

ELLEN

WALLACE

MARGARET

CAPEL, VOL. 1

Ellen Wallace
Margaret Capel, vol. 1

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Ellen Wallace

Margaret Capel: A Novel, vol. 1 of 3

"One of the best kind of fashionable novels, not only free from the vulgar impertinences of the 'silver-fork school,' but has the tone of good society, and better still, a vein of pure and healthful sentiment. The grave incidents of the story are treated with good taste and genuine pathos, but enlivened by very amusing scenes, in which the ridiculous and vicious peculiarities of character, so often met with in real life, are cleverly hit off with a pencil which emulates the witty drollery of caricature without its coarseness."

—*Spectator*.

"A very superior work. Without the coarseness of Mrs. Trollope's writings, it has all her vigour and rapidity of narrative, with touches of ideal grace and beauty, and a perception of the elevating impulses of the heart to which that lady seems utterly a stranger. It might almost be called a dramatic novel, for the characters and story are developed in a series of animated conversations which are sustained with remarkable power, distinctness, and variety. The descriptive portions of the work are written with much elegance."

—*John Bull*.

CHAPTER I

And he had ever on his lip some word of mockery.
MAISTRE WACE.

*Therefore whenever that thou dost behold
A comely corse with beauty fair endewed,
Know this for certain, that the same doth hold
A beauteous soul, with fair conditions thewed;
Fit to receive the seed of vertue strewed,
For all that fair is, is by nature good;
That is a sign to know the gentle blood.*

SPENSER.

"Left guardian to her, are you?" said Mr. Casement, looking with an expression of much satisfaction at his friend Mr. Grey.

"I told you so three months ago," returned Mr. Grey, in a tone of voice that betrayed his vexation.

"I have been very busy for these three months, and forgot all about it," said Mr. Casement.

"I thought you never were busy, Casement," remarked Mr. Grey.

"One of your mistakes," returned Mr. Casement, as if Mr. Grey's mistakes were a synonyme for the dullest of all possible blunders. "Why, you seem to have the luck of it; you are always being made guardian, or executor, or what not."

"I know I am," said Mr. Grey, looking more and more cold, and vexed, and peevish; and rubbing his knee with great perseverance, as he drew closer to the fire; "but never before to a girl."

"What has become of the two young Trevors?"

"One of them drowned near Ilfracombe the summer before last—the other in India."

"Can't you marry her to one of them?"

"Which?" asked Mr. Grey shortly, "they are both equally within my reach."

"I thought there was another—Alfred Trevor?"

"He is married already."

"And how old is the girl?"

"Seventeen, I told you."

"When did you close accounts with young Haveloc?"

"Last Christmas, didn't you know?"

"I forgot. Sharp work, Master Grey, upon my word. If you are to have a ward every year, I don't envy you. As well open a boarding-school at once. That is the good," continued Mr. Casement, turning round and addressing the fire, "that is the good of being a single man; he is bothered with every body's children. Now, I never was appointed guardian in my life. You had better, my good friend," said he, turning again to Mr. Grey, "you had better cajole Master Haveloc to take the young lady off your hands as quickly as possible. There is an arrangement which would please all parties."

"I have a great regard for young Haveloc," said Mr. Grey seriously; "and I don't wish him so ill as to force a wife upon him. I never saw any good come of making matches. Margaret Capel is nearer to me than the Trevors, who are only second cousins. She is my own sister's child. She will inherit my property in all likelihood, and then she will find no difficulty in obtaining a husband without the disgrace of going in search of one."

"That's a long speech," remarked Mr. Casement.

Mr. Grey made no reply to this statement.

"That is to say," resumed Mr. Casement, "if you don't leave your money to a hospital."

"I have no intention of leaving a doit to any hospital in the world," said Mr. Grey.

"But Master Haveloc would make her a nice husband," said Mr. Casement maliciously, "you have heard of the pretty things he has been doing at Florence."

"Yes," replied Mr. Grey shortly.

There was no excuse for repeating the "pretty things," as Mr. Grey professed to recollect them; and Mr. Casement looked a little baffled for a moment.

"Mrs. Maxwell Dorset must be a delightful woman," said he, at length. "It is a pity Haveloc could not manage to run off with her."

"Do you think so?" retorted Mr. Grey, still more shortly.

"He don't do you much credit," resumed his provoking companion, "I am afraid you did not bring him up in the way he should go."

"I did not bring him up at all," replied Mr. Grey. "I had the direction of him, or his affairs, for a couple of years, from nineteen to twenty-one. There began and there ended my control."

"And so," said Mr. Casement, "you expect Miss Peggy here every minute."

"I expect my niece, Margaret, to arrive before nine o'clock."

"Fresh from a boarding-school, good luck!" exclaimed Mr. Casement, "with her head full of sweethearts. You must go over to S—, and call upon the red-coats, only you must get a better cook, let me tell you, or they won't come very often to dine with you. I thought the *fondue* worse than ever to-day. Miss will never want amusement as long as there is a lazy fellow to be found, with a spangled cap on his head, to go about sketching all the gate-posts, far and near, and keep her guitar in tune."

Mr. Grey employed himself busily during this harangue in making up the fire; then suddenly dropped the poker and started. A carriage stopped at the door. Now, he had been cross, not because he was expecting his sister's child; but because he did not know what on earth to do with her when she came.

He hurried out into the hall regardless of the wintry wind, and received the new comer in his arms.

"You are kindly welcome, my dear, to Ashdale," he said, as he led her into the drawing-room. "Casement, this is my niece, Miss Capel."

"Well, I suspected as much," said Mr. Casement, staring into her bonnet; "and now the first question to be determined is—who is she like?"

"I am considered like my mother," said Margaret, in a very quiet sweet voice, laying aside her bonnet as she spoke, almost as if to facilitate Mr. Casement's impertinent scrutiny; but with so self-possessed a manner as to perplex even his degree of assurance.

"Why then your mother was—a very pretty creature, that's all," said Mr. Casement, turning away.

Most persons would have been disposed to echo Mr. Casement's remark, as Margaret brought to view a profusion of bright hair of a rich deep brown, falling in low bands over cheeks of velvet softness, where the warm colour glowed like gathered rose leaves upon the pure white surface, a small accurate nose, short curved lips, as red and almost as transparent as rubies; and long almond-shaped blue eyes, with a fringe of black lashes curved outwards from the upper and under lid, so as to deepen and almost change the colour of the eye itself.

While Mr. Casement was taking note of these particulars, Mr. Grey placed his niece beside him close to the fire; and rang for tea, with such accompaniments as he thought might be acceptable to her after her long journey.

