, dissatisfied mood ever since the day he had detected Amy walking with Mr. Vavasour, and he had carried away the piece of embroidery and gone to his own room so angrily; and while Frances was sobbing passionately he had thrown it on the fire, and paced up and down with hasty impatience. [Pg 224]

Yet what right had he to be angry? He was not in love with her; no; he admired her, thought her different to most girls he had ever seen, inasmuch as she was no flirt; was agreeable, and did not give herself airs. It was her supposed flirtation with another that annoyed him. Had not his brother's wife given him black looks, smiling yet sharp hints about going into the school-room. What right had Vavasour to become acquainted with the governess? What right had he to walk and talk with her? perhaps visit her, where he had been forbidden to set foot, nay avoided.

Yet while he blamed and accused her, those soft, melancholy eyes pursued him, until in a softened mood he drew the work from the grate where it had lain scarcely singed, and locked it away in his desk. He could not return it, that was impossible; but he would never look at it, he would forget its existence, as well as Amy Neville's. [Pg 225]

But was it so easy to forget her? As he rode slowly away from the Hall door, down the long avenue—avoiding the short cut by the stables, which would of necessity lead him past the school-room window,—he still thought of her, otherwise why go down the avenue? unless he feared Miss Neville might think he wished to see or watch her; he who had ceased to take any interest in her movements.

What was it to him where she went or who she walked with? His horses and dog were all he cared for in the whole world, and were worth a dozen women, who only existed in excitement, or a whirlwind of gaiety and pleasure. There was no such thing as a pretty, quiet girl to be met with; a score of plain ones; but if pretty, then flirts, coquettes; beings whose sole delight was angling for hearts, gaining and then breaking them. [Pg 226]

But his was not to be lost in that way. The more he thought of Amy's supposed flirtation with Vavasour, the more bitter he grew. He was very sorry he had not joined the party on the ice. Why make himself miserable? It was not too late; he would ride round now, and if she were there, show her how little he cared for her.

He turned his horse's head, and cantered down the lane, nor slackened his speed until he came in sight of the lake, then dismounting and throwing the reins over his arm, he walked to a spot which commanded a view of almost the whole piece of water; but his eyes in vain sought Miss Neville, she was not amongst the skaters.

Many of the neighbouring gentry had come over to Brampton, and the lake presented a picturesque and lively scene. Conspicuous in the midst of the gay assemblage, on account of her tall and commanding figure, was Mrs. Linchmore, one hand rested on Mr. Vavasour's supporting arm, while seemingly with the utmost care and gentleness he guided her wavering and unsteady feet, as she glided over the slippery surface. [Pg 227]

Frances Strickland, with a small coquettish-looking hat, white ermine boa and muff, was describing circles, semicircles, and all the most difficult and intricate manœuvres known only to experienced skaters; now she approached so near as to make Mrs. Linchmore cling rather closer to the protecting arm of her companion, but just as a faint exclamation of alarm escaped her lips, with a smile Frances would take a sudden swerve to the right, and be almost at the other end of the lake before Vavasour had succeeded in quieting the fears of the haughty lady at his side.

It was strange, but Frances seemed to excel in everything. She was apparently as fearless a skater as horsewoman. Charles had seen her put her horse at a leap that even he, bold as he was, glanced at twice before following in her wake; yet she had never swerved, nay, scarcely moved in her saddle. [Pg 228]

Now he gazed after her until the small hat with its waving scarlet feather was scarcely distinguishable in the distance; yet fearless as she was, he could not allow there was anything at all masculine about her; no, the proud bend of the head, the small pliant figure forbade that, yet still he was not altogether satisfied; there was a something wanting, something that did not please him; and then involuntarily, his thoughts wandered towards Miss Neville again.

"She takes the shine out of us all, does not she?" asked Julia, who had advanced unperceived to his side. "Is that what you were so deep in thought about?"

"Not exactly. She does skate admirably, it is true; but I was thinking if Lawless, a friend of mine could but see her, he would lose his heart in no time. She is just the sort of woman he is always raving about." [Pg 229]

"Oh, ask him down by all means, and let him go mad if it pleases him, so long as we get rid of Frances."

"That speech savours of jealousy or rivalry. Which is it, Julia?"

"Neither the one nor the other."

"She is a girl many women would fear as a rival."

"Nonsense, Charles; she is so different to most women, so proud, and as cold as the ice she is skating on. If I were a man, I could not fall in love with Frances."

"Why not? She may be a little cold and proud perhaps, but that would only entail a little more trouble in winning her, and make her love the more valued when won."

"If she has any love to win. I doubt it; she is so utterly cold-hearted."

"I see nothing to find fault with on the score of coldness; few girls now-a-days—though not absolutely cold-hearted—have hearts worth the having, or wooing and winning." [Pg 230]

"How bitter you are against us."

"Not more so than you were yourself. Did you not call Frances a petrification?" said he, laughing. "But, if Frances does not please you, who, may I ask, comes nearer perfection in your eyes?"

"Oh! lots of women. She and Miss Neville, for instance, ought not to be named in the same breath together."

Then, as Charles made no reply, she added, "I wonder if she skates?"

"Skates! Pshaw! she would be afraid to trust that dainty foot of hers on the slippery ice. I hate a woman with no nerve, afraid of her own shadow."

"If being an accomplished skater is the only proof of a woman's nerve and courage, what a set of cowards more than half our sex must be! I very much doubt if one in a dozen of us are acquainted with the art." [Pg 231]

"Well, if not, you are well up in a dozen and one others wherewith to drive us poor men out of our seven senses at times."

"I know what is the matter with him now," thought Julia; "and why he is so cross, some girl he cares for has been paying him out. I hope it is not Frances. I cannot bear the idea of his having fallen in love with her, although I strongly suspected he was on the high road to it last night."

"Uncle Charles," said a small voice, while a tiny hand was laid on his arm, "I should so like to have a slide."

It was Fanny. Charles lifted his hat courteously but indifferently to Miss Neville's almost friendly greeting, and watched her furtively as she gazed over the lake.

What would she think of Vavasour's attentions to his brother's wife? Now she would find out that he could be as devoted to other women; could guide another's footsteps over the ice just as carefully as he had directed and picked her way for her over the snow; but whatever Amy thought she looked calm and unconcerned as she turned round and desired Fanny not to go so near the horse's feet. Charles assured her the horse was quiet enough; he had never known him indulge in the vicious propensity of kicking. [Pg 232]

"He might disappoint you this time," suggested Julia, "and prove treacherous, there is no certainty about it."

"He might, but he will not," was the reply, "not that I place such implicit reliance in him as I would in Bob; a look is enough for him."

"I would not trust either of them," said Julia, "I have seen Bob's teeth, and heard his growl; and as for the horse, why it was as much as you could do to mount him yesterday, when you went out with Frances. I heard Mr. Hall say he would not insure your life for a pound."

"My thanks to Hall for his kind consideration in valuing my neck at so cheap a rate. Just assure him the next time you see him that I have not the very remotest idea of having it broken yet." [Pg 233]

"He has not the very remotest idea of riding," laughed Julia; "only imagine those long legs of his dangling like ribbons on the side of a horse."

"Where is Hall? I do not see him among the skaters, though Anne is."

"No; he has gone over to see how they are getting on in that wretched little parish of his, and tried hard to persuade Anne and me to go with him, but my sister does not care for looking over churches, even if they were built in the time of Methuselah, and preferred the skating, much to his regret, and I must confess I was not at all sorry to do the same."

"Uncle Charles, do take me for a slide, please," pleaded Fanny, again undeterred by timid Edith, pulling at her sleeve and begging her not to go.

"I would take you with the greatest pleasure in life, Fanny; but what is to become of my horse?"

