

ELLEN

WALLACE

MARGARET

CAPEL, VOL. 3

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Ellen Wallace

Margaret Capel: A Novel, vol. 3 of 3

CHAPTER I

*For not to think of what I need's must feel,
But to be still and patient all I can,
And haply, by abstruse research, to steal
From my own nature all the natural man:
This was my sole resource, my only plan.*

COLERIDGE.

*And time, that mirrors on its stream aye flowing
Hope's starry beam, despondency's dark shade;
Green early leaves, flowers in warm sunshine blowing,
Boughs by sharp winter's breath all leafless made.*

ANON.

Margaret remained for more than a year in the most perfect retirement. The solitude of Ashdale was nothing to that of Mrs. Fitzpatrick's cottage. This tranquillity was well adapted to her state of feeling: she never experienced a wish to interrupt it. She was sincerely attached to her hostess. Although reserved, Mrs. Fitzpatrick was even-tempered; and she became very fond of Margaret, whose society filled up such a painful blank in her home. Both had suffered much, though neither ever alluded to her sufferings: and sorrow is always a bond of union. When first she came to Mrs. Fitzpatrick's, her health was so delicate, that the poor lady feared she was to go through a second ordeal, similar to the one she had lately submitted to with her own child. Margaret had a terrible cough and frequent pain in the side, and whenever Mrs. Fitzpatrick saw her pause on her way down stairs with her hand pressed on her heart, or heard the well-known and distressing sound of the cough, the memory of her daughter was almost too painfully renewed. But Mr. Lindsay pronounced the cough to be nervous, and the pain in the side nothing of any consequence; and though winter was stealing on, his opinion was borne out by Margaret's rapid amendment.

Circumstances had long taught Margaret to suffer in silence: she found then no difficulty in assuming a composure of manner that she did not always feel; and soon the healing effects of repose and time were visible in her demeanour. The loss of her uncle was become a softened grief—for her other sorrow, she never named it even to herself. Yet still if any accident suggested to her heart the name of Mr. Haveloc, it would be followed by a sudden shock, as though a dagger had been plunged into it. She could not bear to think of him, and it was a comfort to be in a place where she was never likely to hear him named.

And in the beautiful country, among those fading woods, on that irregular and romantic shore, was to be found the surest antidote for all that she had endured—for all she might still suffer. In the soft, yet boisterous autumn wind—in the swell of the mighty waves—in the fresh breath, ever wafted over their foam, there was health for the body, there was peace to the mind. The scenery was so delightful that she was never tired of rambling—and so secluded, that there was no harm in rambling alone. And though a beauty, and by no means a portionless one, she found means to pass her time

without an adventure, unless the vague admiration entertained for her by a young coxcomb who was reading for college with the clergyman, might deserve that name.

This youth, not being very skilful in shooting the sea-gulls, had nothing on earth to do except to make love to the first pretty woman he might encounter. He had literally no choice; for Margaret was the only young lady in the parish. She was waylaid, stared at—was molested in church by nosegays laid on the desk of her pew, and annoyed at home by verses that came in with the breakfast things. She was reduced to walk out only with Mrs. Fitzpatrick; she was debarred from sitting on the beach—gathering nuts in the woods—even from wandering in the garden, unless she could submit to be stared at from the other side of the hedge. Trained, as she was, in the school of adversity, (a capital school, by the way, to make people indifferent to minor evils), she could not help crying with vexation when the butler coolly brought her up the fiftieth copy of wretched verses, setting forth her charms and her cruelty in no measured terms.

Mrs. Fitzpatrick had smiled to see the contempt with which Margaret brushed down the first bouquet among the hassocks, and left the second unnoticed upon the desk; even the sweet scent of the Russian violets had not softened her resolution, and the verses wrapped round their stems became the property of the beadle. But Mrs. Fitzpatrick, really sorry for the annoyance of her young charge, spoke confidently to the good Mr. Fletcher; and she had the pleasure to assure Margaret that the Hon. Mr. Florestan was going away at Christmas. Still she had felt some surprise and more curiosity at the conduct of so very young a girl, under such circumstances—there had appeared no vanity, no agitation, none of the natural emotion resulting from the novelty of inspiring a passion.