Margaret, who had been attentively perused by the two gentlemen, now took a survey of them in return, although in a more guarded manner. Mr. Grey was a small, quiet old gentleman, with a thin, pale face, wearing his white hair cut almost close to the head; very mild and pleasing in his address,

with a little of the kind and polished formality of the old school. She thought she never had seen so hideous an old man as Mr. Casement, with his snaky grey and sandy hair, his ragged teeth and long projecting upper lip. As he sat, with the lamp on the other side of his head, the exaggerated shadow traced upon the wall perfectly amazed her when she reflected that it belonged to a human creature. She then looked with some curiosity at the room, which was large though not lofty, with dark oak panels, and heavy crimson curtains; all the furniture was of carved oak and crimson velvet, which gave a rich but somewhat gloomy appearance to the apartment.

"You are very hungry, ain't you, little woman?" said Mr. Casement, who generally knew exactly what would most annoy those to whom he spoke. A school-girl never likes to be thought very hungry; and as Margaret was not tall, she was extremely sensitive to her small stature. With hands and arms like a Greek nymph, and a small round neck that would have delighted a sculptor, she envied every girl in the school, however ugly, who measured any thing above her own five feet two inches. She was very shy, with all her apparent self-possession; and she sat deeply colouring, first at the imputation of being hungry, and secondly with a distressing consciousness that she ought, as the only lady present, to offer her services in making the tea, instead of allowing the old butler to prepare it.

The tea being made, and Mr. Grey informed of the fact, the butler withdrew; and then Mr. Casement remarked that the little girl would pour it out, and it would be good practise against she grew to be a woman, and had a house of her own.

Margaret went to the tea-table, and Mr. Casement followed her to explain his peculiar fancies. "That large cup is mine," he said, "give me four lumps of sugar, and put the cream in first; it makes all the difference."

She complied with his directions in silence; but she turned to Mr. Grey and asked if she had made his tea right for him, in that soft low voice which is in itself a courtesy.

"Quite right, my dear," said Mr. Grey, "a great deal better than when Land makes it."

"And so, you left school to-day;" said Mr. Casement, as soon as tea was over.

"Yesterday," replied Margaret, "I went as far as Winchester with a school-fellow, and staid all night there, and came on here to-day."

"Are you sorry you have left school?"

"No, Sir."

"What—did you not like it?"

"Not much, Sir."

"How's that? Were you a naughty girl, eh? Did you not learn your lessons?"

"Yes, Sir, I learned my lessons."

"Why did you not like school, my dear?" asked Mr. Grey, kindly.

"Didn't give her enough to eat, I dare say!" exclaimed Mr. Casement.

"Quite enough, Sir," replied Margaret; "but I felt I was wasting my time there."

"Ay!" cried Mr. Casement, delighted at the reply; "no young sparks there, eh? No inamoratos! A little in the convent style, is it not? Ugly old music master, ditto drawing, and dancing taught by a lady!"

"Don't mind him, my dear," said Mr. Grey, taking Margaret's hand in his, "tell me about it."

Although the indignant blood flashed fast over neck and brow, Margaret made no answer to Mr. Casement, but turned to Mr. Grey.

"I was learning words all day, Sir," she replied, "and music; they gave me no time for thinking. I should be sorry if there was no more to learn than what they teach at school."

"You will have plenty of time here for thinking, little woman," said Mr. Casement, "for hardly a soul ever crosses his threshold; but I am afraid you will have nobody to think about, if you have not a spark already, I don't know where you are to find one. Such a neighbourhood for young men!"

"There are as many young men hereabouts as there are in other places, I suppose," said Mr. Grey. "What has become of the young Gages?"

"He lives in the Ark," said Mr. Casement, pointing to Mr. Grey. "The Gages are all flown. George is in Ireland, and Everard in Canada, and Hubert I hope from my heart at the bottom of the sea! But they won't do for you, my dear, naughty, swearing troopers. You don't like troopers, do you?"

"I don't know any, Sir," returned Margaret.

"I thought Hubert Gage was a sailor?" said Mr. Grey.

"Right as my glove," said Mr. Casement, "so he is, I forgot. I hate the Gages. George Gage drew a caricature of me; and Everard used to take me off to my face; and Hubert, he used to bolt out of my way as if I was poison. I have known him jump out of the parlour window as I came in at the door."

Margaret found nothing singular in the conduct of the young Gages, she only wondered what a caricature of Mr. Casement could be like.

"The only one of the family worth any thing is Elizabeth. I mean Elizabeth for my second," said Mr. Casement.

This remark let Margaret into the secret that he had one wife to begin with, a thing she would otherwise have thought impossible.

"Though I don't know, now I have seen you," he said turning to Margaret.

"Casement, be quiet; you shall not teaze my child," said Mr. Grey, drawing Margaret towards him as he marked the angry flush again rise to her brow.

Neither of them were prepared for what followed—she burst into a passion of tears.

Mr. Grey passed his hand over her hair, and pressed her closer to him. Mr. Casement was confused.

"I am really very sorry I have made you cry—I am, indeed," he said.

"You did not, Sir," returned Margaret, becoming calm by a single effort, and wiping the tears from her bright eyes.

"What was it then, my darling?" asked Mr. Grey.

"You said, 'my child,' and it is so very long since—" A choking in her throat prevented her finishing the sentence.

"Well, I'm glad it was not my fault," said Mr. Casement. "Good night, I must be going homeward, or my old woman will scold."

"Does he come here very often, Sir?" asked Margaret, looking up into Mr. Grey's face, as Mr. Casement closed the door after him.

"Yes, he does, my dear," replied the old gentleman; "but you need not mind that. You will get used to his ways, and he does not mean any harm."

CHAPTER II

*Ma chi conosce amor, e sua possanza
Fará la scusa dí quel cavaliero
Ch' amor il senno, el' intelletto avanza,
Ne giova al provveder arte, o pensiero;
Giovanni e vecchi vanno a la sua danza,
La bassa plebe col signor altiero;
Non ha rimedio amor, se non la morte,
Ciascun prende d' ogni gente, e d' ogni sorte.*

BOIARDO.

When Mr. Grey came down to breakfast the next morning, he found Margaret sitting close by the fire reading from a large book. She advanced to greet him, half shy, half smiling, and looked more fresh and softly beautiful from a long and undisturbed night's rest. As soon as Mr. Grey had inquired, with scrupulous care, how she had slept, and whether she had found everything comfortable in her room, he begged to know what book it was she had been reading. It was Josephus. He laughed a little, and stroked her hair, and told her not to read too much for fear of spoiling her good looks; but he was glad, he said, that she liked reading, because he lived very much alone. He was a great invalid, and unable to pay visits, or receive company. As he spoke he led her to the window, and remarked that there was but a dreary prospect for her at present; but that in summer she would find the grounds very pretty.

Immediately under the windows the men were sweeping the snow from a broad terrace. Beyond that, lay a wide lawn, dotted with clumps of shrubs, and skirted by magnificent cedars, whose boughs lay darkly upon the whitened grass.

Margaret was sure the garden must be beautiful in summer. She wished to know if there were many flower-beds, and whereabouts the violets grew, and the lilies of the valley.

Mr. Grey was very much amused by her questions, though he hardly knew how to answer them; but as he had some curiosity in his turn, he asked her, as they sat at breakfast, what made her wish to read Josephus, and whether she had not learned Sacred History at school?