"Cousin Julia will hold him. Won't you, cousin?" asked the child, flying to her side. [Pg 234]

"I hold him?" exclaimed Julia. "No, thank you, Fanny, I value my life too well; besides, child, I

should be frightened."

"Miss Neville will, then, she is so fond of horses," cried Fanny, darting off to where her governess stood.

"A fruitless errand," muttered Charles, turning on his heels, "she has not a grain of courage. I wish she had."

But as if to shame him for this assertion, or to gratify his wish, when he looked up, there stood the governess.

"I shall be happy to hold your horse for you, Mr. Linchmore," she said, while Fanny clapped her hands and capered about with delight.

"You, Miss Neville!" he repeated incredulously. "Impossible!"

"And why not? he seems to stand very quietly. Is he inclined to be vicious?"

"Vicious! Far from it. But I am afraid—"

"I will hold him," interrupted Amy, decidedly, and without hesitation, "there is nothing to be afraid of." [Pg 235]

"Charles thinks," said Julia, maliciously, "you have not the nerve for it."

"I see no occasion for any display of nerve," replied Amy, while, with little show of opposition on his part, she took the reins from his almost unwilling hand, and before he had well recovered from his surprise, he found himself on the ice with Fanny's hand fast locked in his.

And where was Frances all this time? Had she forgotten her determination—her newly-born hatred of Amy? Had she thought better of her secret machinations? No. Time only increased her dislike; more deeply rooted her jealousy, while molehills became mountains in her eyes.

Should she see herself supplanted by a governess, one so inferior to her in wealth and station, one whom *he* had known but a few hours. A few hours? Was it possible so short a time could have overthrown the power she fancied she had held in his heart for years. Impossible! It could not be, and again that bitter cry arose in her heart, and she inwardly exclaimed: [Pg 236]

"He shall not love her!"

But Frances drove back the bitter feelings at her heart, and met him as he advanced on the ice with smiles and pleasant words, as though she knew not what sorrow or unhappiness was; but Charles, although he answered her courteously enough, was absent, and often gave random replies, wide of the mark.

Secretly angry, she was not baffled, and suddenly declared her intention of taking off her skates, she would then be better able to talk to Charles than flying round about him, and putting in a word here and there. She had had enough of the amusement for one morning, would Charles kindly come and help her? He was too polite to refuse, although it took him further away from the bank where Amy still held his horse. He gave one glance as he turned away—and yet another—the latter look betrayed him. Frances saw it, and a bitter remark rose to her lips, the only one she was guilty of that day; but it came angrily and vehemently; she could not help it, could not subdue it; she would have given worlds to have afterwards unsaid it. [Pg 237]

"Miss Neville makes a capital groom. I suppose she has been accustomed to that sort of thing."

"I never heard Miss Neville say an unkind word of any one," was the severe rejoinder.

"I shall hate myself for that false move," thought Frances. "I must try and hide my feelings better," and she raised her foot to his knee, but even while she did so, a scream from Julia made him spring to his feet.

But he was too late; his horse was plunging and rearing violently, while Amy's weak arm seemed barely sufficient to curb and control him, although she was trying her utmost to pacify and quiet him.

Charles took it all in at a glance.

"I shall love that girl in spite of myself," he said, as he sprang across the frozen surface to her side. [Pg 238]

How tenderly anxious he was, even his voice slightly trembled as he asked the question:

"Are you hurt?"

No, she was not. But her hand dropped helplessly to her side as he drew the reins from it.

"This is the wonderfully quiet horse," cried Julia. "I never saw such behaviour; astonishing in one of his meek temper, but of course this is the first time he has ever been guilty of such tricks."

"How did it happen?" asked Charles, of Amy.

"I scarcely know, it was all so sudden."

"But something must have frightened him?"

"Yes; I fancy the sound of a horse's feet galloping by excited him, and one of the hounds rushed to his side, and then he became almost beyond my control."

His sorrow was expressed on his face, and was more expressive than any words could be. His regrets—but before he could speak those, Amy had bowed, wished him good morning, and was gone. [Pg 239]

The sorrow faded away from his face; a vexed look succeeded. Why had she left him so hastily? Could she not have spared him a few moments wherein to express his regret. Was she angry? No, he could not think so, her temper appeared unruffled, and her face wore its usual soft and sweet expression.

As Frances advanced to his side he impatiently sprang on his horse and cantered off, but Frances thought as she stood listening to his horse's receding steps on the hard frosty ground, that ere long the canter sounded in her ears far more like a gallop.

Some twenty minutes later, as Amy was returning home through the lane, her attention was drawn towards a horseman going at headlong speed across the distant fields. The children wondered who it could be, but Amy never wondered at all; she knew well enough.

"It is your uncle," she said.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

[Pg 240]

### THE MYSTERIOUS LIGHT.

"Still further on she crept with trembling feet,  
With hope a friend, with fear a foe to meet;  
And there was something fearful in the sight  
And in the sound of what appear'd to-night;  
For now, of night and nervous terror bred,  
Arose a strong and superstitious dread;  
She heard strange noises, and the shapes she saw  
Of fancied beings bound her soul in awe."

CRABBE.

But few of the party returned home in the very best of spirits, or appeared to have enjoyed their afternoon's pleasure on the ice. Charles scarcely raised his eyes during dinner, or addressed a word to any one. Anne was infinitely disgusted at his inattention and dulness, having made up her mind during Mr. Hall's absence to thoroughly enjoy herself, being in no fear of a look from those earnest eyes of his, as she rattled away almost heedless of what fell from her lips, or hazarded trifling, thoughtless remarks. [Pg 241]

Frances' face, if possible, wore a more scornful expression than usual; she was inwardly chafing at her want of tact and judgment in giving way to temper, and allowing Charles to see that Amy was the cause of it. That thought vexed her proud spirit beyond measure, and although to all appearance she was calm and self-possessed, yet inwardly her heart trembled with angry passions, and her mind was filled with forebodings and dim shadowings of the future and what it would reveal to her.

Was it possible she could be supplanted by another, and that other no proud beauty like herself, but a governess! The thought was gall and wormwood to her. It was not only her pride that was touched. No; as I have said before, she loved her cousin with all the love of that proud, and to all appearance, cold heart. Should he not love her in return? Yes, he must. He should never be Amy's. Never! And she pressed her lips together and contracted the delicately-pencilled brows at the bare supposition. She would not believe—could not—that in so short a time his heart was another's. It was merely a liking, not love, and it must be her care to prevent the latter. [Pg 242]

What right had he in the school-room? What was he doing there when she entered so inopportunately?

Ah! she had never guessed that secret yet, or found out the theft of the "Holy work," or her heart would have been even sorer than it was, and her thoughts more bitter and revengeful towards Amy.

Frances had never been thwarted; all had as yet gone smoothly with her; the bare possibility of the one great object in life—her love—being unvalued only made her the more determined to succeed. She had no softness, no gentleness of nature; her love was fierce and strong—headlong in its course; like a torrent it swept along, and carried away all and everything that impeded its course. There was no calm, no sunshine, no breaking of the heavy clouds; all was storm—would be until the end might be gained, and then—even then, there was a question if the troubled, angry spirit would be quiet, or at rest, or ever satisfied. [Pg 243]

Charles did not re-enter the drawing room after dinner. "Gone for a smoke or prefers the company of Bob," was Alfred's ungracious rejoinder when his sister questioned him; so retiring to



an ottoman in a far-off corner, Frances wrapt herself up in her thoughts, or, as Anne remarked, made herself as disagreeable as she could by refusing to join in any one game or amusement proposed. After fruitless attempts to strike up a flirtation with somebody, Anne walked off to bed, thinking a quiet chat with her sister was preferable to the dullness below.

As she reached the first landing on her way up stairs, a gust of cold wind from the sudden opening of the hall door made her pause and look round; and presently Mr. Hall's voice reached her: very pleasant and cheery she thought it sounded, and she could not resist the temptation of peeping over, just to see how he looked after his cold ride.

