

A. L. O. E.

THE HAUNTED
ROOM: A TALE

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Preface

It is under peculiar circumstances that A. L. O. E. sends forth this little volume. As it is passing through the press its author is preparing to enter on a new field of labour in the East, as an honorary member of the Zenana Mission in India. Of the fact that the missionary cause has been dear to A. L. O. E. her readers may be aware from her former writings. She now hopes to be permitted to devote an evening hour of her life to that cause. India is endeared to her from family associations; for there a revered father, and subsequently his sons, lived and laboured, and in that land rests the dust of dear ones who sleep in Jesus.

If there be, as she fain would hope, something of a tie between a writer and those familiar with her works, may not A. L. O. E. venture to claim an interest in the prayers of her readers? May she not hope that they will ask for her, wisdom, humility, zeal, and success? It would be sweet to one struggling with the difficulty of learning a new language to know that many joined in the supplication, “O Lord! open Thou her lips, that her mouth may shew forth Thy praise!” and that many besought Him whose strength is made perfect in weakness, to enable His servant to win Indian gems to lay at His feet.

A. L. O. E.

CHAPTER I. A PLEASANT HOME

"A pleasant nest my brother-in-law has found for his family," said Captain Arrows to himself, as, carpet-bag in hand, he walked the brief distance from a railway-station to his relative's house. "Trevor's home is near enough to London for its inmates to reach Charing-Cross by train in fifteen minutes, and yet far enough from it to be beyond reach of its smoke and noise. Not quite so," added the captain as he passed a Savoyard with hurdy-gurdy and monkey, and then was overtaken by an omnibus well filled within and without; "but I doubt if our young folk would have relished perfect rural seclusion, or would have wished to have dwelt fifty miles from the Great Exhibition and Albert Hall. As long as he holds his government office, Trevor cannot live far from London; and in choosing his residence here, he has made a pleasant compromise between town and country. This is as bright-looking a home as heart could wish," thought the captain, as from the slope of a hill he came in sight of a pretty villa, in the Elizabethan style, standing in its own grounds. "These gay flower-beds, with their geometrical shapes and blooming flowers, show the ingenuity of Bruce and the taste of Emmie. The croquet loops on the lawn, the target in the little field yonder, tell of lives passed in ease and enjoyment. It may be a question whether such lives be indeed the most desirable for our young men and maidens," thus the captain pursued his reflections as he walked down the hill. "Simply to pass youth as pleasantly as possible seems to be hardly the best preparation for the rough campaign of existence. We would not train our army recruits in Arcadia. It would be an interesting problem, had we the means of working it out, to find out how far our characters are formed by our surroundings, as physical qualities are affected by climate. Would early acquaintance with difficulties and dangers ever have braced up our lovely Emmie into a heroine, or made Vibert a reflective and self-denying man? As for Bruce, he has in him so much of the nature of the oak sapling, that the most enervating air could not rob him of all the knots and toughness of close-grained wood. Another curious problem to solve would be, how far easy, luxurious existence in youth is actually conducive to happiness; whether the prospect from a bleak hill-side be not fairer, as well as its air more bracing, than that of the garden of the Hesperides. Where the mind has no real difficulties with which to grapple, the imagination is wont to grow with the rank luxuriance of tropical vegetation. Nervousness, superstition, anxiety about trifles, take the place of serious trials; and the child of luxury, to parody the fine line of Johnson,

'Makes the misery he does not find.'"

The captain had no more leisure for his reflections, for, as he threw open the gate of Summer Villa, his approach was seen from the house, and two of its inmates hastened forth to meet a favourite uncle. A graceful maiden ran lightly down the shrubby path, followed by her younger brother, a handsome lad of some sixteen or seventeen years of age.

"Oh, you are so welcome; we were so glad to get your telegram and know that your long cruise was over!" cried Emmie as she gave to her mother's brother an affectionate greeting.

"We've so much to tell you, captain," said Vibert Trevor, cordially shaking the hand of the newly-arrived guest. "John is away, so let me carry your carpet-bag into the house."

This, from Vibert, was rather a remarkable offer of service. The captain accepted it with a smile, for Vibert was little accustomed to act the part of a porter.

"Where is Bruce?" asked Arrows. "As for your father, I suppose that he is at his office in London."

"No; papa is not at his office," replied Emmie, slipping her arm into that of her uncle. "But come into the house and have refreshment, and while you take it –"

"We'll tell you the whole story," cried Vibert, looking like one who has a grand piece of news to impart.

While the three enter Summer Villa, let us pause and glance at them for a few moments.

Captain Arrows is a naval officer. He has scarcely reached middle age, and looks young to be addressed as “uncle” by the young lady who rests on his arm, or the tall brother at her side. The captain’s face, bronzed by sun and wind, is not one to be easily forgotten, so keen and piercing are the dark eyes which glance from beneath projecting brows. An expression of satire sometimes plays around the thin lips, but of satire tempered and controlled. The impression conveyed by Arrows’ appearance and manner would be, “That is a man of character, a man of decision, a keen observer, who looks as if he were making notes for a book satirizing the follies of mankind.” But there is a kindly frankness about the sailor which tends to counteract the sense of restraint which might otherwise be felt in his society. If he carry the sharp rapier of wit at his side, it is sheathed in the scabbard of good-nature.

Never does Arrows look more kindly or soften his tone to more gentleness than when addressing the motherless daughter of a sister loved and mourned. Emmie is, indeed, one to draw out the affections of those around her. Not only is her face fair, but it has the sweetness of expression which is more winsome than beauty. Her soft dark-brown hair does not, in the shapeless masses prescribed by modern fashion, mar the classical contour of a gracefully formed head. Gentle, tender, and clinging, the maiden’s type might be found in the fragrant white jasmine that embowers the porch of her pleasant home. Emmie’s school companions have loved her; not one of them could remember a harsh or unkind word spoken by the lips of the gentle girl. Her brothers love her; Emmie has shared their interests, and joined them in their amusements, without ever brushing away that feminine softness which, as the down to the peach, is to woman one of the greatest of charms. Bruce would have disliked having “a fast girl” for his sister almost as much as Mr. Trevor would have disapproved of his daughter earning that title. The slang in which some modern ladies (?) indulge would have sounded from the lips of Emmie as startling as the blare of a child’s trumpet toy breaking in on a melody of Beethoven.

Vibert Trevor in appearance resembles his sister; but what is pleasingly feminine in the woman looks somewhat effeminate in the boy. Boy! how could the word escape my pen! Vibert, in his own estimation at least, has left boyhood long ago. His auburn hair, parted carefully down the middle, falls on either side of a face which would be singularly handsome but for the somewhat too great fulness about the mouth. The lad is dressed fashionably and in good taste. If there be a little tinge of foppishness in his appearance, it is as slight as the scent which a superfine cigar has left on his clothes.

“No more refreshment for me, thanks; I have taken some in London,” said the captain in reply to a question from his niece as they entered the house together.

“Then we will go into the drawing-room,” said Emmie. “We expect papa and Bruce by the next train from Wiltshire. Papa wrote that they would reach this an hour before dinner-time.”

A cheerful drawing-room was that which looked out on the lawn of Summer Villa, lighted up as it was by the rich glow of a September sun, then just at its setting. The red light sparkled on the crystal globe in which gold-fish were gliding, and lent vividness to the green of the graceful ferns which ornamented both the windows. Emmie’s piano was open, with a piece of music upon it. Emmie was an enthusiast in music. She had to displace her guitar from the sofa on which she had left it, to make room for her uncle to sit by her side. Emmie’s basket with its fancy work lay on the table, and traces of her late employment in the shape of dropped beads and morsels of bright German wool strewn the soft carpet. Emmie rather felt than saw that her uncle’s eye detected the little untidiness; the naval officer was himself “so dreadfully neat!”

“Now for your news,” said the captain, as he seated himself by his niece, while Vibert threw himself into an arm-chair. Vibert usually chose, as if by instinct, the most luxurious chair in the room.

“What would you say if papa were to throw up office, leave Summer Villa for ever and for aye, and carry us all off to be buried alive?” cried Vibert.

“In Labrador – or equatorial Africa?” inquired the captain.

“Not quite so bad as either of those distant deserts,” laughed Vibert. “Myst Hall is not a hundred miles from London, and Wiltshire is not quite beyond the pale of civilized life.”

“What has happened to make such a migration probable?” inquired Arrows. “You know that during our northern cruise I have had no letters, and that as regards home news, the last three months have been to me an absolute blank.”

“Our story is easily told,” said Emmie. “You will, I dare say, remember that papa had an aunt, Mrs. Myers, who lived in Wiltshire.”

“I recollect the name, but little besides,” replied Arrows.

“None of us knew much of Aunt Myers,” continued his niece. “Except a hamper of home-made preserves which came to us from Myst Court every Christmas, we had little to remind us of a relative who shut herself up from her family and friends for fifty long years.”

“But if we forgot the old dame, she did not forget us,” interrupted Vibert. “Aunt Myers died eight or nine days ago and there came a letter from her lawyer announcing her death, and informing my father that he is the old lady’s heir, executor, and the master of Myst Court, with all the fields, pleasure-grounds, cottages, copses, and I don’t know what else thereto appertaining.”

The captain did not look as much impressed by the announcement as his young informant expected that he would be.

“Papa, of course, went to his poor aunt’s funeral,” said Emmie, “and took Bruce with him to see what he thought of the place.”

“There was plenty of business to be transacted,” observed Vibert; “I fancy that there always is when landed property changes hands. My father asked for a week’s holiday from office-work. Perhaps he will give up his appointment altogether; all depends on whether he decide to live on his own estate, or to let it and take a new lease of Summer Villa.”

“You must have had letters from your father; to which decision does he appear to incline?” asked the captain, addressing himself to his niece.

“Papa has been very busy, and wrote but briefly,” said Emmie. “I believe that a good deal will depend on whether papa is satisfied with what he sees of a gentleman at S – , who has been highly recommended as a private tutor for my brothers. S – is but three miles from Myst Court, so that if we lived at that place, Vibert and Bruce could go over to Mr. Blair’s for study every week-day.”