"Yes," she said, "but that consisted of Bible stories, which she had rather read from the Bible itself. She had heard of Josephus, and she thought she should find there what she wanted to know of the Jews between the Old and New Testaments."

"And had she not read," Mr. Grey asked, "about the Greeks and Romans?"

"Yes; but she wished to know something of the States which had existed before the foundation of Rome, and particularly the Etruscans. And she had read nothing upon Grecian art or poetry. She felt," she said, "that she knew very little."

Mr. Grey could not forbear a smile as he thought of Mr. Casement's prophecy about his niece. He imagined that he should not be compelled to call in the aid of the red-coats to amuse her, if her researches fell upon Etruscan relics, or the dythyrambics of the early Greek bards. He puzzled a short time in silence, and then said he had forgotten all those things; but he would introduce her to the Vicar, who was his only visitor except Mr. Casement; and the Vicar was a very good-natured man, and would, he was sure, explain to her every thing she wished to know. He only hoped she would not find herself very dull. There was a piano in the drawing-room, and he had a fine organ in the gallery up stairs.

"An organ!" cried Margaret, her eyes sparkling with delight. "Oh, Sir! may I try to play on it?"

"Yes," Mr. Grey said, "she might if the gallery was warm enough. He would ring and ask Land if it was safe for her."

Land's answer was satisfactory, and he was directed to wait on Miss Capel in the gallery; and then Mr. Grey said that he was going to be busy all the morning, and that she might walk with Land whenever she pleased; and that Land would be very glad and proud to take care of her.

So Margaret was left, with the beauty of a Juliet, and an old butler for her nurse, to do as she liked with herself from ten in the morning till seven at night. But what a luxury was this compared to the irksome restraint of a school. She was her own mistress. She might learn what she pleased, walk out when she liked, go to sleep if she had a mind—and play the organ!

She was as impatient "as a child before some festival" till she had tried this organ. The grey-haired servant smiled to see her stand chafing her hands with eagerness, her parted lips disclosing her glittering teeth, as he pulled out the stops, and prepared the noble instrument.

"And who ever plays on it here, Land?" asked Margaret, as she took her place before the keys.

"Nobody but Mr. Warde, our Vicar, Miss Capel," said the butler, "sometimes he comes here and runs over a few psalm tunes."

"Is he an old man?"

"Yes, Miss Capel, older than Mr. Grey."

"Perhaps he will tell me how to use these pedals. Do you know what that note is?"

"No, Ma'am, I do not."

"Well, I will leave alone the pedals, give me Judas Maccabæus, that thin book; and let me have the trumpet stop. Oh, dear, it is all trumpet! What shall I do for a bass?"

"Take the choir-organ, Miss Capel."

"So I will, you do know something about it. What is this thing? A swell? Oh! this is what we should call a pedal. I see I shall make nothing of it by myself. I'll try if I can play Luther's hymn."

"Very well—very well; a little too staccato, young lady. Keep your left hand down."

Margaret sprang from the organ in a panic. Mr. Grey had brought Mr. Warde to see her. But he was such a delightful looking old man, with long white hair falling over his collar, and such a benevolent expression of face, that Margaret felt acquainted with him directly. He gave her a good lesson on the organ to her great delight. Let her into the secret of stops, and pedals and swell, and told her she was the quickest scholar he had ever had; and yet he had taught quick pupils too. "That young man, Mr. Haveloc," he said, turning to Mr. Grey, "who had such a fancy for the organ; it was surprising how he improved in those few months he spent with you. What has become of him lately?"

Mr. Grey said he believed he was on his road to England.

Mr. Warde, who was seated at the organ, began to play the Kyrie of one of Mozart's Masses. Talking of Mr. Haveloc, he said, had put him in mind of it—it had been one of his favourite movements. He had a taste for the highest order of musical composition, that seemed to be very rare among Englishmen, indeed, Mr. Warde said, he had thought him full of fine qualities.

"A mingled yarn," said Mr. Grey.

"So we are all," said Mr. Warde, "so we are all." He glanced at Margaret as he spoke, and seeing her seated in one of the deep window seats, looking eagerly through a volume of Masses, he took it for granted that she was out of hearing, while she listened in breathless silence to every word of the conversation that followed.

"And now that he has left Florence," said Mr. Warde, "I trust we may conclude that the influence of that designing woman has ceased."

"No doubt," replied Mr. Grey, uneasily. He did not seem as if he liked referring to the subject, and he began to pull out the stops and put them in again, as if his thoughts were occupied by one engrossing topic.

"How greatly the world fails in its measurement of a character like his," said Mr. Warde.

"True—true," returned Mr. Grey.

"Proud, susceptible, extreme in every thing, and easily deceived from the very integrity of his own nature. I can scarcely picture to myself a character more likely to become the dupe of an unprincipled woman; for while her vanity prompted her to make him her slave, he firmly believed that her heart was devoted to him, and a mistaken sense of justice impelled him to return her supposed regard."

"You know that he did not elope with her," said Mr. Grey.

"So I heard," replied Mr. Warde; "but it was said that the husband intercepted them."

"Her tame husband," remarked Mr. Grey, "there was no duel."

"Thank God for that!" said Mr. Warde, "matters were quite bad enough."

All this passed in a very low voice, but Margaret listened with all her might, and caught nearly the whole of the discourse. The iniquitous conversation of a boarding-school had rendered her no stranger to histories like the present; but she had rather considered them in the light of improper fictions, which it was very naughty in the girls to talk about, than as some of the actual occurrences of life, such as might be discussed by two grave old men like those before her. She looked at the music-book which she held in her hand, and seeing the name of Claude Haveloc on the title-page, she laid it aside, and resolved to play from her own music in future. She was in many respects a remarkable little creature.

It might be reckoned one of the greatest advantages of her earlier life, that she had not been sent to school until the death of her mother, which took place when she was fourteen years old. Until that time she had been well and delicately brought up. Her father, a Colonel in the Company's service, had sent her to a highly respectable school, intending at the end of three years to return to England, and place her at the head of his house; but not long afterwards, he was killed in an engagement under circumstances that in Europe would have exalted his name to the stars, but which never transpired beyond the confines of the distant province in which it took place; if we except a brief and inaccurate statement in the papers, coupled with a hasty regret that the Company should have lost an efficient servant.

The school he had chosen for his daughter was a religious and remarkably select academy; but there were plenty of spare minutes during the day, when the young ladies could tell each other who had looked at them at church, and who they could not help smiling at when they took their daily walk. While the girls were discussing the eyes and waistcoats of the young men they knew by sight, Saint Margaret, as she was called, would steal away to her books, and endeavour by study to drive from her head the trifling conversations that went on around her.