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Yes, there he was, close by the fire, full in the light of the lamp, shaking himself like a large dog, his thick hair in a shocking tangled mass, but this was nothing unusual.

Anne smiled. "What a figure he is!" thought she, "such a great unwieldy creature!" and then half turned, as if to retrace her steps, but woman-like, fearful lest he should guess why she returned, magnanimously went on, but on reaching her own room, no Julia was there to unburden her vexations to, or talk herself into a more congenial mood with.

"She plays me this trick every night," said she, taking off her dress and throwing a shawl round her shoulders; then stirring up the fire into a blaze, she sat down and reviewed in her own mind the events of the day and the evening's dullness.

Some minutes slipped by; and then, whether she grew tired of being alone in that large room or vexed at her sister's prolonged absence she determined on going in quest of her.

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Springing up, away she went to Miss Tremlow's room, and receiving no reply to her repeated knocks for admission, cautiously opened the door and went in, expecting to find her sister.

Miss Tremlow was disrobed for the night, and had tied a large yellow handkerchief round her head, the only symptom of a cap being the huge border overshadowing her small thin face like a pall; while one or two curl-papers—Miss Tremlow wore her hair in ringlets—made themselves guiltily perceptible here and there. Anne burst out laughing.

"My goodness, Miss Tremlow! how extraordinary you look," exclaimed she. "Do you always dress yourself out in this style when you have a cold?"

"A cold, Miss Anne? I have no cold."

"Then why on earth have you decked yourself out with that handkerchief. Oh! I know, you are afraid of thieves, and think the sight will frighten them. Well, you are not far wrong there."

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"No such thing; I am subject to rheumatism, so take every precaution against it," replied Miss Tremlow stiffly, not exactly knowing whether to feel offended or not.

"Of course, quite right," replied Anne, not daring to raise her eyes until Miss Tremlow turned her back, and then the corner of the bright handkerchief stood out so oddly over the high-crowned cap, while a border almost as wide and stiffly starched as the front one drooped from under it, that the incentive to mirth was irresistible, and Anne laughed again.

"I cannot help it, indeed I cannot," said she, as the lady's now angry face met her gaze. "It is of no use looking so vexed, you should not make such a figure of yourself."

"You had better go to bed, Miss Anne," said Miss Tremlow sharply, opening the door.

And very submissively Anne went out of the room, but instead of going to bed, bent her steps towards the school-room, and there found the object of her search; her sister with Miss Neville.

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"Such a scrape as you have led me into, Mag," began she, still laughing, and drawing a chair near the two round the fire. "Of course I thought you were in that queer sick creature's room. What a fright she has made of herself with her head tied up in that yellow handkerchief, enough to make any one laugh."

"I hope, Anne, you did not," replied her sister.

"Then hope no such thing, for I laughed outright, and so would Miss Neville, I am sure. I defy even that sober Mr. Hall to have stood it," and again Anne laughed at the bare recollection. "It's all your fault, Mag, had you gone quietly to bed as you ought, I should never like the Caliph have roamed abroad in search of adventure."

"Why did you come up to bed so soon?" asked Julia.

"So soon! I am sure I never spent so dull an evening; I suppose people's hearts were frozen as well as their toes with coming in contact with the ice. As to Frances, she behaved abominably, and turned the cold-shoulder to everybody. If it is to be like this every evening, I would far rather have the 'short commons' of home than the dainty fare here."

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"For shame, Anne! What will Miss Neville think?"

"Think that I am in a bad temper, that's all. Isabella might have tried to amuse us a little; but no, she only thought of self, sitting so cosily flirting with Mr. Vavasour. How I do dislike that man! I am sure he is no good, and no one seems to know who he is. I do wish that handsome Captain Styles were here. Do you remember last year, what fun we used to have? We never had a dull evening then," and Anne sighed, and looked so comically sad that Julia and Amy both laughed.

"It is just as well he is not here," replied the former. "And as for Mr. Vavasour, everyone knows how intimate old Mr. Vavasour and Mr. Linchmore's father were." [Pg 249]

"Yes; but that gives no clue as to who young Mr. Vavasour is."

Who Vavasour's parents were had never transpired. All he himself knew was, that he had been left an orphan at an early age, and entrusted to Mr. Vavasour. The utmost care had been bestowed on his education; no pains, no money had been spared.

Mr. Vavasour was an eccentric, passionate old bachelor, fond and proud of his adopted son, or, as some supposed, his own son; but this latter was mere idle surmise. He was certainly treated and regarded by the servants and even friends as such; and yet they had not a shadow of proof that he was so.

It must not be imagined that Robert rested calmly, or made no attempts to obtain a clue to his history, and clear up the doubt under which his proud, impatient spirit chafed. He did. He battled and waged war at times against the other's will, when the weight became more intolerable than he could bear; but only to meet with stern rebuffs, and a will as determined as his own. In that one particular, the two resembled each other; not otherwise. In outward form they were unlike. [Pg 250]

It was after one of these battles, in which as usual Robert was vanquished, that wounded to the quick by the other's violence, and seeing the hopelessness of ever moving that iron will, Robert left the only home he had ever known, and went abroad.

After that nothing went right. The old man fretted, grew more and more exacting to those about him, and gave way more frequently to violent fits of rage. There was no Robert to act as mediator, or control and subdue him; and few were surprised to hear of his almost sudden death. He bequeathed not only his forgiveness but his wealth to Robert, who only returned in time to follow him to the grave.

He sought amongst the old man's papers for some document to throw a light on his birth. There was none. The only letter—if such it could be called—bearing at all on the subject was addressed to his lawyer, and ran thus— [Pg 251]

"This is to certify that Robert Vavasour is not my son, as some fools as well as wise men suppose. The secret of his birth was never made known to me. He was entrusted to my care as a helpless orphan, under a solemn promise that I would never reveal by whom. That promise I have faithfully kept, and will, with God's help, keep to the end; believing it can answer no good purpose to reveal it, but only entail much unhappiness and sorrow."

He was not the old man's son then. There was comfort in that, small as it was: perhaps after all there was no shame attached to him. It was too late to remedy now his disbelief of Mr. Vavasour's word, and the angry manner in which they had parted, but it pained and grieved him deeply; until now that he was dead, Robert had never thought how much he had loved the only friend he had ever known. [Pg 252]

Perhaps the person who had entrusted him to old Mr. Vavasour was still alive, perhaps even now watched over him. He thought it could not be his mother; she would not have left him so long without some token of her love. He would still hope that some day his birth might be no secret, but as clear as day: yet it weighed on his mind, and made him appear older than he was, and more reserved; and his manner at times was cold and distant, with no fancy for the light talk and every-day trifles passing around him.

No wonder Anne disliked him. Here was a something which checked her thoughtlessness far more decidedly than poor Mr. Hall's sober face. The one she had no fear of, while the other's sometimes sarcastic look annoyed and vexed her, and made her anxious to escape into a far corner away from him, whenever she saw that peculiar curl of the lip betokening so utter a contempt for what she was saying. No wonder she tried to prejudice Amy against him; her pride having been wounded ever since the day she thought he had neglected her so shamefully, and walked out with Miss Neville, leaving her to fare as best she could with Mr. Hall. [Pg 253]

Seeing Julia determined on taking his part, she turned to Amy.

"You do not like him, do you, Miss Neville? I am sure Charles is worth twenty such men as Mr. Vavasour."

"I know so little of either."

"Oh, nonsense! It is a very safe reply, no doubt, but it will not do. My cousin was here half the summer."

"Only a fortnight the first time he came; and the second visit he made, I was at Ashleigh, at home."

"Quite long enough for you to find out what a good-for-nothing, kind-hearted creature he is. Besides, for the fortnight you had the field all to yourself, and after that advantage ought not to allow another to bowl you out."