“My father’s plan, now that Bruce and I have left Cheltenham,” interrupted Vibert, “is to keep us with him at home for a year or two, and have us prepared for Cambridge or some competitive examination by a private tutor, either in London, or at S – , if we go into Wiltshire.”

“What description does Bruce give of Myst Court?” inquired Captain Arrows.

“Bruce is a lazy dog with his pen, and seldom honours me with a scratch of it,” answered Vibert.

“Bruce wrote to me the day after he went into Wiltshire,” said Emmie. “He knew that I should be interested to hear of the place which may soon be our home. Bruce writes that the house is of the date of the reign of Queen Anne; that it is built of red brick, and looks rather formal, but has splendid trees around it. Myst Court stands quite by itself, with no other country-house near it, and has the reputation of being *haunted*.”

Arrows smiled at the gravity with which the young lady pronounced the last word.

“Myst Court must be a horridly dull place, at least for those who are not sportsmen!” cried Vibert. “Bruce and I may find a little liveliness at S – ; but for you, Emmie, it will be a case of —

‘And still she cried, “’Tis very dreary —
’Tis dreary and sad,” she said;
She said, “I am aweary, aweary;
I wish I were dead!”’”

Emmie laughed, but the laugh was rather a forced one.

“Your sister will never, I hope, echo the peevish complaint of an idle girl, who had not energy enough to nail up her peaches,” observed Captain Arrows. “If Emmie go to Wiltshire, it will be, I trust, to lead there an active, useful, and happy life.”

“I wonder on what course papa will decide,” said Emmie; “we are very anxious to know. A great deal will depend on what Bruce thinks desirable, – papa has such an opinion of the judgment of Bruce.”

“Bruce has a precious good opinion of his own,” said Vibert, with something like scorn.

“For shame! – how can you!” cried Emmie, in a tone of playful reproof.

“Here they are! here come my father and Bruce!” cried Vibert, rising from his easy-chair as he caught sight of two figures at the gate.

Emmie had started up, and was out of the room to receive the travellers, before Vibert had finished the sentence.

CHAPTER II. COMING TO A DECISION

"Yes, I am satisfied in regard to educational advantages for my sons," said Mr. Trevor, in reply to a question asked by the captain, when, a few minutes afterwards, the family were gathered together in the drawing-room. "The tutor, Mr. Blair, appears to be in every way qualified to do full justice to his pupils; I had a very satisfactory interview with him at S – ."

"But Myst Court itself, what do you think of the place?" inquired Vibert.

"The house was originally handsome, but it is now utterly out of repair," replied Mr. Trevor.

"I don't suppose that painter or glazier has entered the door for these last fifty years," observed Bruce.

"The grounds are extensive," continued Mr. Trevor; "but the trees are choking each other for lack of thinning; and the brushwood, through neglect, has thickened into a jungle."

"A good cover for rabbits and hares," observed Vibert, who had an eye to sport.

"I never before saw such wretched cottages," said Bruce; "and there are sixty-one of them on the estate, besides two farms. The hovels are dotted in groups of threes and fours in every corner where one would not expect to find them. Some lean forward, as if bending under the weight of their roofs; some to one side, as if trying to get away from their neighbours; some cottages look as if they were tired of standing at all. I cannot imagine how the men and women, and swarms of bare-footed children, manage to live in such dirty dens."

"Is there no one to look after the people?" asked Captain Arrows.

"There is no church or school-house nearer than S – ,” replied Mr. Trevor. "The people either work for the neighbouring farmers, or in a dyeing factory which stands about a mile from Myst Court. Wages are low in that part of the country; but that is not sufficient to account for the misery which we saw there. Ignorance prevails – ignorance more dense than I could have believed to have been found in any part of our favoured land. I doubt whether of the peasants one in four is able even to read. As a matter of course, drunkenness and every other vice spread as weeds over a field so neglected."

"It is there that the labourer is called to lay his hand to the plough," observed Captain Arrows.

Vibert gave an almost imperceptible shrug of his shoulders; Bruce as slight an inclination of his head. A very faint sigh escaped from the lips of Emmie.

"I have been giving the matter serious, very serious thought," said Mr. Trevor. "My first idea, when I found that my aunt had bequeathed the property to me, was to let Myst Court, and to remain at least for some years in Summer Villa, where we have been for long so comfortably settled. But I found, on visiting Myst Court, that it would be impossible to let the house without effecting such extensive and thorough repairs as I could not at present undertake. Even if this were not so – " Mr. Trevor paused, as if to reflect.

"No mere tenant could be expected to take the same interest in the people as would be felt by you, their landlord and natural protector," observed the captain, concluding the sentence which his brother-in-law had left unfinished.

"And so you think that we are bound to act as props to the cottages that are leaning forwards or sideways, and make them hold themselves straight, as respectable cottages ought to do!" laughed Vibert.

"But what have you to say about the haunted room?" timidly inquired Emmie, who had been sitting with her hand in that of her father, a hitherto silent but much interested listener to the conversation.

"Haunted! Oh, that's all nonsense!" exclaimed Bruce. "Myst Court is no more haunted than is Summer Villa; it is simply a big, dreary-looking house that wants new mortar on its walls, new glass

to replace what is cracked in its windows, and a good fairy, in the shape of a young lady, to turn it into a cheerful, comfortable home.”

“What gives to Myst Court the name of being haunted,” said his father, “is simply this. My aunt, who was of a nervous and highly sensitive nature, had the misfortune to lose her husband, a short time after their marriage, in a very distressing way. When on his wedding-tour, Mr. Myers was bitten by a mad dog, and a few weeks after bringing his bride to their home he died of hydrophobia.”

“How dreadful!” exclaimed Emmie.

“Very dreadful indeed,” said her father. “The shock of witnessing Mr. Myers’ sufferings (he died in frantic delirium) almost upset the reason of his unfortunate wife. She fell into a state of morbid melancholy, making an idol of her grief. From the day of her husband’s funeral to that of her own death, a period of fifty years, my poor aunt never once quitted the house, even to attend a place of worship.”

“The most singular and eccentric mark of the widow’s sorrow was her determination that the room in which her husband died should always remain as it was on the day of his burial,” said Bruce. “Aunt Myers had the shutters closed, and the door not only locked, but actually bricked up, so that no foot might ever enter or eye look on the apartment connected in her mind with associations so painful. It is merely that closed-up chamber which gives to the house the name of being haunted.”

“The sooner it is opened to heaven’s light and air the better,” observed Captain Arrows. “Let the first thing done in that house be to unbrick and unlock the door, fling back shutters and throw open windows, and the first time that I visit Myst Court let me sleep in the haunted chamber.”

“I am afraid that I have not the power either to follow your advice or to gratify your wish,” said Mr. Trevor. “My poor aunt, retaining her strange fancy to the last, actually – in a codicil to her will – made as a condition to my possession of the place that the room in which her husband died should remain as it is now, bricked up and unused.”

“That condition would add not a little to the difficulty of letting or selling the house,” observed the practical Bruce.

“It appears to be a law of nature that whatever is useless becomes actually noxious,” remarked the captain. “That closed chamber, into which the sun never shines, will tend to make the dwelling less healthy, as well as less cheerful.”

Again Emmie breathed a faint sigh.

“And now we return to my proposition,” said Mr. Trevor gravely. “Shall I remain where I am, and put this large property into the hands of some agent to let or improve as he may, – with but little chance of its becoming of much more than nominal value; or shall I give up my office, take the pension to which I am now entitled, live on my own estate, look after my tenants, and gradually effect such improvements as may make the land profitable, if not to myself, to my heirs?”

“What does Bruce, who has seen the property, say on the question?” asked the captain, turning towards his elder nephew.

Bruce replied alike without haste or hesitation. “If my father leave his office in London, there are at least twenty persons ready and eager to fill his place, and to do his work; but there is not one who could be his substitute at Myst Court. It is the master’s eye that is wanted there, not that of a paid agent.”

Young as was Bruce, his words carried weight with his father. Mr. Trevor’s elder son in most points presented a contrast to Vibert; as regarded ripeness of judgment, the fifteen months that separated their ages might have been as many years. In physical appearance the brothers were also unlike each other. Bruce, though older, was not so tall as Vibert; his frame was spare and slight. He had not, like Emmie and his brother, inherited their mother’s beauty. The good sense expressed in his steady gray eyes, the decision marked in the curve of his lip, alone redeemed the countenance of Bruce from being of a commonplace type. The characteristics of the three Trevors had been thus playfully sketched by a lively girl who was a frequent guest at Summer Villa: “If I want amusement,

I choose Vibert for my companion; if I need sympathy, I turn to Emmie; but if I am in difficulty or danger, commend me to Bruce, he has the cool brain and firm heart. I like Vibert; I love Emmie; but Bruce is the one whom I trust.”

A brief silence succeeded the young man’s reply to his father; it was broken by Vibert’s inquiry, “What sort of a town is S – ?”

“Like any other county town,” replied Bruce shortly. The question seemed to him to be trifling, and irrelevant to the subject of conversation.

“S – seemed to me to be a pleasant, cheerful place,” said the more indulgent father.

“And I suppose that fishing and shooting are to be had at Myst Court?” inquired the youth.

“A stream runs through part of the property, and there is likely to be plenty of game in the copse,” replied Mr. Trevor.

“Then I vote that we go to Myst Court!” cried Vibert.

“The only thing which makes me hesitate in coming to a decision,” observed Mr. Trevor, “is the doubt as to whether my dear girl would like being taken from her present bright home. Emmie has here so many sources of innocent amusement, so many young friends and pleasant companions, that it might be trying for her to be transplanted to a place which I cannot now represent as a cheerful abode, though I hope that it in time may become such.” Mr. Trevor, as he spoke, looked tenderly on his daughter, and pressed the hand which he held in his own.