Still, histories like the one hinted at, possessed to her imagination a fearful interest. She regarded Love as a mysterious agency which swept into its vortex all those who suffered themselves to approach its enchanted confines. She imagined that the first steps to this delusion might be avoided; but that once entranced, the helpless victim followed the steps of the blind leader through danger, or neglect, or guilt, without the will or the power to shake off its deadly influence. She had much to learn and to unlearn.

"But what was that affair in Calabria? Not another entanglement, I hope," said Mr. Warde, content in seeing Margaret still at the window arranging her books.

"Oh! that was a harmless affair enough," said Mr. Grey; "if you mean that encounter with the brigands?"

"I heard something of brigands," said Mr. Warde, "and something about a lady and her daughter."

"Aye—aye! the lady and daughter had taken shelter in a hut, having received intelligence that there were brigands on the road. It was a lonely spot, and you may suppose that Haveloc and his servant, chancing to come up at the time, were pressed into their service. The brigands were as good as their word, and did come; but found the hut so well lined that they marched off again. Still, in the scramble, Haveloc was hurt by a shot from one of their carbines, which I dare say rendered him very

interesting in the eyes of the ladies. I think he mentioned in one of his letters to me, that he fell in again with them at Sorrento; but I imagine that they were nothing more than a passing acquaintance. That was before his stay at Florence."

"Oh, yes! a very satisfactory version of the business," said Mr. Warde; "but I must now be going. I have a sick person to visit. Good bye, Miss Capel. I expect you to be wonderfully improved by the time I come again."

Margaret rose, bade the old gentleman good bye, and offered him her best thanks for his kind instructions.

As soon as she was left alone, she began to think over all she had heard. She felt as if she had been transplanted into the regions of romance—so strange was it to think that Mr. Grey actually knew somebody who had defended two ladies against an attack of brigands, and been wounded in the contest. This somebody, it was true, was very wicked; but still so very brave, that she could not but admit she should like to see him of all things. She thought he must resemble one of Byron's heroes, and she detected herself wondering whether he had blue eyes or brown.

She was interrupted in her reverie by Land, who begged to know whether she would like to walk; and advised her to wrap up very warm, for it was a bitter frost.

Her heart beat with delight as she hurried on her furs, and ran down the great staircase to meet her old escort. She felt free as air, she could walk exactly which way she liked, with only a servant behind her, instead of being linked arm-in-arm during the whole promenade with some young lady, who was uninteresting if not disagreeable as a companion. It was as Land had predicted, a bitter frost; her breath whitened her veil, and the ground felt like granite under her feet. Every thing around had been transformed, as Ariel says, "into something rich and strange." The trees stood like coral groves; every branch thickly crusted with sparkling crystals; every brook was ice-bound; every roof pendant with icicles. The sharp air seemed filled with a visible brightness. The pale blue sky appeared to have receded into a farther distance, and the silent fields and hill-side deserted by the grazing flocks, presented an unbroken extent of dazzling snow. Margaret bounded forward with an elasticity of spirit that seemed as if it could never tire. She could not sympathise with old Land when he begged her to walk a little slower; but she wrapped her furs more closely round her, and complied. She had a thousand questions to ask as they proceeded. She must know who lived in every house they passed, and the direction of every road and narrow lane that crossed the highway.

Mr. Land passed over the village dwellings very slightly; but when they came in view of a large white house standing on the river-side with broad lawns and clustering elms, he pointed it out to her with an air of great dignity.

"That seat, Chirke Weston, belongs to Captain Gage. Quite the gentleman, Miss Capel."

The father of the young Gages who disliked Mr. Casement. Margaret looked with much interest at the white walls of the house.

"They are expecting home, Mr. Hubert," said Land, "such a fine young gentleman. A sailor like his father—they are a fine family. Miss Gage is the handsomest young lady in the county."

Margaret felt interested in the Gage family, she begged Land to point out to her where they sat at church, that she might know them by sight. They came to some fields which took them another way to Ashdale.

"Is this field, my uncle Grey's?" asked Margaret, "what a large pond! I say, Land, when I was a little girl I could skate very well. Could you get me a pair of skates? I will give you the money."

Land looked very grave; but Margaret coaxed and begged so much, that he said he would see about it; and the next morning a small pair of skates was laid beside her shoes outside her bed-room door.

The frost continued: she hurried over her organ practice; and went down to the pond with Land. Her skates were on in a moment; and had there been any spectators, they might have enjoyed the sight of an old man holding a young lady's muff and boa, while she amused herself by skimming

over the ice. She was never weary. Poor old Land walked up and down the side of the pond with his hands in her muff, wishing every minute that she would bring her sport to a conclusion, until he was forced to tell her that his time was up, for he had to go in and see to the cleaning of the plate. The next day she managed to go out earlier, for the frost was still hard, and she determined to make the most of it while it lasted.

She excited the unqualified approbation of Land by her performance, for, as she bade him observe, she was fairly getting into practice.

She flew round the pond, and across, and back, until he was almost tired of watching her.

"Miss Capel—Miss Capel! quick! here comes Mr. Casement," cried Land, but Margaret was careering round the pond and did not hear him.

"Miss Capel! Bless the child, he will go and say all sorts of things to Mr. Grey. Oh, dear me! Miss Margaret—"

"Well, Land, what is the matter? You look in such a bustle. You don't mean to say the ice is giving way?"

"Mr. Casement is coming across the field, that's all, Miss Capel."

"Oh! I don't care for him—horrid old man! Just look how nicely I can turn this corner."

Mr. Casement passed through the field on his way to the house, and Margaret continued her skating with great eagerness.

Presently a footman was seen running towards the pond followed by the gardener's boy at a little distance; then appeared the fat coachman, and, in the farthest distance, Mr. Grey himself.

The footman, quite out of breath, brought his master's compliments, and he begged Miss Capel to come off the ice: then up came the boy, grinning, but saying nothing, then the coachman toiled up, and said that master was in a mortal fright lest the young lady had come to any harm; and informed Mr. Land, aside, "as how that cankered old toad, Casement, had been telling master a pack of lies about a thaw;" and by the time Margaret had disengaged the straps of her skates from her little feet, Mr. Grey had reached her all in a tremble, and taking her in his arms had begun a gentle remonstrance on her imprudence in venturing upon thin ice. Land came forward, and vowed that the ice was as firm as the rock of Gibraltar, and recommended, in proof thereof, that the fat coachman and the gardener's boy should cross the pond arm-in-arm. But Mr. Grey's fears once excited, could not so easily be set at rest; if the ice was not thin, it would probably be slippery—not an uncommon attribute—people had broken their limbs before now by a fall on the ice; indeed, he was not sure that there was not a case of the kind at present in the village, which he hoped would be a warning to Margaret never to skate again. And seeing that she was half crying as she resigned her skates to Land, he promised her a plum-cake for tea as the only means that came into his head of softening the bitterness of her disappointment.

CHAPTER III

*The red rose medled with the white yfere,
In either cheek depeinten lively chear;
Her modest eye,
Her majesty,
Where have you seen the like but there?*

SPENSER.