"How you do talk, Anne; I am sure Miss Neville does not understand one half you are saying, you go on at such a rate." [Pg 254]

"Of course I do; what is the use of sitting like this?" and she clasped her two hands together on

her lap and twirled her thumbs. "Do tell me what you two say to one another when I am not here, for if Mag comes every night, and I suppose she does not go to that sick-body's room, seeing she dresses herself up in a style enough to frighten half a dozen children, with the belief she is the veritable 'Bogy,' you surely do not sit like two Quakeresses, without a word, waiting for the spirit to move you. Positively, Miss Neville, I look upon Mag's coming here as an invasion of my rights, since I am left shivering in bed, and frightened to death for fear of ghosts. They do say the house is haunted; and once I nearly fainted when a coal dropped out of the fire into the fender. I really thought the ghost had come, and durst not emerge from under the bedcloths until I was pretty nearly smothered."

"You surely are not afraid of ghosts, Miss Bennet?"

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"Oh, but I am, though, ghosts, hobgoblins, thieves, and every other existing and non-existing horror; and if we are to talk of such things, I vote for the door being locked. Do stir the fire, and turn up the lamp. There, it does look rather less gloomy now. But how cold it is!"

"Cold?" said Julia, "I am as warm as a toast."

"No doubt of it Mag, so cosily as you are wrapped up in 'joint-stock property.' I wonder you are not ashamed to let me see you looking so comfortable, even your feet tucked up too. Would you believe it, Miss Neville, 'joint-stock property' is that dressing-gown, and belongs to both of us, hence its name, but Mag coolly walks off with it in this most shameful way every night."

"Perhaps she thinks you do not want it."

"I suppose she does; but having, as I say a share in it, I think I might be allowed to wear it sometimes."

"By all means, Anne. Why not?" said her sister.

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"Why not? You shall hear, Miss Neville, and judge whether I complain without reason. You must know Mag and I have an allowance, and we found out we could not get on without a dressing-gown; so, as we are neither of us doomed to gruel and hot water at the same time, we agreed to club together and have a joint property one, since which the number of colds Miss Julia has had is quite unaccountable and shocking. I declare to goodness the gown—look when I will—is never on the peg, but for ever round her shoulders; however, it certainly will be my turn next, for I never felt so frozen in all my life. There!" said she, sneezing, or pretending to do so, "what do you think of that signal? does it not portend stormy weather ahead? And now cease laughing, and let us go to bed, for I am awfully sleepy, and tired into the bargain; quite done up."

"And no wonder," said Julia. "Did you ever hear anyone talk as she does? She never knows when to stop."

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Amy thought she never had; but it was amusing and pleasant talk; there could be no dismals where Anne was. It was light talk, but still it was pleasant, and made everyone in a good mood, or at least cheerful.

"I shall see you early to-morrow, Miss Neville," said Julia. "I have so much to say to you."

"If you do not come to bed, Mag," said Anne, from the half-opened door, "I declare I will talk in my sleep to vex you."

Amy went with them as far as the baize door which separated this wing of the house from the other rooms, and then bid good-night to her visitors.

As the light from the candle Anne carried vanished, she was surprised at seeing a dim light glimmering through the key-hole of an unoccupied room opposite. It was but momentary, yet while it lasted it threw a long, thin, bright streak of light across the corridor, full against the wall close beside where she stood.

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In some surprise, she retraced her steps, and drew aside the window curtain of her room and tried to look out. But there was no moon; it was one of those dark, pitchy nights, with not a star visible, betokening either rain or another fall of snow.

Full of conjecture as to whether her eyes had deceived her or not, and feeling too timid to venture out again, Amy went to bed, and tried to imagine all manner of solutions as to the cause of the light, all of which she in turn rejected as utterly improbable. She had satisfied herself it was not the moon's rays; then what could it be?

She recalled to memory the day Nurse Hopkins showed her over the house. The picture gallery, with its secret stairs leading into some quaint old unused rooms, with their old worn-out hangings and antique furniture; ghostly-looking, and certainly dismal and solitary, in being so far removed from that part of the house now teeming with life and gaiety; yet Nurse apparently had no fear, but walked boldly on, and appeared in no hurry to emerge into the life beyond, as she talked of the former greatness of the Hall. To Amy, however, the feeling of utter loneliness, the dull, dead sound of the opening and shutting of doors, as they passed through, sent a chill to her heart. Even the jingling of the ponderous bunch of keys Nurse carried jarred against her nerves, so that perhaps her own shadow might have startled and alarmed her.

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But although Nurse, in a loud tone of voice, seemed never tired of recounting the by-gone grandeur, which had been handed down to her from the sayings of former housekeepers, yet her

voice had sunk into a whisper, as in passing by that door, she stopped and said, "No one ever goes in there. It was old Mrs. Linchmore's room," as if the simple fact of its having been old Mrs. Linchmore's room forbade further enquiry, and was in itself sufficient to check all idle curiosity.

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Amy passed by the door whenever she went into the long corridor. The room stood at one end, facing the entire length of the passage; but the door was at the side adjoining the door of another room, and opposite the baize door, so that Amy's dress almost brushed its panels in passing by, and never could she recollect having once seen the door standing open, or the signs of a housemaid's work near it.

Perhaps the room was held sacred by Mr. Linchmore as having been his mother's; perhaps he it was who was there now, although it did seem strange his going at such an hour, being past twelve o'clock by Anne's watch when they parted. Still, it might be his peculiar fancy to go, when secure from interruption and the remarks of others.

All people had strange fancies; perhaps this was his. And partly comforted and assured with the conclusion she had arrived at, and partly wearied with the effort, Amy fell asleep.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

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### MEMORIES OF THE PAST.

"And the hours of darkness and the days of gloom,  
That shadow and shut out joys are come;  
And there's a mist on the laughing sea,  
And the flowers and leaves are nought to me;  
And on my brow are furrows left,  
And my lip of ease and smile is reft;  
And the time of gray hairs and trembling limbs,  
And the time when sorrow the bright eye dims,  
And the time when death seems nought to fear,  
So sad is life,—is here, is here!"

MARY ANNE BROWN.

Amy passed a restless night, and awoke oppressed in spirit. It was yet early, but she arose and dressed hastily, determined on seeking the fresh air, hoping that, that, would in a measure restore her drooping spirits.

It was a bright, clear morning, and Amy felt some of its brightness creep over her as she picked her way across the hard, uneven ground towards the wood. Here the trees glistened with the frost, and birds chirped among the bare boughs, or hopped fearlessly about the path. She walked on heedlessly, striking deeper into the wood, and approached, almost before she was aware of it, Goody Grey's cottage. How bleak and desolate it looked now the branches of the tall trees stripped of their green foliage waved over it; while the dim, uncertain shadows streamed through them palely, and the wind whistled and moaned mournfully as it rushed past the spot where Amy stood deliberating whether she should continue her walk or not. A moment decided her on knocking lightly at the door, but receiving no reply, she lifted the latch and entered.

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Goody Grey was seated in the high-backed arm chair, but no song issued from her lips; they were compressed together with some strong inward emotion, and she either did not see, or took no notice of Amy's entrance. The ivory box stood open on the table beside her, while in her hand she held some glittering object, seemingly a child's coral. On this Goody Grey's eyes were fixed with an expression of intense emotion. She clasped it in her hands, pressing it to her lips and bosom, while groans and sobs shook her frame, choking the words that now and then rose to her lips, and she seemed to Amy's pitying eyes to be suffering uncontrollable agony. How lovingly sometimes, in the midst of her anguish, she gazed at the toy! How she fondled and caressed it; rocking her body backwards and forwards in the extremity of her emotion. Amy stood quietly in the doorway, not venturing to speak, although she longed to utter the compassionate words that filled her heart. At length, feeling that under the present circumstances her visit would only be considered an intrusion, and could scarcely be a time to offer or attempt consolation, she turned to go. As she did so, the skirt of her dress became entangled in a chair close by, and overturned it. The noise roused Goody Grey; she hastily thrust the trinket into her bosom, and started up.