“Oh, papa, do not think about me; I shall have you and my brothers,” said Emmie. It did not escape the notice of Arrows that his niece spoke with a little effort, and that her lip quivered as she uttered the words.

“You shall have a pony-chaise, too,” said her father; “it will be needed to carry you to church on Sundays, and on week-days you shall drive about the country, explore the neighbourhood, or indulge a lady’s taste by shopping in S – .”

“And carry us back from our tutor’s,” interrupted Vibert; “for I suppose that a hansom is not to be got for love or money; and I’ve no fancy for trudging six miles every day, like a horse in a mill.”

By the time that the dressing-bell rang before dinner, the question of removing to Wiltshire was virtually settled. Emmie was too unselfish and high-principled to oppose a decision which approved itself both to her common sense and her conscience. She tried to hide from her father her strong repugnance to leaving Summer Villa, its pleasant associations and friendly society, in order to bury herself alive in a grand, gloomy house, quite out of repair, and with the name of being haunted besides.

CHAPTER III.

GOSSIP DOWNSTAIRS

The topic which excited such interest in the drawing-room was certain to be eagerly discussed in the kitchen also. At the servants' supper-table that night nothing was talked about but Myst Hall, and the probability of the Trevor family leaving Summer Villa to settle in Wiltshire.

"I'm certain that there will be a grand move soon, from what I heard while I was waiting at table," said John the footman. "I mean to give warning to-morrow," he added, shrugging his shoulders.

"You had better do nothing in a hurry," observed Susan Pearl, a sensible, pleasant-looking woman, who had been Emmie's attendant when she was a child, and who acted as her lady's-maid now. "You may find that second thoughts are best, when the matter in question is throwing up a good place."

"Then master had better have his second thoughts too," observed John, as he stretched out his hand for the walnut pickle. "A week of Myst Court was quite enough for me, I assure you. If you were to see how the mortar is starting from the brickwork, how the plaster is peeling from the ceilings, and how the furniture is faded; if you were to hear the windows shaking and rattling as if they had a fit of the ague, the boards creaking, and the long passages echoing, you would think any sensible man well out of so dreary a prison."

"Plaster and paint can be put on anew, a carpet deadens echoes, and curtains keep out draughts. As for windows rattling, a peg will stop that," observed Susan, who was not easily daunted.

"Outside the house it's as bad as within," pursued John. "The drive is green with moss and grass, and the piece of water with duckweed; the trees grow so thick together that you can't see ten yards before you; and your ears are dinned with the cawing of rooks."

"Weeding and clearing will do wonders," said Susan; "if Miss Emmie were set in a coal-yard, she would manage to make flowers grow there."

"Are there good shops near?" inquired Ann, the housemaid, who wore a cap of the newest pattern, trimmed with the gayest of ribbons.

"Shops!" echoed John, as if amazed at the question. "Why, the very baker and grocer have to come in their carts from S — , and there's nothing like a gentleman's house within several miles of Myst Court."

"I'll give warning to-morrow," said Ann. "As well be transported at once, as go to such a heathenish out-of-the-way place as that is!"

"I suppose that Myst Court is overrun with rats and mice," observed Mullins the cook.

"Not a bit of it," answered John, laughing. "Thieving rats and mice would have had a hard life of it with old Mrs. Myers' nine and thirty cats and kittens to serve as a rural police."

"La, John, you're joking! nine and thirty!" exclaimed the women-servants in a breath.

"I'm not joking," replied the footman; "I counted them, — black, white, gray, and tabby, long hair and short hair, blue eyes and green eyes! Mrs. Myers cared a deal more for her cats than she did for her tenants' children. No, no, the rats and mice would find no safe corner in that big old house, unless in the shut-up, haunted chamber."

Whenever these last two words were pronounced, curiosity was certain to be roused, and questioning to follow. Three voices now spoke at once.

"Do you think that the place is really haunted?"

"Did you see any ghosts?"

"What do the servants say about that chamber?"

The last question, which was Susan's, was that to which John gave reply.

“The cook and the housemaid at Myst Court say that for certain they’ve heard odd noises, a sighing, and a rattling, and a howling o’ nights,” said the footman, looking as mysterious as his plump, well-fed face would allow him to do.

“On windy nights, I suppose,” said the sensible Susan. “I’ve heard a sighing, and a rattling, and a howling even here in Summer Villa.”

“Let him tell us more!” cried Ann impatiently, for John’s countenance showed that he had a great deal more to impart. The footman prefaced his tale by deliberately laying down his knife and fork, though cold beef lay still on his plate; this was a token that honest John was indeed in solemn earnest. He began in a lowered tone, while every head was bent forward to listen: —

“Mrs. Jael Jessel, the old lady’s attendant, told me that she had twice passed a ghost in the corridor, and once on the stairs. It was a tall figure in white, – at least seven feet high, – and it had great round eyes like carriage-lamps staring upon her.”

Ann and the cook uttered exclamations, and exchanged glances of horror; but Susan quietly remarked, “If Mrs. Jessel really saw such a sight once, she was a stout-hearted woman to stay to see it a second time, and a third. Did this brave lady’s-maid look much the worse for meeting her ghost?”

“No,” replied John, a little taken aback by the question. “Mrs. Jessel is a stout, comfortable-looking person. I suppose that she got used to seeing odd sights.”

Susan burst into a merry laugh. “John, John,” she cried, “this Mrs. Jessel has been taking a rise out of you. She saw that you were soft, and wanted to make an impression.” Susan was helping herself to butter, which, perhaps, supplied her with the simile of which she made use.

“Mrs. Jessel did not stay at Myst Court for nothing,” said John, who, possibly, wished to give a turn to the conversation; “she had not waited on Mrs. Myers for more than three years, yet the old lady left her five hundred pounds, a nice little furnished house just outside the Myst woods, and all the cats and kittens, which she could not trust to the care of strangers.”

“It was made worth her while to live in a haunted house,” observed Ann.

“I thought at first,” continued John, who had taken up his knife and fork, and was using them to good purpose, – “I thought at first that I might as well put my best foot forward, for that it would be no bad thing to have a wife with five hundred pounds and a house to start with; and,” he added slyly, “with such a live-stock to boot, one might have done a little business in the furrier’s line. But – ”

“But, but, – speak out!” cried Ann with impatience; “what comes after the ‘but’?”

“Somehow I didn’t take to Mrs. Jessel,” said John, “and shouldn’t have cared to have married her, had the five hundred pounds been five thousand instead.”

“What’s against her?” inquired the cook.

“Nothing that I know of,” said John; “but when you see her, you’ll understand what I mean.”

“I’ll not see her; I’m not going to Myst Court; I could not abide being so far from London,” observed the cook.

“I shall give miss warning to-morrow!” cried Ann.

“And what will you do?” inquired John of Susan.

“Stay by the family, to be sure,” was the answer. “Would I leave my young lady now, just when her heart is heavy? for heavy it is, I am certain of that. While she was dressing for dinner, Miss Emmie could hardly keep in her tears. It is no pleasure to her to leave a home like Summer Villa, where she has nothing to cross her, and everything to please. There’s not a day but Miss Alice, or some other friend, comes dropping in to see her; nor a week that passes without some sight or amusement in London. At the age of nineteen, a young lady like Miss Trevor does not willingly leave such a pleasant place as this for a dreary, deserted old country-house.”

“Poor miss! I pity her from my soul!” cried Ann.

“With a pity that would leave her to see none but new faces in her household!” said the indignant Susan. “No; I’ll stick by my young lady through thick and thin, were she to go to the middle of Africa. I’ve been with her these ten years, ever since she lost her poor mother, and I will not desert her now.”

“You don’t believe in ghosts,” observed John.

“I believe my Bible,” replied Susan gravely; “I read there that I have a Maker far too wise and good to allow His servants to be troubled by visitors from another world. This ghost-fearing is all of a piece with fortune-telling, and spirit-rapping, and all such follies, after which weak-brained people run. Simple faith in God turns out faith in such nonsense, as daylight puts an end to darkness.”

Susan was not laughed at for her little lecture as ten years before she might have been. Her long period of service and her tried character had given her influence, and won for her that respect which a consistent life secures even from the worldly. Her fellow-servants felt somewhat ashamed of their own credulous folly.

“I’m not a bit afraid of ghosts,” said Ann; “but I don’t choose to mope in the country.”

“I don’t care a rap for a house being haunted; but I mean to better myself,” said the cook.

“Do you think, John, that the young gentlemen will like Myst Court?” inquired Susan.

“I think Master Bruce has a purpose and a plan in his head; and when he has a purpose and a plan, it’s his way to go right on, steady and straight, and none can say whether he likes or don’t like what he’s a-doing,” answered the footman. “When he looked over the house, it wasn’t to say how bad things were, but to see how things could be bettered. He has a lot o’ common sense, has Master Bruce; I believe that he’ll make himself happy after his fashion, and that ghosts, if there be any, will take care to keep out of his way.”

“He’d see through them,” said Susan, laughing.

“As for Master Vibert,” continued John, “if he has plenty of amusement, he’ll not trouble his head about ghost or goblin. He’s a light-hearted chap is Master Vibert, and a bit giddy, I take it. Perhaps his father ain’t sorry to have him a bit further off from London than he is here in Summer Villa.”

“The one for whom I feel sorry is my young lady,” said Susan. “She’ll not take a gun or a fishing-rod like her brothers, and – ”

“She’ll be mortally afraid of ghosts,” cried Ann.

“She’s timid as a hare,” observed John.

“If miss screams when a puppy-dog barks at her, and hides her face under her bed-clothes if there’s a peal o’ thunder, how will she face ghosts ten feet high, with eyes like carriage-lamps?” cried the cook.

Susan looked annoyed and almost angry at hearing her mistress spoken of thus. “Miss Emmie is nervous and not very strong, so she is easily startled,” said the maid; “but she is as good a Christian as lives, and will not, I hope, give way to any idle fancies and fears such as trouble folk who are afraid of their own shadows. I should not, however, wonder if she find Myst Court very dull.”