Mr. Grey did not go to church on the Sunday after Margaret's arrival. He very seldom ventured during the winter to encounter the cold and damp common to most village churches at that season; from which some persons augured that he had a bad heart, while others contented themselves by supposing that he had a delicate chest.

Having seen his little niece warmly packed up in the carriage, he returned to his library to read the service to himself, and she proceeded, with some little elevation of feeling, on her way. It was new to her to have a carriage all to herself, to recline alone in the corner with her feet in a carriage-mat; and to have Land to hand her out, and carry her prayer-books to the pew-door. Having deposited Margaret and her books, and having whispered to her that the Gage's seat was next to hers, Land withdrew to his own part of the church.

Presently, a tall, elderly man of imposing appearance, with an empty sleeve, and hair touched with grey, opened the door of the Gages' seat, and stepped back that the young lady by his side might pass in. These, Margaret was sure, were Captain Gage and his daughter. Captain Gage cast one quick glance from his clear blue eyes at Margaret, and then took his seat. Miss Gage lingered a second longer, without any apparent rudeness of manner, from a genuine reluctance to remove her eyes from so lovely a face. Although Miss Gage was all fur and black velvet, yet her regal figure and magnificent stature could not be mistaken.

She was strikingly like her father, with straight features, light brown hair, and calm, clear, full-opened blue eyes; but although it was impossible to deny to her face the regularity of an antique statue, and the sweetness of expression that almost always accompanies regularity, she possessed one drawback in the eyes of Margaret; she must have been two or three and twenty, at least, an age that to a girl of seventeen seems to approach very near to the confines of the grave.

Margaret possessed too correct a sense of her religious duties to spend her time in watching her neighbours, but as they sat just in front of her, she could not raise her eyes without seeing them; and before church was over, she had become perfectly acquainted with Miss Gage's appearance, from the large ruby that flashed on her white hand, to the purple prayer-book inlaid with silver in which she looked out all the places for her father.

Mr. Grey was very much amused by her account of what she had seen when she came home. He was very careful that she should have plenty of sandwiches, and hot wine and water for luncheon to counteract the cold of the church, and sat listening and smiling to hear her describe Miss Gage's velvet pelisse and little ermine muff. He saw plainly, he told her, that she would like a black velvet gown herself. Margaret coloured and laughed, but could not deny the fact, and the next morning after breakfast, he told Land to go over to the next town and get one.

"Ready made, Sir?" asked Land, endeavouring to impress upon his mind the exact height of his young lady.

"No, no, Land; black velvet enough to make a gown for a lady. That is the way, is it not, my darling?"

Margaret was profuse in her thanks, and was beginning to imagine what a grand appearance she should make, in it; when Mr. Grey told her, after looking at her attentively with a smile, that it would make her look like a little old woman. Her unfortunate height was one great obstacle to her enjoyment.

Once when she was out walking with Land, she met the Gages. Captain Gage was pacing leisurely up and down before a cottage, sometimes looking sharply up into the sky as if watching the weather; and just before Margaret came up, Miss Gage joined her father from the inside of the cottage, and said, "I have kept you waiting unmercifully, to-day, my dear father, but she was so very ill."

"Ill, was she, poor old soul!" said Captain Gage, "take care that she has all she wants. Give me your basket, Bessy."

But Bessy would not give her father her basket, and they walked out of hearing.

Margaret grew to be interested in the Gages; she liked to hear all Land had to tell her in their daily walks about them; and as Captain Gage divided with Mr. Grey the honour of being the greatest person in that neighbourhood, he paid the usual penalty of greatness, and could not stir abroad, or stay at home without having his doings registered. Land knew to an hour when the ship in which Mr. Hubert was second Lieutenant arrived at Plymouth, and when Captain Gage set out to meet his son, and accompany him home. He was likewise well informed as to whether Miss Gage drove out in the chariot or the britschka, and how many people were staying at Chirke Weston.

This sort of gossip was certainly not the best thing for Margaret, and it was contrary to her habits to seek for such amusement; but she felt a kind of interest in the family, particularly in Miss Gage, that she could hardly explain to herself.

With regard to her own occupations, she played the organ, she read history, particularly the books that Mr. Warde either recommended or lent; as she could not skate, she walked with Land every morning, and after luncheon Mr. Grey's carriage was at her service if she chose to drive out. She was quite a little Queen in the house; she had only to express a wish, and it was fulfilled. She had a very skillful maid entirely for herself, her dressing-room was fitted up in a style of elegance that might have served a duchess; in short, her uncle did not quite know, as Mr. Casement told him, how to spoil her enough. It may be supposed that she became exceedingly attached to him, in the evening she sang to him, or sat on a low stool by his side, telling him all the little pieces of news she might have heard during the day, or relating with equal interest the historic tales that she was reading, or exciting his sympathy, by a detail of the uncomfortable period she had passed at school.

It happened one morning that Margaret walked down to the Vicarage with Land to exchange a volume of history she had borrowed, and when she was shown into Mr. Warde's morning room, she found him talking earnestly with Miss Gage.

"I beg your pardon," said Margaret, drawing back, "I did not know you were busy."

"Oh! come in, come in, little one," said Mr. Warde, "we were talking no secrets. Ah! you want the second volume. Why, what a reader you are!"

"And will you not come nearer the fire, while our good friend is finding your book?" said Miss Gage to Margaret.

"Thank you," returned Margaret, drawing towards the fire, and ungloving her beautiful hands.

"Do you like this cold weather?" asked Miss Gage, kindly.

"Yes, when it is a hard frost," returned Margaret; "but I am looking forward very much to summer time."

"You will find the neighbourhood beautiful in spring," said Miss Gage, "and I think Mr. Grey has the prettiest place in the county."

"I am glad of that," said Margaret, "I have not half explored it yet."

"I dare say you have plenty of amusements in-doors," said Miss Gage, "I am sure you have an unfailing one if you are fond of reading."

"Yes, reading and music," said Margaret, "and the house is kept so warm, that I can play wherever I like on wet days."

"And what do you play at?" asked Miss Gage.

"Battledore," said Margaret, blushing as she made the confession; "but it is rather stupid with only one player."

"You will give this note to Mr. Grey, little one," said Mr. Warde, returning to Margaret with her book, "and make good haste home, or you are likely to be caught in the rain. And now, Miss Elizabeth, I have done your bidding."

"Thank you very much for your kindness," said Miss Gage, as she shook hands with him. Then turning to Margaret with a sweet smile and a bow, she said, "I hope it may happen that we shall be better acquainted with each other."

Margaret endeavoured to say a few words expressive of her pleasure in the idea; and then hurried off to Land with her book and note.

Now Miss Gage had begged Mr. Warde to write to Mr. Grey, that she might know whether it would be agreeable to him that she should make the acquaintance of his niece. He was recognised as such a determined invalid by all the country round, that she never thought of calling upon Margaret, taking it for granted that such a step would be an intrusion upon Mr. Grey's habits. But she wished much to show her every attention in her power, from a sincere desire to make her happier than she was likely to be if always shut up with a nervous old man for her only companion; and from a hope that her society might be of some advantage to a girl so much younger than herself; for Margaret was right, Miss Gage was turned of two-and-twenty.