Mr. Florestan was a boy of good family; some people would have called him a man, for he was seventeen and a half; he wrote rhymes and bought hot-house flowers; so many girls would have been delighted at his homage. Margaret seemed merely bored: she cried, as she said, from absolute weariness of him and his scented paper; from the perpetual chafing of a small annoyance. His love was too contemptible to cause a stronger feeling; for herself she had never looked at him, and did not know whether he was tall or short. Once or twice when Mrs. Fitzpatrick had called to her, 'Look, Margaret, there goes your devoted swain!' she had been so long in putting down her work, and coming to the window, that he had turned the rocks, or the corner of the road, and the opportunity was lost. And he actually left the place, without her ever having seen more of him than a green coat and brass buttons, with which he was wont to enliven their parish church every Sunday, and which being on an exact level with her eye, she could not without affectation avoid. Such entire indifference to a conquest, Mrs. Fitzpatrick could not understand, and she told Margaret with a smile, that some day she would be more indulgent to the feelings of a lover than she seemed at present. The well-known sharp pain went through Margaret's heart as she spoke; but she smiled too, and said she had a great respect for lovers, but she saw no cause to enrol the Hon. Mr. Florestan in their ranks. And so the subject dropped.

After this, many months passed in such stillness, that Margaret hardly knew how they flew. Her only regular correspondent was Lady d'Eyncourt. Her letters formed the one excitement of her life. It was so delightful to trace her from place to place; to hear the little anecdotes of her travels—even the name of Captain Gage, mentioned casually, brought back vividly to her remembrance, the many happy days she had passed at Chirke Weston. And in the few allusions to her husband that her letters contained, it was evident that the devotion she felt for him before marriage, had increased, and was still gathering strength in a degree that it was perilous to indulge. She said, herself, that the unclouded sunshine of her life could hardly last. To say that she adored Sir Philip, was no figure of speech in her case. The more intimately she became acquainted with his character, the more she found to love and to respect. He had no *little* faults. The reserve which repelled others, vanished entirely with her; and the most exacting of an exacting sex, must have been content with the measure of his fondness. She was not so much his first, as his only object. Captain Gage often said that they were made for each other, and neither party seemed inclined to dispute the opinion. At last, the storm came. After

an unusual silence on the part of Elizabeth, Margaret received a letter—a few lines from Captain Gage, announcing the terrible news of Sir Philip's death. He had been carried off in a few weeks by a fever, at Marseilles. Elizabeth was expecting to become a mother; and the next hurried intelligence from her father announced the disappointment of her hopes,—and spoke of his intention of taking her on to Italy as soon as her health would permit. These few lines had been sent to her at the desire of Elizabeth, and she could not but feel them a proof of her unaltered friendship.

Margaret felt, after this shock, as young people cumbered with much feeling are apt to do, when they see and hear around them so much of sorrow and alarm. Every thing seemed insecure; she could picture no happiness sufficiently stable to be worth desiring; she looked round to see what new misfortune threatened herself; she was possessed with a feeling of vague apprehension. But her religious impressions, always sincere, and now deepened by the experience of sorrow, enabled her in time to combat this feeling of undue depression.

Always gentle, she became more grave than was common at her years; more than would have been graceful in so young a person, had it not been tempered by the remarkable sweetness of her disposition. She found too the benefit of constant occupation. She learned that nothing so effectually dispels regret.

Her improvement in every branch of knowledge was great enough to content even herself; and in music, her favourite recreation, Mrs. Fitzpatrick often told her that she could at any time have gained her living by her proficiency.

The next event of her tranquil life was the receipt of a box of bride-cake, and a letter from Harriet Conway. This was in the month of November; just three months after the death of Sir Philip.

The letter, which was written in a good bold hand, ran as follows:—

"Ma mie,

"Do not take it into your head that this is a piece of my bride-cake. Somewhere in the box you will find the cards—Lord and Lady Raymond. I wonder if you recollect who I am. Also, I wonder if you are as pretty as you were two years ago? To be sure you think I might have asked the question a little earlier. But we returned from Germany only a short time before Lucy's marriage.

"I am now at Singleton Manor, and desire you, on the receipt of this, to set off directly, and join me there. I have your promise, and, therefore, you cannot very well be off paying the visit. So come instantly; I cannot endure to wait for any-thing; and stay as long as ever I please.

So say Uncle and Aunt Singleton, besides the veritable mistress of the mansion,

"Harriet Conway."

Margaret at last found the cards Harriet mentioned under a quantity of bon-bons. She rather wondered that her friend was still Harriet Conway; but she was glad that this singular young lady still bore her in mind.

She showed the letter to Mrs. Fitzpatrick, and obtained her ready consent to the visit. There was no objection to Margaret travelling with Mason; a steady creature, who had been so long with her, and who could pay the post-boys as well as a manservant.