“She’d better take to amusing herself by looking after the poor folk around her,” observed the cook. “From what you’ve told us, John, I take it there’s company enough of bare-legged brats and ragged babies.”

“Miss Emmie is mighty afraid of infection,” said John, doubtfully shaking his head. “She has never let me call a four-wheeler for her in London since small-pox has been going about. Miss will cross to the other side of the road if she sees a child with a spot on its face. No, no; she’ll never venture to set so much as her foot in one of them dirty hovels that I saw down there in Wiltshire.”

“Tain’t fit as she should,” observed Ann. “Why should ladies demean themselves by going amongst dirty beggarly folk?”

“To help them out of their misery,” said Susan. “In the place where I lived before I came here, I saw my mistress, and the young ladies besides, take delight in visiting the poor. They thought that it no more demeaned them to enter a cottage than to enter a church; the rich and the poor meet together in both.”

“Miss Emmie is too good to be proud,” observed John; “but, take my word for it, she’ll never muster up courage to go within ten yards of a cottage. Kind things she’ll say, ay, and do; for she has

the kindest heart in the world. But she'll send you, Susan, with her baskets of groceries and bundles of cast-off clothes; she'll not hunt up cases herself. Miss would shrink from bad smells; she'd faint at the sight of a sore. She'll not dirty her fine muslin dresses, or run the risk of catching fevers, or may be the plague, by visiting the poor."

"Time will show," observed Susan. But from her knowledge of the disposition of her young lady, the faithful attendant was not without her misgivings upon the subject.

CHAPTER IV. PREPARING TO START

The question of a move was finally settled; Myst Court was to be the future residence of its new owner, who lost no time in making arrangements for effecting in it such repairs as were absolutely necessary to make it a tolerably comfortable dwelling. More than this Mr. Trevor did not at present attempt; his expenses, he knew, would be heavy. His newly-inherited property would yield no immediate supply; improvements must be gradually made. The life of a landed proprietor was one altogether new to Mr. Trevor, who had passed thirty years of his life in a government office, never being more than a few weeks at a time absent from London. Being a sensible man, he was aware that experience on a hitherto untried path is often dearly bought. He expected to make some mistakes, but resolved to act with such prudence that even mistakes should not involve him in serious difficulties.

The six weeks which elapsed before the departure of the family from Summer Villa were full of business and arrangements. Mr. Trevor, having to wind up his office-work, and settle the affairs of his late aunt, was, except in the evenings, very little at home. Emmie, who acted as her father's housekeeper, found a hundred small matters to arrange before making a move which must bring so complete a change. Her brothers attended a private tutor in London, and usually went and returned by the same trains as their father; so that, but for the company of her uncle, Emmie would have spent much of her time alone. But the captain was a cheerful companion and a most efficient helper to his young niece. He made up her accounts, he paid her bills, he helped her to decide which articles of furniture must be taken to the new home, which left to be sold or given away. The slow-paced John was astonished at the energy with which the naval officer would mount a ladder, and with his own hands take down family pictures and swathe them in the matting which was to secure their safe transit to Wiltshire.

"Sure the captain does the work of three. One would think he'd been 'prenticed to a carpenter by the way he handles the tools; and he runs up a ladder like a cat," observed John to another member of the household.

Captain Arrows felt strong sympathy for his niece. He saw, perhaps more clearly than did any one else, how painful to her was the change which was coming over her life. Her uncle respected Emmie's unselfish efforts to hide from her father her reluctance to leave Summer Villa and all its pleasant surroundings. Arrows noticed the shade of sadness on Emmie's fair face when she received, as she frequently did, congratulations on her father's accession to property. The acute observer could not fail to see that the acquisition of Myst Court was no source of pride or pleasure to Emmie.

Miss Trevor was perpetually reminded of her approaching departure from the home in which her life had been so much like a summer holiday. Many visits of leave-taking had to be paid, and few could be paid without more or less of pain. Emmie had numerous friends, and to some she could not bid farewell without a sharp pang of regret. Even inanimate things, dear from association, were resigned with sadness. Emmie sighed to take leave of her garden, and spent much time in procuring cuttings from her favourite plants, her geraniums, her fuchsias, her myrtles. With what pleasant memories were those flowers connected in the affectionate mind of Emmie! Summer Villa and her friends seemed dearer than ever when she was about to leave them behind.

Next to the captain, Emmie found her best helper in Susan. Active, thoughtful, the neatest of packers, the most intelligent of maids, Susan was indeed "a treasure" to her young mistress.

"You seem to like the change," said the cook to Susan, who was humming cheerfully to herself as she knelt beside a hamper which she was packing with china.

Susan did not pause to look up from her work as she answered, "I never ask myself whether I like it or not; my business is to make ready for it, and that is enough for me."

“How dismal a house looks when everything in it is being pulled down and upset!” remarked the cook, standing with her back to the wall, and watching Susan as she imbedded quaint old china tea-pot and cream-jug in white cotton wool as carefully as she might have laid a baby in a cradle. “The hall all lumbered with luggage; the whole place smelling of matting; things awanted just when they’ve been packed up, corded, and labelled; the walls looking without their pictures as faces would do without eyes, – there is something horrid uncomfortable about a house as has been long lived in when it’s agoing to be left for good. I’m half sorry that I agreed to stay on the extra fortnight; only it was such a convenience to the family. I don’t know what they’d have done had Ann and I taken ourselves off before the move was fairly over.”

Susan went quietly on with her occupation, while Mrs. Mullins went on with her talking.

“P’r’aps master did wisely to keep on Mrs. Myers’ servants, for he’d hardly have got London folk to stay in his dismal country house, even on double wages. We’ll have you at the Soho registry before three months are over.”

“Time will show,” said Susan.

“Them people down at Myst Court are accustomed to the kind of life they lead there,” continued the loquacious Mrs. Mullins, “and that’s the reason they don’t mind it. Frogs like their ditch because they’ve never known anything better; and I suppose that folk in a haunted house get used to ghosts, as eels are used to skinning.”

“Or learn not to be frightened at shadows,” said Susan.

“I’m not frightened; don’t you fancy that shadows keep me from going to Myst Court,” cried the cook. “But I could never stand a place where the butcher – as John says – comes but twice a week in the winter; no cook could abide that.”

“It seems that Mrs. Myers’ cook did,” observed Susan.

“She’s no cook!” exclaimed Mrs. Mullins, with an emphatic snort of disdain: “she’s had nothing to keep her hand in, and don’t know a *vol-au-vent* from a *soufflet*! Why, Mrs. Myers never saw company, never asked a friend to a meal! John says that for five days out of the seven the old lady dined on mutton-broth, and the other two on barley-gruel! John told me that he could hardly touch the dinners which Hannah prepared; he is used to have things so very different,” added Mrs. Mullins with professional pride.

“If Hannah’s cooking satisfied master and his son, John might have been satisfied too,” observed Susan.

“Oh, Mr. Trevor is never partic’lar about his food; and as for Master Bruce, John says that he was so much taken up about arrangements, and alterations, and improvements, that he would not have noticed if the stew had been made of old shoes. But Master Vibert, he’s not so easily pleased; he likes his dainty bits, his sauces, and his sweeties; there is some satisfaction in dishing up a dinner for him! He’ll soon find out that this Hannah knows just as much of cooking as I do of cow-milking, and there will be a worrit in the house.” Mrs. Mullins folded her hands complacently at the thought of how much her own valuable services would be regretted, and then inquired, in an altered tone, “Is the captain going to Myst Court with the rest of the party?”

“No; I am sorry to say that the captain leaves this to-morrow,” said Susan. “He is before long to start on another cruise, and as he has much business to do in the docks, he needs to stop for awhile in London. The carriage which takes the captain away is to drop Miss Emmie at the house of her friend, Miss Alice, to whom she wishes to say good-bye. My poor dear young lady! every day brings its good-bye to her now. It will be well when Friday comes, and the move to Myst Court is fairly over.”

“I’d never go into a new house on a Friday; it’s unlucky,” observed Mrs. Mullins, as she turned away and went off to the kitchen.

CHAPTER V. HAUNTED ROOMS

November has come with nights of drizzle and mornings of fog. The dreariness of the weather without adds to the sense of discomfort within the half-dismantled house. The carpet has been taken from the staircase, and the old family clock no longer is heard striking the hours. The drawing-room is much changed in appearance from what it was when the reader was first introduced into the Trevors' cheerful abode. It is evening, and the family are sitting together, with the exception of the master of the house, who is busy in his study with lawyers' papers and parchment deeds before him. The light of the drawing-room lamp falls on a scanty amount of furniture; for sofa, arm-chair, and piano have all been packed up for removal to the new home. No ornament of china, no graceful vase relieves the bareness of the white mantelpiece; the mirror has been taken away, no trace remains of pictures except square marks on the wall. The guitar has vanished from view; the globe of gold-fish is now the property of a friend; the ferns have been sent to the greenhouse of an aunt in Grosvenor Square.

Emmie sits at the table with her lace-work beside her, but her needle is idle. Bruce, the most actively occupied of the party, is drawing plans of cottages, and jotting down in his note-book estimates of expenses. The captain has a book in his hand, but makes slow progress with its contents. Vibert is glancing over a number of *Punch*. The party have been for the last ten minutes so silent that the pattering of the November rain on the window-panes is distinctly heard.

"I hope that we shall not have such weather as this when we go to our new home," said Vibert, as with a yawn he threw down his paper. "The place will need at least sunshine to make it look a degree more lively than a lunatic asylum. 'Tis lucky that our queer old great-aunt did not take it into her head to paint the house black, inside and outside, and put in her will that it must remain so, as a compliment to her husband, who has been dead for the last fifty years. Fancy bricking up the best bed-room!"

"Such an act proves that Mrs. Myers was in a very morbid state of mind," said the captain.

"What a misfortune!" observed Emmie.

"Misfortune! I should rather call it weakness – absurdity," said Bruce, sternly glancing up from his drawing.