For acts of disinterested kindness are not quite so frequent as good people imagine, nor yet so uncommon as selfish people, who never perform them, would fain make out. The pitiful phrase of nothing for nothing being unceasingly used by those sorry persons, who give nothing, it is true; but who invariably take all they can pillage, or beg from every human being they approach.

Mr. Grey accepted Miss Gage's kind advances with much gratitude, and she immediately wrote to ask Margaret to dine with her the next day, that they might lose no time in becoming acquainted with each other. Margaret was equally pleased; to be sure, the idea of going to a strange house all alone was rather formidable, but there was a sweetness in Miss Gage's manner that gave her some confidence. However, the day was not to be one of unmixed satisfaction, for Mr. Casement came to dinner; and she was obliged to take his arm into the dining-room instead of her uncle's, and as they were crossing the hall, he asked her if she did not wish he was a nice young man; which question had the desired effect of making her blush, though she longed to tell him that it would be a great gain if he could be changed into any thing that was nice, young or old. Then he began to tease her about her skating, which she bore in silence till Mr. Grey interfered, and begged him to talk of something else, which request he complied with immediately by changing his point of attack, and laughing at her dress, which was in the fashion of the day, and consequently quite different from any thing that his "old woman" wore.

This strain of banter, Mr. Grey interrupted by mentioning Miss Gage's kind invitation.

"Oho!" said Mr. Casement, "then there are some hopes for you, little woman."

The very manner in which he uttered the interjection, oho! with a little jerk at the end, was unpleasing to Margaret: she sat with her beautiful lips compressed, resolved to be silent.

"It is particularly kind in Miss Gage," said Mr. Grey, "knowing the state of my health to be so bad."

"There is nothing the matter with your health, I am sure," said Mr. Casement, "you will live to be a hundred!"

Mr. Grey smiled quietly, and made no reply.

"It is all nerves—what are nerves? Don't tell me!" said Mr. Casement.

Mr. Grey did not seem at all inclined to tell him; and Margaret, rising pettishly from the table, pushed her chair back, and her dessert plate forward, and turned about to leave the room.

"Going, little woman?" said Mr. Casement, "going to sit in state in the drawing-room, and play at being grown up?"

"Going away from you, Sir;" returned Margaret, taking courage from being almost outside the door.

Mr. Grey laughed; although he tolerated Mr. Casement's caustic remarks from very long habit, he was not at all sorry that any other person should be less forbearing.

Meantime Margaret had much to think about as she sat over her embroidery; she was considering first, how she should be dressed on the morrow, and next, how she should behave. Her one anxiety was always to conceal her shyness, which she did beneath a repose of manner that deceived almost every one.

When the gentlemen joined her at tea-time, Mr. Grey was in excellent spirits. The evening post had brought him a letter from Mr. Haveloc, announcing his arrival in England, and saying he would be at Ashdale in a day or two. He was very much attached to his former ward, and the idea of seeing him so soon gave him great satisfaction; he could not avoid expressing this feeling several times, unawed by Mr. Casement's satirical glances, which were alternately directed to Mr. Grey and to Margaret. She heard the news with anything but pleasure. It would materially alter her comfort and freedom to have any one staying in the house; and she forgot Mr. Haveloc's picturesque encounter with the brigands while musing on the annoyances she was likely to experience during his visit to Ashdale.

CHAPTER IV

*She is a child in years,
And though in wit a woman, yet her heart
Untempered by the discipline of pain
Is fancy led.*

TAYLOR.

Margaret felt terribly shy as the carriage stopped at the Gages' door. Not all the beautiful basket-work of her elaborate plaits of hair; not even the long coveted black velvet which set off to so much advantage her snowy neck and shoulders; not the pearly delicacy of her white and silver gloves could reconcile her to the distress of entering the drawing-room alone. She was tremblingly alive to everything; to the stately appearance of the hall with its marble columns, and the beautiful exotic creepers trained round them; the powerful scent of the choice hot-house plants; the pompous manner of the servants, who took her cloak from her; and when the drawing-room door was thrown open, she did not see distinctly anything within, so overpowering was her shyness. But Miss Gage met her almost on the threshold, took both her hands in hers, and welcomed her so kindly and yet so calmly, that she felt quite happy.

Captain Gage came forward, shook hands frankly with Margaret, and asked after Mr. Grey's health; and then Miss Gage turned round and presented her brother to Margaret. She saw then for the first time that he had been standing on the hearth-rug beside his father. Indeed, it would not have been particularly easy to have long overlooked him. All the Gages were on a large scale, and Hubert Gage was as like his father and sister as it was possible to be, except that his blue eyes had more of mischief than Elizabeth's, and it may be said, rather less intelligence. Like her, he had light brown hair of that silken texture which is stirred with every breath of wind, straight features, and a fine upright carriage which joined to his unusual height would have given an air of great dignity to his deportment, but that his manner partook of that restless enjoyment, and that careless frankness which is still not uncommon among men of his fine profession. Directly Margaret was named to him, he shook hands with her as if he took it for granted she was somebody he ought to recollect very well, and sat down beside her.

"I am very sorry to hear that Mr. Grey has become such an invalid," he said, "when I was last at home he did not shut himself up in this way."

"I did not know my uncle till lately," said Margaret, "but I understood he was always in delicate health."

"So he was," remarked Miss Gage, "but as Hubert had the full range of his orchards, and preserves, and sometimes met his kind old friend walking on the terrace, he never had an idea that there could be anything the matter with him."

"A pretty couple you were to be turned loose upon an invalid," said Captain Gage, "you and Claude Haveloc."

"I am sure we always behaved admirably," said Hubert, "all the old women in the parish used to hold us up as a pattern to every mischievous urchin who plagued them. Did they not, Bessy?"

"I never heard it before," said Elizabeth, laughing.

"I allow we got into a scrape with the poachers," said Hubert; "poor Mr. Grey was really frightened then."

"You came home on a pair of shutters. Did not you?" asked Captain Gage.

"Not so bad as that," replied Hubert; "but Haveloc had his arm broken. You know Bessy, how I used to tease him about it. I always declared that one of the poachers struck at him with a broomstick."

"And did they?" asked Margaret, with wide opened eyes.

"No. It was the stock of a gun, I believe," said Hubert Gage, looking at her with much complacency: "but if you had ever seen Claude Haveloc you could imagine how little he would enjoy such an undignified catastrophe."

"And poor Mr. Grey gave up game-keepers ever after," said Elizabeth, "and entirely neglected his fine preserves. He was so shocked at the danger two silly boys had brought upon themselves."

"And Claude got a shot in the shoulder in that adventure with the bandits," said Hubert; "some people have the luck of it."

"Your father to wit," said Captain Gage.