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"Who are you?" she exclaimed fiercely. "What do you here? How dare you come?"

"I did not mean to disturb you," replied Amy, somewhat alarmed at her voice and manner.

Goody Grey paid no heed to her words, but walked up and down the small room with hasty steps, her excitement increasing every moment, while her features became convulsed with passion; some of her hair escaped from under her cap, and floated in long, loose locks down her shoulders, while her eyes looked so bright and piercing that Amy shrank within herself as the old woman approached her, and exclaimed passionately—

"Do you think it possible a woman could die with a lie on her lips, and revenge at her heart? with

no repentance!—no remorse!—no pity for one breaking heart!—no thought of an hereafter!—no hope of heaven! Do you think it possible a woman could die so?"

"No. It is not possible," replied Amy; striving to speak calmly, "no woman could die so."

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"True,—true; she was no woman, but a fiend! a very devil in her hate and revenge!"

"Ah, speak not so," replied Amy, as the first startling effect of her words and wild looks had passed away. "Say not such dreadful words. If any woman could have lived and died as you say, she deserves your pity, not your condemnation."

"Pity! she'll have none from me. I hated her! she wrecked my happiness when I was a young girl, and for what? but to gratify her insane jealousy. Do you see this?" said she, taking off her cap, and shaking down the thick masses of almost snow-white hair; "it was once golden, and as fair as yours, but a few short months of—of agony changed it to what you see, and drove me mad; *she* worked the wreck; *she* caused the—the madness, and gloried in it. And yet you wonder that I condemn her?"

Her hair was the silvered hair of an old woman, and as it fell from its concealment down her shoulders almost to her feet, throwing a pale, softened, mournful shadow over her excited features, Amy was struck with the beauty of her face; she must once have been very beautiful; while her face, lighted up as it now was, was not the face of an aged woman. No; it must have been, as she herself said, a sudden, severe sorrow years ago that had helped to change that once luxuriant golden hair to grey. Her figure, as she stood confronting Amy, was slight, and by no means ungraceful; that also bore no trace of age, and although she generally walked with the aid of a thick staff, it was more to steady the weakness of her steps than to support the tottering, uncertain ones of old age.

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Who? and what had caused such a wreck? It must have been some terrible blow to have sent her mad in her youth, and to have left her even now, at times—whenever the dark remembrance of it swept over her—hardly sane in more mature age. Would the divulging of the secret remove the sad weight from her heart, or quiet the agony of her thoughts? It might in a measure do so, but Amy shrank from sustaining alone the frenzy that might ensue, and as Goody Grey repeated her last question of "Do you wonder that I condemn her?" Amy, with the view of soothing her, replied gently—

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"She may have lived hardened in sin, but through the dark shadows remorse must have swept at times, and stung her deeply. Besides, her life and death were most wretched, and deserve your pity more than anger."

"Had she known remorse, she never could have died so revengefully. I don't believe she ever felt its sting, and as for pity, she would have scorned it!" and Goody Grey laughed a wild, bitter laugh at the thought.

"Did she injure you so very deeply?"

"How dare you ask me that question? Are not you afraid to? Don't you know it stirs up all my worst passions within me, and sends me mad, —mad do I say? No, no, I am not mad now; I was once, but that, like the rest, is past—past for ever!" and her voice changed suddenly from its fierceness to an almost mournful sadness.

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"Did you know her well?" Amy ventured to ask, notwithstanding the rebuff her last question had met with.

"Aye, did I; too well—too well! Would to God I had never seen her, it would have been better had I died first: but I live, if such a life as mine can be called living. And *she* is dead and I haven't forgiven her; never will; unless," said she, correcting herself, "unless—oh God! I dare not think of *that*; does it not bring sorrow—deep, intense, despairing sorrow, sorrow that scorches my brain?" and either exhausted with her fierce excitement, or overwhelmed with the recollection of the cause of her grief, she sank down in a chair, and covering her face with her hands, moaned and rocked herself about afresh.

For the moment Amy felt half inclined to leave her—her strange words and wild manner had so unnerved her—but a glance at the sorrow-stricken face, as it was suddenly lifted away from the hands that had screened it, decided her upon remaining for at least a few minutes longer. Perhaps the compassionate feeling at her heart had something to do with the decision, or it might be she hoped to say a few words of comfort to the sorrowing creature so relentless in her bitter feelings towards one who had evidently been remorseless in her revenge, and unforgiving even in her death; one who had injured her, if not irreparably, at least deeply and lastingly.

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As Amy stood deliberating how best to shape her words so as not to irritate her afresh, Goody Grey spoke, and her voice was no longer fierce or passionate, but mournfully sad.

"I am lonely," she said, "very lonely. There are days when the thoughts of my heart drive me wild, and are more than I can bear; there are days when I feel as if death would be welcome, were it not for one hope, one craving wish. Will this hope, this wish, ever be realised? Shall I ever be any other than a broken-hearted, despairing woman?"

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"The clouds may clear—sunshine may burst forth when least expected."

"May! That's what I repeat to myself day and night—day and night. The two words, '*Hope on,*' are

ever beating to and fro in my brain, like the tickings of that clock, and sometimes I persuade myself that the time-piece says, '*Hope on, hope on.*' But only the years roll on—the hope is never realised; and soon my heart will whisper, and the clock will tick, '*no hope, no hope.*'"

"Do you never earnestly pray that God will lighten the heavy load that weighs on your spirits or that He will bring comfort to your sorrowing heart?"

"Do I ever cease to pray; or is there not one fervent prayer always on my lips and heart? Day after day I bewail my sins, and ask God's forgiveness and mercy for my poor, broken, contrite heart, and sometimes I rise from my knees, feeling at peace with—with even *her*. But then wild thoughts come back; thoughts that utterly distract me, and which I can neither control nor prevent, and then I go mad, and don't know what I say or think. But enough of my sufferings. You can neither heal nor cure them; even now you have seen too much, and betrayed me into saying more than I ought. Tell me what led you to my cottage so early?"

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"I could not sleep last night," replied Amy, "and so strolled out, thinking the air would revive me."

"It is strange you could not sleep," replied Goody Grey, speaking as she usually did to strangers, in a half solemn, impressive manner. "You who have health, youth, and innocence to help you. I seldom sleep, but then I am old and careworn. Why could you not sleep?" and she looked as though she would pierce the inmost recesses of Amy's heart.

"I can scarcely tell you why, perhaps my fancy misled me; but whatever the cause, I would rather not speak of it."

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"Well perhaps it were best so, and better still if the parent bird looked after her young, when the kite may find its way to her nest."

Amy looked up quickly.

"I scarcely understand your words," she replied, "or I am at a loss to understand their meaning."

"I meant you no harm, 'twas for your good I spoke. Others have thought like you and been deceived. Others have hoped like you, and been deceived. Others have been as loving and true as you *may be*, and been deceived. When you think yourself the safest, then remember my words, 'when you think that you stand, take heed lest you fall.'"

There was a tone of kindness lurking beneath her words, so that Amy regretted she had spoken so hastily, and felt half inclined to tell her so, when Goody Grey again spoke.

"Who is that tall, dark, fine-looking man; a Linchmore in his walk, and perhaps his manner and proud bearing, but there the resemblance ceases; the expression of the face is different, the eye has no cunning in it, but looks at you steadily, without fear? He is brave and noble-looking. Who is he?"

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"I think you must mean Mr. Vavasour," replied Amy.