"I should call it a sin, a downright sin," cried Vibert. "Such a shame it is to make what might have been a jolly country-house into a sort of rural Newgate! I'm afraid that even our best friends will not care to visit us there. Why, I asked pretty little Alice to-day whether she were coming to brighten us up at Christmas, and she actually answered that she was rather afraid of haunted houses, especially on dark winter nights."

Bruce smiled a little disdainfully; and the captain suggested that perhaps the fair lady was jesting.

"Not a bit of it," answered Vibert; "Alice was as much in earnest as were all our servants when they gave us warning, because not one of them but plucky Susan would go to Myst Court. Why, I'd bet that Emmie herself is shivery-shakery at the idea of the house being haunted, and that she'll not care to walk at night along the passages lest she should meet some tall figure in white."

Emmie coloured, and looked so uncomfortable, that her uncle, who noticed her embarrassment, effected a diversion in her favour by giving a turn to the conversation.

"I have been tracing a parallel in my mind," he observed, "between the human soul and the so-called haunted dwelling. Most persons have in the deepest recess of the spiritual man some secret chamber, where prejudice shuts out the light, where self-deception bricks up the door. Into this chamber the possessor himself in some cases never enters to search out and expel the besetting sin, which, unrecognized, perhaps lurks there in the darkness."

"You speak of our hearts?" asked Emmie.

"I do," replied her uncle. "It is my belief that not one person in ten thousand knows the ins and outs, the dark corners, the hidden chambers, of that which he bears in his own bosom."

"Every Christian must," said Bruce; "for every Christian is bound to practise the duty of self-examination."

"I hope that you don't call every one who does not practise it a heathen or a Turk," cried Vibert. "All that dreadful hunting up of petty peccadilloes, and confessing a string of them at once, is, at least to my notion, only fit work for hermits and monks!"

"We are not talking about confession, but simply about self-knowledge," observed the captain.

"Oh, where ignorance is bliss," began Vibert gaily; but his brother cut short the misapplied quotation with the remark, "Ignorance of ourselves must be folly."

Vibert took up again the comic paper which he had laid down, and pretended to re-examine the pictures. But for the captain's presence the youth would have begun to whistle, to show how little he cared for Bruce's implied rebuke; for, as Vibert had often told Emmie, he had no notion of being "put down" by his brother.

"Do you think it easy to acquire self-knowledge?" asked Arrows, fixing his penetrating glance upon Bruce, who met it with the calm steadiness which was characteristic of the young man.

"Like any other kind of knowledge, it requires some study," replied Bruce Trevor; "but it is not more difficult to acquire than those other kinds of knowledge would be."

"In that you come to a different conclusion from that of the writer of this book," observed Arrows; and he read aloud the following lines from Dr. Goulburn's "Thoughts on Personal Religion," the volume which he held in his hand: —

"One of the first properties of the bosom sin with which it behoves us to be well acquainted, as our first step in the management of our spiritual warfare, is its property of concealing itself. In consequence of this property, it often happens that a man, when touched in his weak point, answers that whatever other faults he may have, this fault, at least, is no part of his character."

The captain read the quotation so emphatically that Vibert again threw down his paper, and listened whilst Arrows thus went on: —

"This circumstance, then, may furnish us with a clue to the discovery: of whatever fault you feel that, if accused of it, you would be stung and nettled by the apparent injustice of the charge, suspect yourself of that fault, in that quarter very probably lies the black spot of the bosom sin. If the skin is in any part sensitive to pressure, there is probably mischief below the surface."

"I doubt that the author is right," observed Bruce. "Besetting sins cannot hide themselves thus from those who honestly search their own hearts."

"Perhaps some search all but the haunted chamber," suggested Vibert. Captain Arrows smiled assent to the observation.

"By way of throwing light on the question," said he, "suppose that each of you were to set down in writing what you suppose to be your besetting sin; and that I — who have watched your characters from your childhood — should also put down on paper what I believe to be the bosom temptation of each. Is it likely that your papers and mine would agree; that the same 'black spot' would be touched by your hands and mine; that we should point out the same identical fault as the one which most easily and frequently besets the soul of each of you three?"

"It would be curious to compare the two papers," cried Vibert. "I wish, captain, that you really would write down what you think of us all. It would be like consulting a phrenological professor, without the need of having a stranger's fingers reading off our characters from the bumps on our heads."

"I am not speaking of the whole character, but of the one sin that most easily besets," said the captain. "Would a close observer's view of its nature agree with that held by the person within whose heart it might lurk?"

“Perhaps not,” said Bruce, after a pause for reflection. “But the person beset by the sin would know more about its existence than the most acute observer, who could judge but by outward signs.”

“That is the very point on which we differ,” remarked Captain Arrows. “The property of the bosom sin is to conceal itself, but only from him to whom the knowledge of its presence would be of the highest importance. I should be half afraid,” the captain added with a smile, “to tell even my nephews and niece what I thought the besetting sin of each, lest they should be ‘stung and nettled by the apparent injustice of the charge,’ and feel, though they might not say it aloud, that ‘whatever other faults they may have, this fault, at least, forms no part of the character in question.’”

The captain’s hearers looked surprised at his words. Vibert burst out laughing. “You must think us a desperately bad lot!” cried he.

“Uncle, I wish that you would write down what you think is the besetting sin of each of us,” said Emmie, “and give the little paper quietly to the person whom it concerns, not, of course, to be read by any one else. I am sure that I would not be offended by anything you would write, and it might do me good to know what you believe to be my greatest temptation.”

“As you are going away to-morrow, you would escape the rage and fury of the indignant Emmie, however ‘stung and nettled’ she might be!” laughed Vibert Trevor. “Now, Bruce,” added the youth sarcastically, “would you not like the captain to inform you confidentially what he considers the tiny ‘black spot’ in your almost perfect character?”

“I have no objection to my uncle’s writing down what he chooses,” replied Bruce coldly. “All that I keep to is this, – neither he nor any other man living can tell me a fact regarding my own character which I have not known perfectly well before.”

“Were I to agree to write down my impressions, it would be to induce you all to give the subject serious reflection,” observed the captain. “It matters little whether I am or am not correct in my conclusions; but it is of great importance that no one should be deceived regarding himself. I wish to lead you to think.”

“Oh, I’ll not engage to do that! I hate thinking; it’s a bore!” cried Vibert gaily. “I know I’m a thoughtless dog, – ah, I’ve hit the ‘black spot’ quite unawares! Thoughtlessness is my besetting sin!”

“My difficulty would be to single out one amongst my many faults,” said Emmie.

“Now that is humbug; you know that it is!” exclaimed her youngest brother. “You have no fault at all, except the fault of being a great deal too good. I should like you better if you were as lively and larky as Alice!”

“Saucy boy!” said Emmie, and she smiled.

“But, captain,” continued Vibert, addressing himself to his uncle, “though we are willing enough to read what you write, we won’t be driven to anything in the shape of confession. You may tell us what is your notion of what lurks in our haunted rooms, but we won’t invite you in and say, ‘Behold there’s my besetting sin!’”

“I want no confessions,” said Captain Arrows. “I repeat that my only object is to induce you to pull down your brickwork, draw back your curtains, and search for yourselves; or, to drop metaphor and speak in plain words, to lead you to make the discovery of the weakest point in your respective characters the subject of candid investigation and serious thought.”

And to a certain degree this desired result was obtained. Though Vibert laughed, and Bruce looked indifferent, to their minds, as well as to that of their sister, the subject of self-knowledge recurred at different parts of the evening.

“I don’t suppose that the captain can look further through a mill-stone than can any one else,” thought Vibert; “yet he has uncommonly sharp eyes, and is always on the watch. No doubt he learned that habit at sea. I am glad that he can detect some fault in Master Bruce, who is a kind of pope in our house, though I, for one, don’t believe in his infallibility. I wonder on what my uncle will fix as the bad spirit in my haunted room. I should say – let me think – I have never thought about the matter before. Well, I don’t take to religion as earnestly as do papa and my elder brother and sister. I don’t go

twice to church on Sundays, nor – if the truth must be owned – do I pay much attention to the service whilst I am there. I'd rather any day read a novel than a serious book. I believe that's the worst I can say of myself. The captain would call that – let me see – would he call that irreligion? No, no; that name is too hard. I'm thoughtless, I own, but certainly not irreligious. Impiety? Why, that is worse still! I do not pretend to be in the least *pious*, but still I'd be ready to knock down any fellow who called me the reverse. I'm something between the two poles. Levity? Ah, that's the word, the precise word to describe my besetting sin, if one can call mere levity a sin. I am no man's enemy but my own; and not my own enemy either, for I spare and indulge myself in every way that I can. Levity may be a fault at sixty, but it's no fault at all at sixteen. I should decidedly object to be as sober as Bruce. He goes on his way like a steady old coach, while I am like a bicycle," – Vibert laughed to himself as the simile occurred to his fancy. "A bicycle is quick, light, not made to carry much luggage, and a little given to coming to smash! Yes, I skim the world like a bicycle, and levity is my worst fault!" Yawning after the unusual effort of even such cursory self-examination, Vibert now set his thoughts free to ramble in any direction, satisfied that nothing of a serious nature could be laid to his charge.