Mason was in ecstasies. Of course she understood paying the post-boys. She would have undertaken to pay the National Debt, if that could have delivered her from the hated seclusion of the cottage. She confessed to Miss Capel, in confidence, that it had really fretted her to see Miss Capel growing handsomer every day, and not a soul coming, or likely to come, to this wilderness of a place, since poor Mr. Florestan. She confessed she should like to see Miss Capel have her due; and now that she had her health again, she thought it was high time to get out of this dungeon and mix in the world; and for that purpose, she supposed Miss Capel would choose to have a new bonnet, and a new

silk walking dress, and a few evening dresses, and more things than she could recollect at once; but she could sit down and make a list of them.

Margaret gratified her by leaving entirely in her hands, the reforming of her wardrobe; and that important matter being arranged, and a warm and reluctant farewell taken of Mrs. Fitzpatrick, she stepped into the post-chaise that was to convey her to Singleton Manor.

She was to make one long day's journey of it—a fatiguing performance—but she was anxious to avoid sleeping on the road.

The last few stages seemed to be interminably long; she was almost exhausted with fatigue. It had been dark for some miles, and she was just beginning to convince herself that there was no chance of reaching their destination that night, when the carriage turned abruptly round; the wheels echoed over the rough stones of a paved court-yard; lights glimmered; the Gothic outline of a grey stone porch became visible; and Margaret alighted at Singleton Manor.

CHAPTER II

*The gnawing envy, the heart-fretting fear,
The vain surmises, the distrustful shews,
The false reports that flying tales do bear,
She doubts, the dangers, the delays, the woes,
She feigned friends, the unassured foes,
With thousands more than any tongue can tell,
Do make a lover's life a wretched hell.*

SPENSER.

The hall into which Margaret was ushered was low-ceilinged, carpeted, and adorned with numerous glass cases filled with stuffed animals, such as a seal, an otter, a Norway bear, and the rarer kinds of birds, that sometimes fall into the way of sportsmen, in distant parts of this island. Some handsome furs were stretched before a blazing wood fire, upon which several dogs lay enjoying the warmth. The oak staircase was wide and finely carved, and at every few steps there was a broad landing-place, while the balustrades took the opportunity to make a halt also, and to transform themselves into huge claws, which sustained the scutcheon of the Singletons, with the raven's heads, and golden roses duly emblazoned on them.

The room into which Margaret was shown, was divided into two compartments by a screen of oak carved like filagree, with a door-way left in the centre to admit of passing through; the one side of this screen serving for a dressing-room; the other for a bed-room, having a recess filled with a curious tall bed, gloomy with plumes and purple velvet hangings.

While her maid was arranging the preliminaries of her toilet, and Margaret was looking at all the curiosities that the room contained,—the carved wardrobe, the curiously framed pictures, the antique looking glass, upheld by silver cupids, who bestowed on the mirror, the lace draperies of which they themselves seemed to stand in some little need; her door was thrown open, and Harriet rushed into the room, so altered, so improved, so radiant with health and beauty, that Margaret hardly knew her again.

"Well!" exclaimed Harriet, after kissing and fondling her as she would have done a pet child. "Well, now I have you here, after this long while; I shall not let you go again in a hurry!"

"You are very kind, very kind, indeed," said Margaret, almost overcome by the warmth of her reception, "I cannot tell you how glad I am to see you again, you good little creature. But do you know you are grown considerably taller? You will be too tall to pet soon, if you do not take care. What are you looking at? We have some people staying in the house, that is the reason I have made something of a toilet."

Harriet was rounded into a splendid woman. Her complexion was as soft and clear as alabaster, and a bright carnation colour in her cheeks, gave a dazzling brilliancy to her hazel eyes. She wore a white Cachemere dress, edged with a red Greek pattern; her hair was banded back from her forehead, and a slight wreath of white periwinkles, mixed with dark green leaves, encircled her head.

"I was not looking at your dress," said Margaret, smiling, "I did not ascribe your appearance to your toilet, I assure you."

"You little flatterer! But do you know you will cut us all out? I never saw any one so improved, and you were quite pretty enough to do mischief before."

"Oh, Harriet!" said Margaret, hardly knowing to what her volatile companion referred.

"True for you," said Harriet, archly. "Well, you have not asked me all the particulars of Lucy's marriage."

"I ought to congratulate you upon it," said Margaret, "I hope Lady Raymond is well?"