"Vavasour," repeated Goody Grey, thoughtfully, "the name is strange to me, yet—stay—a dim recollection floats across my brain that I have heard the name before; but my memory fails me sadly at times, and my thoughts grow confused as I strive to catch the thread of some long-forgotten, long-buried vision of the past. Well, perhaps it is best so. Life is but a span, and I am weary of it—very weary."

"We are all at times desponding," said Amy; "even I feel so sometimes at the Hall, and there you know the house is filled with visitors, and is one continued round of gaiety."

"Yes," said Goody Grey, as if speaking to herself. "Amidst the gayest scenes the heart is often the saddest. But," continued she, addressing Amy, "your sweet face looks as though no harsh wind had ever blown across it; may it be long before a cold word or look mars its sunshine. But there is a young girl at the Hall; one amongst the many visiting there who has a proud look that will work her no good. I have warned her, for I can trace her destiny clearly. But she has a spirit; a revengeful spirit, that will never bend till it breaks. She scorned my warning and thought me mad; yet evil will overtake her, and that, too, when least she expects it. Have nothing to do with her. Avoid her. Trust her not. And now go you away, and let the events of this morning be buried in your heart. I would not that all should know Goody Grey, as you know her; think of the old woman with pity; not with doubt and suspicion."

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"I will. I do think of you with pity," replied Amy. "How can I do otherwise when I have seen the anguish of your heart."

"Hush! recall not thoughts that have passed almost as quickly as they came. And now farewell, I am tired and would be alone."

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As Amy came in sight of the Hall on her way home, she met Mr. Vavasour.

"Where have you been to so early?" said he; "I have watched you more than an hour ago cross the park and make for the wood, but there I lost sight of you, and have been wandering about ever since in the vain hope of finding you. Where have you been?"

But Amy was in no mood for being questioned. She felt almost vexed at it, and answered crossly

"I should have thought Mr. Vavasour might have found something better to do than to dog my footsteps. I had no idea my conduct was viewed with suspicion."

"You are mistaken, Miss Neville, if you think I view any conduct of yours with suspicion; such an unworthy thought never entered my head. If I have unwittingly offended, allow me to apologise for that and my unpardonable curiosity which has led me into this scrape."

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"Where no offence is meant, no apology is required," said Amy, coldly. "It would have been better had Mr. Vavasour remained at home instead of venturing abroad to play the spy!"

"You compare me Miss Neville, to one of the most despicable of mankind, when I am far from deserving of the epithet."

"We judge men by their actions not by their words. I have yet to learn that Mr. Vavasour did not enact the spy, when both his actions and his words condemn him."

"Be it so," replied Robert Vavasour, almost as coldly as she had spoken. "But I would fain Miss Neville had conceived a different opinion of me."

Amy made no reply, and in silence they reached the house; his manner being kind, almost tender, as he bid her farewell.

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## CHAPTER XV.

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### THE GALLERY WINDOW.

"Know you not there is a power  
Strong as death, which from above  
Once was given—a fadeless dower,  
Blessed with the name of love!  
On it hangs how many a tale!  
Tales of human joys and woes;  
Fan it with an adverse gale,  
Then it strong and stronger grows.

J. B. KERRIDGE.

"Such a fuss about a piece of embroidery!" exclaimed Mason, entering the servants' hall; "one would think Miss Neville had lost half a fortune instead of a trumpery piece of needle-work. I'm sure she's welcome to any of mine," and she tossed over the contents of her work-box with a contemptuous nod of the head. "I don't suppose it was very much better than this—or this!" and she drew forth an elaborate strip of work; either a careless gift from her mistress, or one of her righteous cribbings, such as servants in places like hers think it no robbery to appropriate to themselves.

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"Law! Mrs. Mason, however did you work it?" asked Mary, in her simplicity.

"It's one of Madam's cast-offs, I expect," said Mrs. Hopkins, with some asperity of manner.

"It don't much signify where I got it, or who it belonged to; it's mine now, and as good, I know, as the piece Miss Neville's turning the house upside down for. Governesses always make places disagreeable; they're sure to lose something or another, and then wonder who's taken it, and then make us out a pack of thieves. I've made up my mind never to take a situation again where there's a governess."

"Does Miss Neville accuse anybody of having taken it?" asked Mrs. Hopkins, more sternly than before, and certainly more sharply.

"Well; no, Mrs. Hopkins, she doesn't exactly do that, she wouldn't dare to; but a hint's as good as a plain-spoken word sometimes. I know I could scarcely stand quiet in Madam's room just now. I did say I was surprised she hadn't lost something more valuable, and should have spoken my mind more plainly than that, but you know Madam's temper as well as I do, Mrs. Hopkins; it isn't for me to tell you; and I can't always say what I wish. She had been put out, too, about that new violet silk dress; it's been cut a trifle too short waisted—a nasty fault—and doesn't fit as it ought, so it couldn't have happened at a more awkward time. Besides, I believe Madam thinks Miss Neville an angel, so quiet and '*mum*;' for my part I dislike people that can't say 'bo' to a goose; and I don't think Miss Neville would jump if a thunderbolt fell at her feet."

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This remark set Mary, and Jane, Frances Strickland's maid, laughing; but not a muscle of Mrs. Hopkin's face moved as she asked—

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"How did you happen to hear of the loss of the piece of work?"

"Oh! Miss Fanny came in open-mouthed to tell her Mamma of it, and said 'wasn't it strange that though they had hunted high and low for it, they could not find it.' Miss Edith accused Carlo;—you know what a rampacious dog he is;—but then they would have found some of the shreds, but

not a vestige of it could they see, rummage as they would. There's the school-room bell, Mary, that's for you to hear all about it, and be put on your trial, and be frightened to death." She added as Mary left the room, "She's no more spirit in her than the cat," and she glanced contemptuously at the sleepy tortoise-shell curled up before the fire.

"Mary's plenty of spirit when she's put to it," replied Mrs. Hopkins, "she's not like some people, ready to let fly at every word that's said."

"And quite right too, I say; when words are spoke that make one's heart leap up to one's throat; but there, servants ain't supposed to have hearts or tongues neither for the matter of that now-a-days; why if a man only looks at us, we're everything that's bad, when I'm sure I'd scorn to have the lots of 'followers' some young ladies have."

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"Mrs. Mason," said Mrs. Hopkins, rising with dignity, "this talk does not become you to speak, nor me to listen to; leastways I won't allow it in this room," and she rose and drew up her portly figure in some pride, and no little expression of anger on her face, while she shook out the stiff folds of her black silk dress. "If the place doesn't suit you; you can leave and get a better if you can; but not one word shall you say in my hearing against any of Madam's friends."

"Good gracious, Mrs. Hopkins, you're enough to frighten anyone. I wasn't aware I'd said anything against anybody, and I'm sure and certain if I did, I didn't mean it. I have no fault to find with my place, I'm well enough satisfied with it, but I'm not partial to Miss Neville," yet at the same time Mason gathered up her work, and thrust it hastily into the box which she closed noisily, as if the spirit was ready to fly out, if she only dare let it.

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But Mason knew well enough that Mrs. Hopkins was not to be trifled with, she could say a great deal, but beyond a certain point she dare not go; for as soon as the other chose she could silence her. All her airs and assumed grandeur were as nothing, and were regarded with cool disdain and contempt, but reign paramount the housekeeper would—and did; her quiet decided way at once checked and subdued the lady's maid, and all her pertness and boasting fell to the ground, but the sweep of her full ample skirts expanded with crinoline annoyed and vexed Mrs. Hopkins much more than her words; the one she could and did check; the other she had no power over, since Mrs. Linchmore tolerated them, and found no fault.

Mason partly guessed it was so, for she invariably swept over something that stood in her way when Mrs. Hopkins was present, either some coals from the coal box, or the fender-irons, the latter were the more often knocked down as Nurse so particularly disliked the noise. Mason had even ventured upon the tall basket of odds and ends from which Mrs. Hopkins always found something to work at, and which stood close by her side as she sat sewing. It would have stood small chance now of escape could Mason have found an excuse for going near it.