"It is strange that my uncle should imagine that he can penetrate the recesses of the heart of another," such was the reflection of Bruce, as, candle in hand, he mounted the staircase that night. "Captain Arrows can but judge of my character by my outward conduct, and he can have seen but little to find fault with in that. I own – and with regret – that in many points I fail in my duty towards my Maker; but that is a secret between my conscience and God, – a secret which no man can penetrate, and with which no man has a right to meddle. Yet it is evident that my uncle has detected some visible error, whatever that error may be. I am aware that I have a defective temper, but I have lately been gaining some control over that which Calvin called an 'unruly beast.' I may, indeed, have betrayed some impatience in my manner towards Vibert in the presence of my critical uncle," thus flowed on the reflections of Bruce as he entered his room, and closed the door behind him. "I now remember my uncle's remarking to me that I might have more influence with my brother if I showed him greater indulgence. But who can have patience with Vibert's follies?" Bruce set down his candle, and threw himself on a chair. "Vibert has been a spoilt child from his cradle, and now, when nearly seventeen years of age, is no better than a spoilt child still! Our poor dear mother made her youngest-born almost an idol; my father is blind to his faults; Emmie pets and humours him to the top of his bent; and all the world does the same. Vibert is admired, courted, and welcomed wherever he goes, because, forsooth, his face is what girls call handsome, and he can rattle off any amount of nonsense to please them. Vibert does not mind playing the fool, and he plays it to the life!" Bruce paused, and conscience gave a low note of warning to the elder brother. "I am, I fear, harsh in my judgment. Want of charity, that is perhaps my besetting sin. I am too quick to perceive the faults and follies of others. That is a quality, however, which is not without its advantages in a world such as this. I am not easily taken in; mere veneer and gilding will not deceive my eye. I cannot be blind, if I wish it, either to my own faults or to those of others." Bruce thought that he knew himself thoroughly, and that there was no haunted room in his heart which he had not boldly explored.

Emmie Trevor had her heart-searchings as she sat silent before her mirror, while Susan brushed out the long glossy tresses of her young mistress's hair.

"I would fain know what my dear uncle regards as my besetting sin," mused the gentle girl. "I was so foolish as almost to fancy that one so loving and partial as he is would not notice my faults, and I am still more foolish in feeling a little mortified on finding that I was mistaken in this. What defect in my character is most likely to have struck so acute an observer? My uncle cannot possibly know how often my thoughts wander in prayer; how cold and ungrateful I sometimes am even towards Him whom I yet truly love and adore. It is something in my outward behaviour that must have displeased my uncle. Is it vanity?" Emmie raised her eyes to her mirror, and had certainly no reason to be dissatisfied with the face which she saw reflected in the glass. "Yes, I fear that I am vain; I do think myself pretty, and I cannot help knowing that I sing well, – I have been told that so often. Then I have

certainly love of approbation; my uncle may have detected that, for it is so sweet to me to be admired and praised by those whom I love, – and perhaps by others also. This vanity and love of approbation may lead to jealousy, a very decided sin. Did I not feel some slight vexation even at Vibert's playful words about Alice, his wish that I were more like that gay, giddy girl? I find Alice nice enough as a companion, but would certainly never set her up as a model. I am afraid," – thus Emmie pursued the current of her reflections, – "I am afraid that I might be haunted by jealousy, if circumstances gave me any excuse for harbouring a passion so mean, so sinful. I have often thought that for papa to marry again would be to me such a trial. I could hardly bear that any one, even a wife, should be dearer to him than myself. I should grieve at his doing what might really add to his comfort; and oh! is not this selfish, hatefully selfish? It shows that with all my love for my only remaining parent, I care for his happiness less than my own. Certainly selfishness is in my character; it lurks in my haunted chamber, and doubtless my uncle has found it out! Then am I not conscious of giving way to indolence, and harbouring self-will? There are duties which I know to be duties, and yet from the performance of which I am always shrinking, making excuses for my neglect such as conscience tells me are weak and false. Truly mine is a very faulty character, yet am I given to self-deception; the kindness and partiality of every one round me help to blind me to my own faults, and perhaps to draw me into a little hypocrisy, to make each 'black spot' more black."

It will be observed that Emmie was no stranger to self-examination; it was to the maiden no new thing to commune with her heart and be still.

CHAPTER VI.

THREE WARNINGS

"You are right, Bruce; it is certainly desirable for you to go down to Wiltshire to-day to make any needful arrangements, and prepare for our arrival to-morrow," said Mr. Trevor to his son on the following morning, when the family were at the breakfast-table. "New servants will need verbal directions; and you will see to the unpacking of the furniture which I have sent down from this place, and to the most suitable disposal of it in the several rooms of Myst Court." The gentleman rolled up his breakfast-napkin, and slipped it into its ring. "Your train starts at 10.30," he added, as he rose from his seat.

"Is Vibert to go with me?" inquired Bruce, glancing at his brother, who had, as usual, come down late, and was still engaged with his anchovies and muffin.

"I do not think that Vibert would give you much help," observed Mr. Trevor.

"No help at all," exclaimed Vibert quickly. "It may be just in Bruce's line to order and direct, see that there are enough of pots and pans in the kitchen, meat in the larder, and fires all over the house; but as for me –"

"You think it enough to eat the food and enjoy the fire," observed the captain drily.

"And I positively must go to Albert Hall to-night; the Nairns have asked me to make one of their party, and I really could not disappoint them," continued Vibert. "It is quite necessary that I should have a little amusement before going to bury myself in the wilds of Wiltshire. As Moore the poet sings, —

"To-night at least, to-night be gay,
Whate'er to-morrow brings!"

"That's fair enough," observed the indulgent father.

Bruce exchanged a glance with his uncle which conveyed the unuttered thought of both: "It is scarcely fair that one brother should have all the trouble and the other all the amusement." Vibert noticed the look, and laughed.

"Duty first – pleasure afterwards – that's the motto taught to all good little children!" he cried. "Bruce, you are the elder, and like to be first, so you naturally pair off with duty, whilst I am modest enough to be quite contented with pleasure."

Mr. Trevor smiled at the jest, though he shook his bald head in gentle reproof. Then turning to his brother-in-law, he observed, "Edward, I have an early engagement in London, and must be off to the station. I am afraid that I shall not find you here on my return."

"I also start early," said the captain. "Emmie has ordered the conveyance to be at the door at ten. I must therefore wish you good-bye now, thanking you for my pleasant visit to Summer Villa, and hoping next spring to find you all well and happy in your new home."

The brothers-in-law cordially shook hands and parted, Mr. Trevor going off to the station, as usual, on foot.

"I say, Bruce," observed Vibert, "if you have the settling about the rooms at Myst Court, mind that you give me a good one. I like plenty of air and light, and a cheerful view. No poky little cabin for me, nor an attic at the top of the house; long stairs are a terrible bore."

"I shall certainly give my first attention to the accommodation of my father and sister," said Bruce; "they never think of themselves."

"A hit at me, I suppose," cried Vibert with unruffled good-humour. "Ah! that reminds me of our conversation last evening. Captain, have you been hunting up the ghosts in our haunted rooms?" asked the youth as he rose from his place at the breakfast-table.

Arrows replied by drawing forth a memorandum-book from the pocket of his surtout. He unclasped it, and took out from it three minute pieces of paper, neatly folded up and addressed.

"I am going upstairs to look after my luggage," said the captain; "I leave with you – "

"These three private and confidential communications!" cried Vibert, playfully snatching the papers out of his uncle's hand. "Each one, I see, is directed: here's yours, Emmie; yours, Bruce; and here is mine!"

Captain Arrows did not wait to watch the effect produced by his little missives, but quitted the room to complete preparations for his departure.

"I'm of a frank nature," said Vibert; "I don't care if all the world hear my good uncle's opinion of me!" and, unfolding the scrap of paper which he held, the youth read aloud as follows: "*Be on your guard against the Pride that repels advice, resents reproof, and refuses to own a fault.* I don't recognize my likeness in this photo!" cried the youth; "if the portrait had been intended for Bruce," – Vibert turned the paper and looked at the back – "sure enough, it is directed to Bruce; and the captain has hit him off to the life!"

"You made the apparent blunder on purpose," said Bruce with ill-suppressed anger, as he took the paper from Vibert, and then threw it into the fire. Then, after tossing down on the table the unopened note which had been handed to him first, Bruce Trevor turned on his heel, and quitted the apartment.

"Stung and nettled! stung and nettled! does he not wince!" cried Vibert, looking after his brother. "The captain has, sure enough, laid his finger on the sensitive spot!"

"I am so much vexed at your having read that private paper aloud," said Emmie; "it was never intended that we should know its contents."

"It told us nothing new," observed Vibert. "Bruce's pride is as plain as the nose on his face; only, like the nose, it is too close to him – too much a part of himself, for him to see it."

"Bruce is a noble, unselfish, generous fellow!" cried Emmie.

Vibert cared little to hear his brother's praises. "What is in your tiny paper?" he asked, after he had glanced at his own. "Why, Emmie, you look surprised at what our uncle has written. Tell me, just tell me what lurking mischief the sharp-eyed Mentor has ferreted out in you. Some concealed inclination to commit burglary or manslaughter?"

"I do not quite understand what my uncle means," said Emmie, gazing thoughtfully upon the little missive which she had opened and read.

"I could explain it – I could make it clear – just let me see what the oracle has written!" cried Vibert, with mirth and curiosity sparkling in his handsome dark eyes. "I'll tell you in return, Emmie, what he has put in my scrap of paper: *Beware of Selfishness*. Short but not sweet, and rather unjust. I am thoughtless and gay, I care not who says that much; but as for being selfish, it's a slander, an ungenerous slander!"

"Perhaps our uncle has again laid his finger on a sensitive spot," observed Emmie with a smile, but one so gentle that it could not offend.

"I want to know what the fault-finder lays to your charge, what solemn admonition has called up the roses on those fair cheeks!" cried the younger brother; and throwing one arm round Emmie, with his other hand Vibert possessed himself of the paper of the scarcely resisting girl, sharing her surprise as he glanced at the two words written upon it. Those words were —*Conquer Mistrust*.

"Mistrust of what or of whom?" said Vibert. "The oracle has propounded a kind of enigma: as you are going to take a *tête-à-tête* drive with the captain, you will have an opportunity of getting an explanation of your paper. As for mine, it goes after Bruce's – into the fire." Vibert suited the action to the word.

About half-an-hour afterwards the conveyance which was to take Captain Arrows from Summer Villa was driven up to the door. Emmie was ready, as arranged, to accompany her uncle part of the way. John handed up his luggage to be disposed of on the coach-box. Vibert came to the

door to see the guest depart and bid him farewell. "I'll show him," said the youth to himself, "that I bear him no grudge for a warning that was not very necessary, and certainly not very polite."