Margaret noticed the proud admiring glance that Hubert Gage threw on his father as he spoke; but at that moment dinner was announced. Captain Gage came up to her and offered his arm; Hubert Gage whispered something in her ear about his father cutting him out, which did not lessen the tints on her cheek, and then fell back and led his sister from the room.

At dinner, Margaret sat with perfect tranquillity listening to the conversation, and replying quietly to everything said to her. Hubert was exactly opposite to her, and though she seldom lifted her eyes to him, she felt that he was looking at her much more constantly than he ought. She was a rapid observer of character, a faculty common to shy people; for the very sensitiveness which occasions that feeling, quickens their perception of the qualities of others. She detected that Hubert Gage, with a great deal of candour and good-nature, had but little enthusiasm—his father had tenfold more ardour in his composition, even at his age. He was anxious that no one should be able to discover that he was a sailor by his language or appearance; took the greatest pains that his dress should not betray the secret; never used a technical term; affected not to know which way the wind was; and prided himself with some reason upon his horsemanship; and this not because he had the least dislike to his profession, but from an idea that it was vulgar to display any traces of it.

Elizabeth was talking to Margaret about some book she was reading, when she caught something her brother was saying to her father, and paused to listen.

"What did you say, Hubert, about Sir Philip?" she asked.

"That he is to undertake this survey," he replied; "he has scarcely returned before he will go out again. Before I landed, he was on his road to London for his instructions, and he will be off I dare say in a few days. Just the thing for him, Bessy."

"Very unwise in his state of health," said Captain Gage.

"Oh, Sir! pray let him kill himself his own way," said Hubert, laughing; "he enjoys it amazingly."

"I wonder at you, Hubert," said Miss Gage, "such an honour as you ought to feel it to have sailed under such a Captain."

"It is an honour I am very willing to resign," said her brother, laughing still more, "we were always on the best of terms, but I don't much like him."

Elizabeth regarded her brother in speechless amazement. Had he said he did not like King William IV., she would hardly have thought the remark more treasonable. Sir Philip d'Eyncourt, whose ship was a model ship, whose scientific knowledge was quoted as infallible; who had been her father's favourite officer; who had seen real service; who had been shipwrecked in a romantic manner, on a romantic island; who was going out to make a survey, when he ought to have come home for his health; who pursued his profession after he had succeeded to a baronetcy, and a large estate; who knew how to manage his crew, a very different thing from commanding them. However, as she was struck quite dumb, she was unable to inquire of her brother whether he was in the enjoyment of his right senses.

"Oh, look at Bessy!" exclaimed Hubert, "I forgot that Sir Philip was her hero."

"Never mind, Bessy," said her father; "I like Sir Philip, let that content you."

Miss Gage smiled her approval of this sentiment; and nothing further occurred until she left the table with Margaret.

"I must do the honours of my own sitting-room to you," said Miss Gage, as she ushered Margaret into a room plainly furnished; but adorned with abundant book-shelves, and a few pictures and busts. There was a round table of green marble between the windows, on which stood a small bust of Lord Nelson in white composition under a glass. Two masterly water colour sketches of Captain Gage, and of Hubert, her favourite brother, hung over the mantelpiece. She showed these to Margaret with a calm pride in her eye and voice, that pretty plainly discovered the estimation in which she held them. If she had a weakness, it was her ardent admiration of the navy. If she could have been brought to confession, I believe she would have owned that she thought it a contemptible waste of time in any man to adopt another profession, if he could by any means go on board a ship. She adored her father, not only with the affection which so delightfully attaches parent and child; but with a boundless admiration, a devoted pride, that made her seriously consider him unequalled in character both private and professional. She told Margaret of the engagement in which her father had lost his arm:—a desperate encounter with a French ship shortly before the close of the war.

"They tell me," she said, "that his arm might have been saved, if he would have consented to leave the deck in time; but he knew his presence was needful, and he remained until the Frenchman struck. My father—there was always an accent on the word—would fight his ship as long as he had a stick standing, and then blow it up, rather than strike his colours. I am glad he lost his arm!"

Margaret shuddered, and looked with wonder at Elizabeth, who stood with her bright eye kindled as if she were quite equal to perform the actions she applauded. Yet there was nothing masculine or ungraceful in her emotion. The phrases she used were those she had alone heard employed from her childhood to describe certain transactions, and she would have found it difficult to allude to them in other terms.

"But I must show you my other brothers," said Miss Gage, "or you will call me an unnatural sister."

She opened two miniature cases which lay on the table.

These were the "troopers" Mr. Casement had mentioned. George Gage stared arrogantly out of the ivory over an immense pair of very light moustaches, and Everard stood looking so exceedingly languid, that he threatened to drop into the background altogether. Miss Gage clasped them up, rather carelessly, as Margaret thought, and then held a taper to the bust of Nelson. "That is my hero, of course," she said, "that, and the gallant King Christian IV.; here is a small oil painting of his Danish Majesty. Have you read Carlyle on 'Hero Worship?'"

"No," Margaret said, "she feared she had read very little. It was so difficult to find books, or time to pursue any study at school but those assigned to you."

"I do believe," said Miss Gage, "that you are wise enough to begin your education just where everybody ought to begin it; as soon as other people have done teaching you."

"I have need to begin it," said Margaret looking round on the book-shelves. "How much you know! Here are books in—how many languages?"

"Oh!" said Miss Gage smiling, "I should never measure a person's knowledge by the languages, or the accomplishments they happen to have learned."

Margaret looked inquiringly at her, but had not courage to ask for an explanation of so strange a remark. She knew that at school a girl who learned German was thought more highly of than one who only learned French, and one who played the guitar took precedence of the young lady who only paid for lessons on the piano.

"I mean," said Miss Gage, "that the education which is of most value to us through life, is that which teaches us to think and act with judgment and integrity, which is quite independent of the knowledge of Spanish and German, or of any accomplishment, however pleasing."

This was a new idea to Margaret, but before she could make any observation upon it, a servant came to let them know that coffee was ready, and they went immediately to the drawing-room.

After tea, Hubert Gage asked his sister for some music.

"Will you have the harp?" said Miss Gage ringing the bell, "I will just give my father his book, and then play what you like. My harp, Davis."

"Why don't you keep it down here?" asked her brother.

"Ah! you know nothing of female politics," said Miss Gage, smiling; "the young ladies like me a great deal better for keeping my harp, and some other things in the background."

"But the young gentlemen don't;" said Hubert, as he stood leaning on the harp.

"I am very sorry," said Miss Gage laughing, "I cannot arrange it to please all parties; but in society where every one is anxious to play a prominent part, I feel it to be a real kindness not to take up their time by my performances."

"Don't you think Bessy spoils me?" asked Captain Gage of Margaret, as his daughter found the place in his book, and arranged the wax lights beside his chair.

She had not courage to make any other reply than a blush and a laugh.

"After all, Bessy, I am half tired of this book," said Captain Gage, "I shall never have patience to get through it. Have you seen it?" he asked, holding out the volume to Margaret. It was the 'Tour to the Sepulchres of Etruria.'