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"Well Mary, has the work been found?" asked Mrs. Hopkins, as the girl came back.

"No Ma'am, it hasn't; Miss Neville says she supposes she must have mislaid it somewhere," while Mason curled her lip as much as to say, "I could have told you that."

"Well, you had better go and look over your young ladies' wardrobes; there's no telling sometimes where things get put to, at all events it's as well to search everywhere."

And Mary went, but of course with small chance of finding what she sought for, as it still lay snugly enough under the shelf in Charles' desk, while he appeared totally unmindful of it or indifferent as to its existence; but then the last two days he had been indifferent to almost every thing. He could not account for Miss Neville's coldness and stiffness; surely he had done nothing to offend her, yet why had she treated him so discourteously at the lake, and turned away with scarcely a word?

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He had seen her walking with Vavasour; surely if she had done that, there could be no great harm in her remaining to say three words to him. He had also seen Mr. Hall one morning hasten after her with a glove she had dropped accidentally, and she had turned and thanked him civilly enough, even walked a few paces with him; then why was he to be the only one snubbed?

It irritated and annoyed him. He thought of the hundred-and-one girls that he knew all ready to be talked to and admired. There was even his proud cousin Frances unbent to him; yet he was only conscious of a feeling of weariness and unconcern at her condescension.

Amy's manner puzzled him, and at times he determined on meeting her coldly; at others that he would make her come round. What had he done to deserve such treatment? he could not accuse himself in one single instance. But then Charles knew nothing of his sister-in-law's interference. That one visit of hers to the school-room had determined Amy on the line of conduct she ought to adopt. There was no help for it, she must be cold to him; must show she did not want, would not have his attentions, they only troubled her and brought annoyance with them. She was every bit as proud as Charles. What if he thought as Mrs. Linchmore did? She would show him how little she valued his apparent kindness, or wished for his attentions.

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Ah! Amy was little versed in men's hearts, or she would have known that her very coldness and indifference only urged the young man on; and made the gain of one loving smile from her, worth all the world beside.

Charles was sauntering quietly home through the grounds from the next day's skating on the lake, when the children's voices sounded in the distance; he unconsciously quickened his steps,

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and soon reached the spot where they were playing.

"Another holiday!" he exclaimed, as he saw at a glance that Miss Neville was not there.

"Oh! yes, Uncle, isn't it nice. We have enjoyed ourselves so much."

"I wish I had known it," he replied, "for I would just as soon have had a game of romps with you, as gone skating. You must let me know when you have a holiday again."

"That won't be for a long time," said Edith, "Fanny's birthday comes next, and it isn't for another six months."

"Whose birthday is it to-day then?"

"No one's. We have been having a regular turn-out of the school-room, all the books taken down and the cupboards emptied, because Miss Neville has lost her work."

"Lost her work, has she?" said Charles, not daring to look the two girls in the face, as he took a long pull at his cigar, and watched the smoke as it curled upwards. [Pg 287]

"Yes, Uncle, lost her work; such a beautiful piece she was doing; we can't find it anywhere, and Miss Neville is so vexed about it."

Vexed, was she? He wished he had taken the thimble and scissors as well. He felt a strange satisfaction in learning something had roused her, and that she was not quite so invulnerable as he thought.

"Was she very angry?" he asked.

"Miss Neville is never very angry," replied Edith, "but she looked very much vexed about it. I think she thought some one had been playing her a trick, as she would not allow Fanny to say it had been stolen."

"I dare say she will find it again. It will turn up somewhere or other; you must have another search," and away he walked, knowing full well that unless he brought it to light it never would be found, and that all search would be fruitless. [Pg 288]

Soon after, as the children walked towards the house, they met Robert Vavasour.

"Well young lady, and where are you going to?" asked he of Fanny, who, having Carlo attached to a chain, was some way behind her sister and cousin.

"We are going home, Sir," said Fanny, with some difficulty making the dog keep up, by occasionally scolding him, which he seemed not to mind one bit, but only walked the slower, and tugged the more obstinately at his chain.

"I have a little favour to ask of you," said he, "will you grant it?"

"What is it, Sir?" asked Fanny.

"Will you wait here a few minutes until my return?"

"Yes. But oh! please don't be long."

"Not three minutes," said he, as he disappeared.

"Fanny! Fanny! are you coming?" called Edith, returning; "we are late, it is nearly four o'clock." [Pg 289]

"I cannot come," said Fanny, "I have promised to wait for him," with which unsatisfactory reply, Edith went on and left her.

And Fanny did wait, some—instead of three—ten minutes, until her little feet ached, and her hands were blue with the cold, and her patience, as well as Carlo's, was well-nigh exhausted, he evincing his annoyance by sundry sharp barks and jumping up with his fore paws on her dress. At last, her patience quite worn out, Fanny walked round to the front of the house, where, just as she reached the terrace, she met Mr. Vavasour.

"There," said he, placing a Camellia in her hand, "hold it as carefully as you can, for it is not fresh gathered, and may fall to pieces, and take it very gently to your governess."

"Yes Sir, I will; but oh! what a time you have been, and how she will scold me for being so late, because it rang out four o'clock ever such a time ago, and Edith and Alice are long gone in." [Pg 290]

"Then do not stand talking, Fanny, but make haste in, and be careful of the flower."

"But you must please take Carlo round to the left wing door for me, as Mamma does not like his coming in this way. You see his paws are quite dirty."

"I suppose I must, but it's an intolerable nuisance."

But the dog had not the slightest idea of losing his young mistress, and being dragged off in that ignominious way, but resisted the chain with all his might.

"Suppose we undo his chain, and let him loose," suggested Robert. "I dare say Mamma will excuse his intrusion for this once."

Away went Fanny, faithfully following out the instructions she had received, and carrying the flower most carefully, when suddenly a hand grasped her shoulder rather roughly.

"Oh! cousin Frances, how you startled me!" said Fanny.

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"Where are you going to with that flower?" and she pointed to the Camellia Fanny held so gently between her small fingers.

"It's for Miss Neville, cousin."

"For Miss Neville is it? I suspected as much. Give it to me; let me look at it."

"No, it will fall to pieces. He said so; and that I was to be very careful of it; so you musn't have it."

"Who gave it you? Speak, child; I will know."

But little Fanny inherited the Linchmore's spirit, and was nothing daunted at the other's stern, overbearing manner. In fact her little heart rose to fever heat; so tossing back her long, thick hair with one hand, while with the other she put the flower behind her, and looking her tall cousin steadily in the face, she replied defiantly—

"I shan't tell you."

"How dare you say that, how dare you speak to me in that rude way; I will know who gave it to you. Tell me directly."

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"No I won't, cousin."

Frances raised her hand to strike, but Fanny quailed not; she still held the flower behind her back, away from the other, and made her small figure as tall as she could, planting her little foot firmly so as to resist the blow to her utmost when it did come.

But it came not. The hand fell, but not on Fanny.

With a strong effort Frances controlled herself, and determined on trying persuasion; for she would find out where she got the flower.

Now Frances had been dressing in her room, and had accidentally seen from her window Charles talking to the children; so when she, unfortunately for Fanny, met her in the passage, and saw the Camellia, she naturally enough concluded he had sent it. If not he, who had? but she was certain it was Charles; her new-born jealousy told her so.

Still the child must confess and satisfy her, must confirm her suspicions, and then—but though Frances shut her teeth firmly, as some sudden thought flashed through her, yet she could not quite tell what her vengeance was to be, or what measures she would take; she only felt, only knew she must annihilate and crush her rival, and remove her out of her path.

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"I do not want the flower, Fanny," commenced she in a low voice, meant to propitiate and coax.