"Good-bye, captain," cried Vibert, as he shook hands with his uncle; "come to Myst Court next spring, and you and I will make a raid on the haunted chamber."

"Where is Bruce? I have not wished him good-bye," said the captain, pausing when he was about to hand his niece into the carriage.

"Bruce!" called the clear voice of Emmie, as she ran back to the bottom of the staircase to let her brother know that the guest was on the point of departing.

"Bruce!" shouted Vibert with the full strength of his lungs.

There was no reply to either summons, and Emmie suggested that her brother might have gone out, not remembering that the carriage had been ordered so early. After a few minutes' delay, Arrows handed her into the carriage, with the words, "You will bid Bruce good-bye for me."

"None so deaf as those who won't hear," muttered Vibert, when the vehicle had rolled from the door. "Bruce heard us call, but he is in a huff, and did not choose to appear. He *repels advice*, *resents reproof*, and yet won't believe that he's proud! No more, perhaps, than I believe that I'm selfish!"

CHAPTER VII. MISTRUST

"I am so glad to have a little time for quiet conversation with you, dear uncle," said Emmie, as the carriage in which she was seated beside Arrows proceeded along the drive. "I want to ask you," – she hesitated, and her voice betrayed a little nervousness as she went on, – "what it was that you meant when you bade me *conquer Mistrust*?"

"Let me refer you to our old favourite, the Pilgrim's Progress," replied the captain. "In whose company did the dreamer represent Mistrust, when he ran down the Hill of Difficulty to startle Christian with tidings of lions in the way?"

"In the company of Timorous," said Emmie.

"And have you no acquaintance with that personage?" asked the captain.

"Oh, then you only mean that I am a little timid and nervous," said Emmie, a good deal relieved. "That is no serious charge; you let me off too easily."

"Not so fast, my dear child. Let us examine the allegorical personages more closely. Timorous and Mistrust are not only found together, but they are very closely related."

"You would not have me a Boadicea or a Joan of Arc?" asked Emmie, smiling.

"I would have you – what you are – a gentle English maiden; but I would have you *more* than you now are, – that is to say, a trustful Christian maiden," replied Captain Arrows.

"Surely courage is a natural quality, which belongs to some and not to others," observed Emmie Trevor. "Besides, if it be a virtue at all, it is surely a man's rather than a woman's."

"Mere physical courage, such as 'seeks the bubble reputation e'en in the cannon's mouth,' is not a Christian virtue," said the captain; "it may be displayed by infidel or atheist. The courage which *is* a grace, a grace to be cultivated and prayed for, is that childlike trust in a Father's wisdom and love, by which the feeblest woman may glorify her Maker."

"Faith in God's wisdom and love! Oh, you do not surely think that I am so wicked as ever to doubt them! I have many faults, I know, but this one – " Emmie stopped short, startled to find on her tongue almost the very words which had been given as a sign that the bosom sin had been tracked to its lurking-place.

"You remember," said Captain Arrows, "that a few days ago I listened to your singing that fine hymn which begins with the lines, —

'Lord, it belongs not to my care
Whether I die or live.'"

"Yes," replied Emmie Trevor; "and you told me that, much as you admired that hymn, you did not think it suited for my singing. I supposed that you thought it too low for my voice."

"No, I thought it too high for your practice. Could it be consistently sung by one who that morning had been in nervous terror at the scratch of a kitten; one who owned that she would scarcely dare to nurse her best friend through the small-pox; one who, even with my escort, could not be persuaded to cross a field in which a few cows were grazing?"

"Oh, uncle, how can you take such trifles seriously!" cried Emmie, a good deal hurt.

"Because I wish you to take them a little more seriously," replied Captain Arrows. "You have hitherto regarded *unreasonable fear* as an innocent weakness, perhaps as something allied with feminine grace, and not as a foe to be resisted and conquered. I see that fear is at this time throwing a shadow over your path; that you would be happier if you had the power wholly to cast it aside."

"I have not the power," said Emmie. The words had scarcely escaped her lips when she wished them unspoken, for she was ashamed thus to plead guilty to a feeling of superstitious alarm.

“Let us then trace the parentage of unreasonable fear,” said Captain Arrows. “I use the adjective advisedly. There are cases where the nerves are so shattered by illness, or enfeebled by age, that fears come on the mind, as fits on the body, not as a fault but as a heavy affliction. There are also times of extreme and awful danger, such as that of the Indian Mutiny, when faith must indeed have had a dread struggle with fear; though even then, in the hearts of tender women, faith won the victory still. But I am speaking of that fear which common sense would condemn. Such fear is, must be, the offspring of mistrust, and its effects show it to be a tempter and an enemy of the soul.”

“What effects do you mean?” said Emmie.

“These three at least,” answered the captain. “Unreasonable fear hinders usefulness, destroys peace, and prevents our glorifying God.”

“I do not quite see how it should do so,” murmured Emmie.

“It hinders usefulness,” said her uncle; “like indolence, fear is ever seeing ‘a lion in the street.’ Does not fear hang like a clog on the spirit, *making ‘I dare not’ wait upon ‘I would,’* even when duty to God and mercy to man is in question?”

Arrows paused as if for a reply. Emmie gave none; her eyes were gazing out of the carriage window on the smoky veil which hung over the great city which they were approaching; she knew that she dared not do, what thousands of her sex are doing, go as a child of light to carry light into the abodes of darkness. Emmie had owned in her uncle’s presence that she was far too timid to visit the poor.

“Then fear destroys peace,” continued the captain, “and I believe that it does so to a greater extent than does any other passion which troubles the soul, remorse only excepted. If we literally and fully obeyed the command so often repeated in Scripture, to hope and to be not afraid, a mountain of misery would be removed at once and cast into the sea. If you do not mind a personal application of the subject, would you, my dear child, feel uneasy at going to a house which is called haunted, if you realized that God fills all space, and that you are everywhere under His loving protection?”

Emmie still continued silent, looking out of the carriage window. Her feelings were those of deep mortification. That she, earnestly pious as she was, should virtually be accused of want of faith, that her deficiency in this first requisite of religion should have been so glaring as to have attracted the notice of a partial relative, was a trial the more painful from being totally unexpected.

“Bunyan represents Mistrust, the parent of unreasonable fear, as a robber,” pursued the captain, referring again to that allegory which gives so wondrously true a picture of man’s spiritual state. “We first meet Mistrust in company with Timorous, and their object is to discourage, to frighten, to make Christian start back from the perils which would meet him if he pursued the path of duty; when we next hear of Mistrust, he is in company with Guilt, and together they rob Little-faith of his treasure.”

“Yes, mistrust does rob us of our peace,” said Emmie with a sigh.

“And now, let me touch on my third point, even at the risk of giving some pain,” said the captain. “Mistrust not only hinders usefulness, and mars peace, but prevents our glorifying our Maker as we might otherwise do. Is not the inconsistency of His children dishonouring to God? And is it not inconsistent to avow our belief that our Heavenly Father loves us – cares for us – is about our path and our bed, and yet to be as full of unreasonable terrors as if, like the fool, we said ‘there is no God’? The Christian knows that Christ hath ‘abolished death;’ he knows that to depart from earth is to enter into rest; that light, and life, and glory await the redeemed of the Lord. Is it not inconsistent, I repeat, in one who believes all this, to shrink with unconcealed terror from the barest possibility that the time for his going home may be hastened, even a little? The natural effect of strong faith would be to make the righteous ‘bold as a lion.’”

“Uncle, you judge me very hardly,” murmured Emmie, ready to burst into tears.

“I do not judge you, dear child; I only warn you not to cherish, as an inmate, that enemy whom you have hitherto regarded but as a harmless infirmity. Bring him before the bar of reason, bind him with the strong cords of prayer. I have spoken thus frankly to you on this subject, because I foresee

that on your conquest of mistrust, your victory over unreasonable fears, must depend much of your peace, happiness, and usefulness also, in the new home to which you are going. A realizing faith in God's presence, a simple trust in His love, these are the most powerful antidotes against superstitious and all other ill-grounded fears. The light that dispels shadows is the words, *I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me.*"

Captain Arrows had thus given to his sister's children his warning against what, from close observation of their characters, he deemed to be the besetting sin of each, – pride, selfishness, and mistrust. What had been the effect of his words? The monitor had given offence, he had given pain, and in one case, at least, his warning had been as the dropping into a brook of a pebble, that scarcely causes even a ripple. There are few who value gratuitous counsel; the many prefer to buy experience, though it should prove to be at the price of future pain and regret. We are seldom thankful to him who would explore for us the heart's haunted chamber, even should we not possess the candour and moral courage to search its depths for ourselves.

CHAPTER VIII. THE JOURNEY

On the following day Emmie, escorted by Vibert and attended by Susan, started for her new home. Almost at the last moment Mr. Trevor found that important business would, for another day, delay his own departure; but all arrangements for the general move having been made, he would not defer it, preferring for the single night to sleep at a hotel in London.

The bustle of departure took from its pain; Emmie left her dear old home without a tear, though not without a sigh of regret. Vibert was in high spirits, for novelty has its charm, especially to a temperament such as his. Mr. Trevor had given to each of his sons a fishing-rod and a gun; and Vibert was already, in imagination, a first-rate angler and sportsman. It would have been difficult to have been dull in Vibert's company during the journey. Sporting anecdotes, stories of adventures encountered by others, and anticipations of future ones of his own, interspersed with many a jest, amused not only Vibert's sister, but their fellow-travellers in the same railway-carriage. The youth had none of his elder brother's reserve, and took pleasure in attracting the notice of strangers, having a pleasant consciousness that in his case notice was likely to imply admiration also.

"That handsome lad seems to look on life as one long holiday, to be passed under unclouded sunshine," thought a withered old gentleman, who looked as if all his days had been spent in a fog. "Poor boy! poor boy! he will soon be roused, by stern experience, from the pleasant dream in which he indulges now!"