She could hardly read it aright in her impatience. Here was undoubtedly all she wanted to know—she would be able to find out at last who the Etruscans were.

Elizabeth smiled, and told her when her father had made up his mind not to finish it, which she foresaw would be very soon, she would send it to her. "But," she said, "you must not expect too much; this is an account of a lady's visit to some tombs. There is but little information regarding the people, except what may be inferred from the degree of excellence they displayed in the decoration of their sepulchres."

"But you know, Bessy," said her brother, "that a people's progress in art is the best standard you can have of their degree of civilization."

"Yes; if you had looked upon them as a barbarous race," said Miss Gage to Margaret, "you will find sufficient proof in this book that you had not done them justice."

"Why, Bessy," said Hubert, "no Phœnician colony ever was, or could be, in a state of barbarism."

"Assuming that they were Phœnicians," said Elizabeth.

"There can be no doubt of that," returned her brother, "their character is sufficient evidence of their origin. The old Greek character, written from right to left, after the fashion of the Phœnicians."

Elizabeth unlocked a cabinet, and took out a gold serpent-ring—she showed it to Margaret as an undoubted Etruscan relic, which her brother had brought her from Rome. Margaret looked at it with great reverence—it was thick and heavy, and the gold was of a dull colour—not like the bright trinkets in a jeweller's shop; but it was delightful to hold in her hand something that was two thousand years old.

Miss Gage went on to talk of the circlets of gold leaves found in some of the tombs; of the city of Cœre, and the origin of the Vestal Virgins; and the degree of religious knowledge enjoyed by the Etruscans; and Hubert took pencil and paper, and sketched for Margaret one of the allegorical processions painted on the wall in the tombs; taking care to exaggerate, as much as possible, the evil spirits which figure in those decorations.

Margaret listened earnestly—she was afraid to lose a word—it was not to her a dry narrative of facts, but a dim unfolding of the pages of a gorgeous and mystical romance. A people so magnificent, and of whom no written literature remains, appeared to her so contradictory and so tantalising, that she longed to seize the book at once, and never rest until she had read it through. She hoped Miss Gage would say something more on the subject, but just then Elizabeth saw Captain Gage trying to open

one of the illustrations in his book, and she went to his chair to help him. Margaret noticed that Miss Gage was always on the watch, and whenever her father was at a loss, from having only one hand, she supplied the deficiency; and that so quickly and quietly that few people would have been aware of it.

"Now for your harp, Bessy," said her brother, "we had forgotten all about it."

"Because we have been better employed," said Miss Gage, placing herself at the harp; "music is always a *pis aller*; when people cannot talk, they very naturally have recourse to a noise."

Margaret could not echo this remark: she loved music from her heart, and she sat absorbed in the sweet sounds, quite unconscious this time that Hubert Gage's eyes were fixed upon her face. Elizabeth played splendidly—better than any young lady at her school, and without a book. She sat watching her fine marble hand and arm as she stilled the harp-strings, and began to fancy that she should like to play the harp instead of the organ.

Hubert Gage pressed her very much to play in her turn, but she declined with a feeling of panic that almost made her giddy; and Elizabeth, at her request, sung her a ballad. It was the first time she had ever heard a song *spoken*, if the phrase may be applied to vocal music, and it moved her almost to tears. Hubert asked her if Bessy did not sing very well, and Margaret, lifting up her dewy eyes, said, "beautifully!" and looked so beautiful when she said it, that he leaned across to his sister, and declared that there was not upon the face of the earth such an exquisite little creature as her friend.

Miss Gage rose from the harp, and they sat round the fire for a chat, but there was no time for any more conversation, for Margaret's carriage was announced.

Captain Gage told her that she must soon come to see Bessy again. Elizabeth took an affectionate leave of her, and Hubert led her into the hall and wrapped her cloak all round her, much as one would muffle up a little child, talking and laughing all the time, and stopping to gather her flowers from the creepers in the hall in the intervals of handing her gloves, and winding her boa round her neck. He then went to the door, and assuring her that it was a hard frost, he offered her a cloak of his own, which she had some difficulty in preventing him from putting on, and which he absolutely insisted on throwing to the bottom of the carriage to keep her feet warm.

Margaret drove off a little taller than she was before. She wondered what the girls at school would have said if they had heard a young man declare he thought her an exquisite creature. She believed nobody thought her so at school. Girls had often told her that young men had quite looked at them, and squeezed their hands at a Christmas dance, but she wondered whether they ever threw their cloaks at their feet, almost like Sir Walter Raleigh and Queen Elizabeth. She had learned some few things that evening. She had spent several hours with a young lady who had not acquired a proficiency in an accomplishment for the sake of exhibiting to her acquaintance, but in order to make her home cheerful. Miss Gage had never asked her for a list of the things she had learned, a list so important to school girls who graduate, by its length, their good opinion of every girl they met.

Margaret had always a thirst for knowledge, and she felt more desirous than ever to cultivate her intellect, now that she found how agreeable it was to converse, or to listen to persons who talked well. She was ashamed to think that she did not know who King Christian was; she had been hurried, when at school, through a compressed History of England, but there had been no hurry in the way she had journeyed through Chaulieu's and Czerney's Exercises. Once impressed with the importance of acquiring information, she determined that nothing should divert her from a steady course of application.

In the midst of these reflections the carriage stopped, and she hastened to the drawing-room to give Mr. Grey an account of her visit before she went to bed. To her great vexation, she found him seated in earnest discourse with a stranger. The candles had burned low, one of the lamps had gone out, and the room was only half lighted. Margaret paused at the door, but Mr. Grey called her in.

"Come here, my child," said he, "I am afraid it is a very cold night. I hope you have taken no chill. Claude, my niece. Well, did you pass a pleasant evening?"

Mr. Haveloc, on being named to Margaret, rose and bowed slightly, placed her a chair, and returned to his own. She felt all her shyness return: coloured, bowed without raising her eyes, and went up to Mr. Grey.

"Well, and how are they all?" said Mr. Grey.

Margaret, standing with her back to Mr. Haveloc, and her hand in Mr. Grey's, felt her courage somewhat restored. "I dare say they are all very well, Sir," she said in a low voice: "but oh! I wish you had heard Miss Gage sing, Sir, and play on the harp; and she has such a nice sitting-room of her own, Sir, and so many books! She is going to lend me one about Etruria. Elizabeth wore such a beautiful nosegay, Sir, of azaleas—sweet smelling ones. May Richard get me some azalias?"

"Yes, my love, that he shall—to-morrow," said Mr. Grey. "And what did you talk about?"

"Oh! most about Etruria. I wish Miss Gage had told me some more curious things. I think she knows more about it than Mr. Warde. He told me if he met with some things in Livy, he would mark them and read them to me; I wish he would. Look, Sir, I cannot think how this stain came on my glove. Oh! I recollect: I was gathering myrtle in the green-house just before I went."

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