"You would not have it, if you did!" replied Fanny, not a bit conciliated or deceived at the change of tone and voice.

Frances could scarcely control her anger.

"You need not hold it so determinately behind you. I am not going to take it from you."

"No! I should not let you."

"Nonsense! I could take it if I liked, but I do not want it; and I know where you got it too, Fanny."

"No you don't, cousin. I am sure you don't."

"But I do; for I saw your uncle give it you, just now."

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"If you saw him, why did you bother so? But I know you did not see him. You are telling me a fib, cousin Frances, and it's very wicked of you!" said Fanny, looking up reproachfully.

At this, as Frances thought, confirmation of her doubts, her rage burst forth.

"You little abominable, good-for-nothing creature! you have the face to accuse me of telling a falsehood; I will have you punished for it. Your Mamma shall know how shamefully you are being brought up by that would-be-saint, Miss Neville."

"If you say a word against my governess," retorted Fanny, "I will tell Mamma, too; all I know you've done."

"What have I done? you little bold thing, speak!" and she grasped the child's arm again, so sharply that Fanny's face flushed hotly with the pain; but she bore it firmly, and never uttered a cry, or said a word in reply.

"Say what have I done. I will know."

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"You stole Miss Neville's work," replied Fanny fearlessly. "No one thinks it's you, but I know it, and could tell if I liked."

"Tell what?"

"That you took my governess's work," repeated Fanny. "I know it was you; because I saw her put it away in her basket before we went out, and when we came home again it was gone, and she has never found it since."

"What are you talking about? I think you are crazed."

"No, I am not. What did you go into the school-room for that day, while we were out? There's nothing of yours there; and why did you look so angry at Miss Neville, when we all came upstairs, if you had not taken away her piece of embroidery to vex and annoy her."

"Was it on that day Miss Neville lost a piece of work?"

"Yes, it was only half finished, too; and you took it, you know you did."

"And you say some one took it while you were out walking?"

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"Yes."

Frances lifted away her hand from Fanny's arm, where it had been placed so roughly, and let it fall helplessly to her side.

Gradually she drooped her eyes, and slowly moved away.

"It is too much," she said, with a deep sigh, while the child stood mute with astonishment at the effect of her words, she being old and wise enough to see they had not only disarmed, but wounded and hurt Frances, and stung her to the quick.

And so they had.

Frances knew well enough *she* had not taken the work. Was it Charles? and was that the reason why he had looked so guilty when she unexpectedly entered? It was not the mere fact of being caught in the school-room. No; it was a cowardly fear lest she should have seen the theft that had made him start, and answer at random, and appear so confused. All was accounted for now.

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Yes; he it was who had taken it, and for what? She paused and looked back. Fanny was following at a respectful distance. She waited until she came up.

"You know not what you have done, child," she said, sternly, with just a slight tremble of the lips and lower part of the face. "I will never forgive you for telling me."

She went on, and the now startled child went on too, knowing full well that her governess must be growing anxious.

And Amy had grown anxious at her prolonged absence, and after awaiting Mary's fruitless search for her in the shrubbery and garden, had gone herself in quest of her, first to Julia's room, thinking she might be there, or at the least they might be able to give her some information; but neither of the sisters had, of course, seen anything of her, so Amy retraced her steps, and had reached the end of the gallery, when Charles turned the corner.

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They met face to face.

He held out his hand. Amy could not refuse to take it, indeed it was all so sudden, she never thought of refusing.

"Have you hurt your hand, Miss Neville?" he inquired, seeing she held out the left, while the right was in some measure supported by the thumb being thrust into the waist belt.

"Slightly," replied Amy, and would have passed on, but he was determined this time she should not evade him.

"What is the matter with it? How did you hurt it?"

"It was wrenched," she said, hesitatingly, and a little confusedly. "I do not think there is much the matter with it."

"Wrenched!" echoed he, in some surprise. Then, all at once, the thought seemed to strike him as to how it was done, and he added, decidedly, "It was yesterday, at the lake, holding my horse. Confound him!"

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Amy did not deny his assertion, indeed she could not, as it was true.

"Are you much hurt?" he asked again, in a kind voice.

"I think not. It is bruised or sprained, that is all."

"All!" he repeated, reproachfully and tenderly.

But Amy would not raise her eyes, and replied, coldly, "Yes; I can scarcely tell you which."

"But I can, if you will allow me."

And in spite of her still averted face, he drew her towards the long window, near where they were standing, she having no power of resisting, not knowing well how to, so she held out her hand as well as she was able.

He held the small, soft fingers in his, and took off from her wrist the ribbon with which she had

bound it.

It was much swollen and inflamed, and was decidedly sprained. He looked closer still, until his breath blew over those clear blue veins, and he could scarcely resist the temptation of pressing his lips on them—might, perhaps, have done so—when they were both startled. [Pg 300]

A dark shadow floated towards them, and danced in the light reflected from the windows by the last red rays of the fast fading sun, right across them.

It was Frances, returning, full of anger and wounded feeling, after her meeting with Fanny.

Scornfully she stood and looked at both, while both quailed at her glance, and the proud, angry look in her eyes.

Charles was the first to recover himself. "Miss Neville has sprained her wrist badly, Frances. Come and see."

More scornfully still, she returned his gaze, and then saying, with cutting sarcasm, "Pray do not let me disturb you," she swept on, as though the ground was scarcely good enough for her to walk on, or that her pride would at all hazards o'er master any and every thing that came in her way. [Pg 301]

So she passed out of their sight.

"It is too much," she repeated again, "and more than I can bear," but this time there was no rebellious sigh, nothing but pride and determination struggling in her heart.

She went into her own room, and locked the door, so that the loud click of the key, as she turned it in the lock, startled again those she had left in the gallery.

"My cousin is not blessed with a good temper," remarked Charles, "though what she has had to vex her I know not, and do not much care;" but at the same time, if Amy could have read his heart, she would have seen that he was inwardly uncomfortable at her having caught him.

"I am sorry," was all Amy said, but it expressed much, as taking the ribbon from his hand, and gently declining his proffered assistance of again binding it round the injured wrist, she left him.

And Amy was sorry. She could not think she had done wrong in allowing Charles Linchmore to look at the sprain, simply because she could not well have refused him without awkwardness; besides, he took her hand as a matter of course, and never asked her permission at all; but then might not Miss Strickland imagine thousands of other things, put a number of other constructions upon finding them in the embrasure of the window together alone. [Pg 302]

It was very evident from her manner that she had done so, and Amy shrank within herself at the idea that perhaps she also would think she was leading him on, and endeavouring to gain his heart, and he, too, as Mrs. Hopkins had told her, the inheritor of the very house she lived in.

As a governess, perhaps she had done wrong, she ought not to have allowed him to evince so much sympathy; but what if she explained to Miss Strickland how it had all happened, there would then be an end to her suspicions; her woman's heart and feeling would at once see how little she had intended doing wrong, and feel for her and exonerate her from all blame or censure. [Pg 303]

So Amy determined on seeking an interview with Frances. It was, as far as she could see, the right thing to do; and she went; when how Frances received her, and how far she helped her, must be seen in another chapter.

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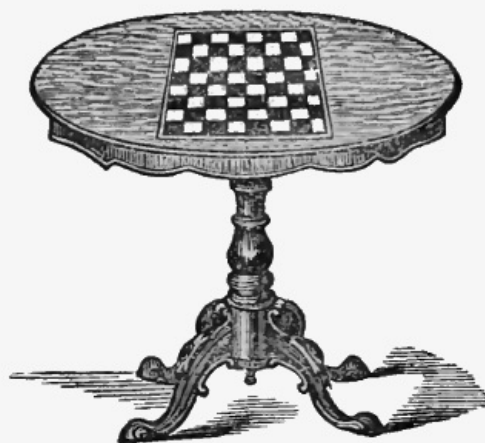
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