About half-an-hour before sunset, the train in which the Trevors were making their journey approached the station of S – , the one at which they were to alight.

"Your new pony-chaise is to meet us, Emmie, so papa arranged," observed Vibert; "but it must be a commodious chaise if it is to accommodate four persons, and all our lots of luggage. There are three boxes and a carpet-bag of mine in the van, besides I know not how many of yours. Then look here," – Vibert glanced at the numerous *et ceteras* which showed that the young travellers had understood how to make themselves comfortable; "here's a shawl, and a rug, and foot-warmer, a basket, a bag, three umbrellas, and a parasol, my hat-box, and a fishing-rod besides! Are all to be stowed away in the chaise? If so, it will need nice packing."

"Bruce was to order a fly," said Emmie.

"If he was to do it, he has done it," observed Vibert; "one may count upon him as upon a church-clock. Now if I had had the arranging, I should have been so much taken up with trying the new pony-chaise, that I should have forgotten all about the old rattle-trap needed to carry the boxes. I wish that we had riding-horses. I shall never give papa peace till he buys me a hunter."

The shrill railway whistle gave notice of approach to a station; the train slackened its speed, and then stopped; doors were flung open, and a number of passengers soon thronged the platform of S – .

"There is Bruce; he is looking out for us!" cried Emmie, as she stepped on the platform.

"Where is the pony-chaise?" asked Vibert, addressing his brother, who immediately joined the party. Susan was left to collect, as best she might, the numerous articles left in the railway-carriage.

"A lad is holding the pony just outside the station, and the fly is in waiting also," was the answer of Bruce. "Where is the luggage, Vibert? the train only stops for five minutes at S – ."

"Susan will tell you all about it," cried Vibert; "I've a bag and three boxes, one of them a gun-case, stowed away in the van. Mind that nothing is missing. Come, Emmie, I must get you out of the crowd," and, drawing his sister's arm within his own, Vibert rapidly made his way to the outside of the station, where a pretty basket-chaise, drawn by a white pony, was waiting.

"In with you, quick, Emmie!" cried Vibert, with the eager impatience of one about to effect an escape. No sooner had the young lady taken her seat than Vibert sprang in after her, seized the

reins, caught up the whip, and calling to the lad who had acted as hostler, "My brother will pay you," gave a sharp cut to the pony, which made the spirited little animal bound forward at a speed which raised a feeling of alarm in the timorous Emmie.

"Stop, Vibert, stop! you must not drive off; you must wait for Bruce!" she exclaimed.

"I'll wait for no one!" cried Vibert, still briskly plying the whip. "Bruce would be wanting to drive; but this time he has lost the chance, – ha! ha! ha! There's my brave little pony, does he not go at a spanking pace?"

"I wish that you would not drive so fast, it frightens me!" cried Emmie.

"Frightens you! nonsense, you little coward! Don't you see that thick bank of clouds in which the sun is setting? We'll have a thunderstorm soon, and that will frighten you more."

"Oh, I hope and trust that the storm will not burst till we reach shelter!" cried Emmie, whose dread of thunder and lightning is already known to the reader.

"We are running a race with it, and we'll be at the winning-post first!" exclaimed Vibert, who was enjoying the excitement, and who was rather amused than vexed to see his sister's alarm.

"But, Vibert, you don't even know the way to Myst Court! Oh, I wish that you had waited for Bruce!"

It had never occurred to the thoughtless lad that he might be driving in a wrong direction; so long as the pony went as fast as Vibert wished, he had taken it for granted that Myst Court would soon be reached. The station had been left far behind; the road was lonesome and wild; only one solitary boy was in sight; he was engaged in picking up boughs and twigs which a recent gale had blown down from the trees which bordered the way.

"We'll ask yonder bare-footed bundle of rags to direct us," said Vibert, and he drew up the panting pony when he reached the spot where the boy was standing.

"I say, young one, which is the way to Myst Court?" asked Vibert in a tone of command.

The boy stared at him, as if unaccustomed to the sight of strangers.

"Are we on the right road to the large house where Mrs. Myers used to live?" inquired Emmie.

"Ay, ay, but you'll have to turn down yon lane just by the stile there," said the urchin, pointing with his brown finger, and grinning as if a chaise with a lady in it were a rare and curious sight.

"I don't believe that the rustic could have told us whether to turn to left or right," said Vibert, as he whipped on the pony. "If he's a fair specimen of my father's tenants, we shall feel as if we had dropped down on the Fiji Islands."

The direction given by the finger was, however, perfectly clear, and the Trevors were soon driving along a picturesque lane, where trees, still gay with autumnal tints, overarched the narrow way, and with their brown and golden leaves carpeted the sod beneath them.

"What a pretty rural lane!" exclaimed Emmie, as the chaise first turned off from the high-road; but admiration was soon forgotten in discomfort and fear. The lane was apparently not intended as a thoroughfare for carriages, at least in the season of winter. The ground was miry and boggy, and the pony with difficulty dragged the chaise. There were violent jerks when one side or other dropped into one of the deep ruts left by the wheels of the last cart that had passed that way. Vibert plied the whip more vigorously than before, and silenced his sister's remonstrances by remarking how darkly the clouds were gathering in the evening sky. Young Trevor was but an inexperienced driver, and ever and anon the chaise was jolted violently over some loose stones, or driven so near to the hedge that Emmie had to bend sideways to avoid being struck by straggling bramble or branch. She mentally resolved never again to trust herself to Vibert's driving.

"Will this lane never come to an end?" exclaimed Emmie, as the first heavy drop from an overshadowing mass of dark cloud fell on her knee. She was but imperfectly protected from rain; for Vibert, in his haste to dash off from the station before his brother could join him, had never thought of taking with him either umbrella or shawl for his sister.

“Here comes the rain with a vengeance, and this stupid beast flounders in the mud as if it were dragging a cannon instead of a chaise,” cried Vibert. “These country lanes drive one out of all patience! Ha! there’s the rumbling of distant thunder!”

“Oh! I trust that we shall reach home soon,” exclaimed Emmie, who, exposed to the heavy downpour, shivered alike from cold and from fear.

“I suspect that we shall never reach home at all by this lane,” said Vibert. “Take my word for it, that little wretch has directed us wrong; I have a great mind to turn the pony round, and get back to the high-road.”

“You can’t turn, the lane is too narrow; you would land us in the hedge!” exclaimed Emmie, who thought that the attempt would inevitably lead to an upset of the chaise. On struggled the steaming pony, down poured the pattering rain; Vibert, almost blinded by the shower and the gathering darkness, could scarcely see the road before him.

“The longest lane has a turning, – there is an opening before us at last!” exclaimed the young driver, as a turn in the winding road brought a highway to view. “We shall reach Myst Court like two drowned rats. Why on earth did you not bring an umbrella, Emmie? I could not think of everything at once.” Vibert had, indeed, thought but of himself.

The want of an umbrella was to Emmie by no means the worst part of her troubles; she was afraid that her brother had indeed been misdirected, and that they might be lost and benighted in a part of the country where they as yet were strangers, exposed to the perils of a thunderstorm, from which the nervous girl shrank with instinctive terror. Emmie had never hitherto even attempted to overcome her fear; and though her uncle’s words now recurred to her mind, the idea of encountering a thunderstorm after nightfall, without even a roof to protect her, put to flight any good resolutions that those words might have roused in her mind.

“There was a flash!” exclaimed Emmie, starting and putting her hands before her eyes. She pressed closer to her brother as if for protection.

“We shall have more soon; the storm comes nearer,” was the little comforting reply of Vibert. As he ended the sentence, the thunder-clap followed the flash. The pony pricked up his ears, and quickened his pace.

“I am glad that we are out of this miserable mouse-hole at last,” cried Vibert, pulling the left rein sharply as the light vehicle emerged from the narrow, miry lane into the broad and comparatively smooth highway.

At this moment the darkening landscape was suddenly lighted up by a flash intensely bright, followed almost immediately by a peal over the travellers’ heads. The terrified Emmie shrieked, and, losing all presence of mind, caught hold of her brother’s arm. The sharp turning out of the lane, the pony’s start at the flash, and the sudden grasp on the driver’s arm, acting together, had the effect which might have been expected. Down went pony and chaise, down went driver and lady, precipitated into the ditch which bordered the high-road.

CHAPTER IX. NEW ACQUAINTANCE

Vibert shouting for help, Emmie shrieking, the pony kicking and struggling in vain attempts to scramble out of the ditch, rain rattling, thunder rolling, all made a confused medley of sounds, while the deepening darkness was ever and anon lit up by lightning-flashes.

“Oh, Vibert! dear Vibert! are you hurt?” cried the terrified Emmie, with whom personal fear did not counterbalance anxiety for her young brother’s safety.

“I’m not hurt; I lighted on a bramble-bush; I’ve got off with a few scratches,” answered Vibert, who had regained the road. “But where on earth are you, Emmie? Can’t you manage to get up?”

“No,” gasped Emmie; “the chaise keeps me down. Oh, there is the lightning again!” and she shrieked.

“Never mind the lightning,” cried Vibert impatiently. “How am I to get the pony on his legs? he’s kicking like mad; and, oh! do stop screaming, Emmie, you’re enough to drive any one wild. It was your pull and your shrieking that did all the mischief.”

Vibert had had little experience with horses, and to release, almost in darkness, a kicking pony from its traces, or set free a lady imprisoned by an overturned chaise, were tasks for which he had neither sufficient presence of mind nor personal strength. Glad would the poor lad then have been to have had Bruce beside him, Bruce with his firm arm and his strong sense, and that quiet self-possession which it seemed as if nothing could shake. Vibert felt in the emergency as helpless as a girl might have done. Now he pulled at the upturned wheel of the chaise, but without lifting it even an inch; then he caught up the whip which had dropped from his hand in the shock of the fall, but he knew not whether to use it would not but make matters worse. Vibert ran a few paces to seek for assistance, stopped irresolute, then hurried back, thinking it unmanly to leave his sister alone in her helpless condition.

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