"Lady Raymond—yes, I will let you call Lucy so, because you were not very intimate with her, though I mean you to know each other more by and by; but if you call me Lady Any-thing, when I marry a Lord, I will not forgive you. Yes, Lucy is very well, and as happy as possible. Lord Raymond is amazingly fond of her; the more so, perhaps, because he is not very likely to attract any body else. There was such a party at the breakfast! We, the bridesmaids, had pelisses of peach-coloured silk, trimmed with swansdown, and Lucy was all in white lace, and she looked so cold, poor girl, while we were as cosy as possible in our warm coats. And Lord Raymond stammered dreadfully; which was very odd, for I had been hearing him the responses for a week previous."

"Harriet, you make me laugh!"

"I mean it. Now let us come down together. You will love my Aunt Singleton; she is such a good little mouse!"

Mrs. Singleton did win very much upon Margaret by the manner in which she received her: there was something in her quiet and impressive kindness which seemed to say that she felt a more than ordinary interest for the orphan who was thrown in her way.

Margaret looked at her serious but sweet countenance, and felt with the intuitive knowledge that experience gives, that Mrs. Singleton must have suffered much at some period of her life, and that her placidity was as much the effect of resignation as of contentment.

Mr. Singleton looked the hearty fox-hunter. He welcomed Margaret with honest kindness, thanked her repeatedly for taking so long a journey to gratify a wish of Harriet's, and hoped earnestly that dinner would soon be announced, since he was certain she must have been starved on the road. He then crossed over to welcome a strange looking young man who had entered the room, and was standing on the other side of the ample fire-place.

This young man might have been of age, though a short, stumpy face, surmounting a very large person, gave him the appearance of a little boy under a strong magnifier. His arms were too short, and his hands, which were singularly small, seemed to hang the wrong way. He gave a little kick behind, when he attempted to bow, and began almost every sentence with a short barking laugh.

"Look at that animal!" said Harriet leaning across to Margaret. "That is Mr. Humphries—the very rich Mr. Humphries! Is he not exactly like a seal set upright? Look at him trying to reach my aunt with his short fins! Quite in vain, my good friend! Oh, no, Mr. Humphries, I never shake hands, you know."

The youth, who had advanced for the purpose of exchanging this courtesy with Harriet, barked, gave his accustomed scrape, and retired. Harriet continued her caustic remarks to Margaret.

"Observe the very fat Mrs. Pottinger in the brocaded gown and Mrs. Markham with a whole dish of grapes and currants upon her head; and their well-bred daughters whispering together on that ottoman—comparing notes about you, I have no doubt! I tell my uncle he need never expect me to pay any attention to this sort of guests. I hardly know who shall take me in to dinner. Colonel Markham drawls so, and Mr. Pottinger speaks through his nose. Then Mr. Baxter is so fat, and the seal—oh! I see Evan has caught somebody that will do to walk across the room with. Uncle Singleton, let that black-looking man take me in to dinner. Evan, I wish to introduce you to Miss Capel."

"Delighted," said Mr. Evan Conway bowing to Margaret.

"You will also take Miss Capel in to dinner."

"Delighted."

"And, oh! in case I don't come near you again, be careful that you make Mr. Humphries sing in the evening."

"Delighted."

"Evan is not a fool," said Harriet, turning to Margaret, "though you would think so by his using only one word to express everything. What is that man's name Evan, who is propping that side of the chimney-piece with his shoulder?"

"Gordon."

"Oh, good Heaven! A Scotchman! I retract, Margaret, I will have Colonel Markham; though he drawls, he says very little; and any-thing is better than the brogue. What is he, this Scotchman?"

"Nothing."

"Worse and worse. I detest a man without an occupation; and now I look at him, I suspect he writes."

"Sometimes."

"What does he write in the name of goodness?"

"Travels."

"Oh! that is better than poetry, don't you think so Margaret? I am not sure if I will not put up with him. Is he poor?"

"No."

"Rich then?"

"Nor rich."

"One of your black swans that I always find to be so much worse than geese?"

"Perhaps."

"Introduce him to me."

"Harriet—Mr. Gordon."

"What a detestable introduction. I suppose Mr. Gordon, you are sufficiently acquainted with Evan not to be surprised at any-thing he says or does?"

Margaret did not hear Mr. Gordon's reply, for he led Harriet off to dinner, which was announced at the moment, and she accepted the offered arm of Mr. Evan Conway.

Margaret was struck with the appearance of the dining-room. It was a large dark room; for although crowded with lamps, black oak is the most difficult of all things to light up. The mantle-piece was in the form of a Gothic arch; the ceiling crossed with carved beams of wood; and at the end of the apartment there was an arched recess, where stood the sideboard loaded with old plate.

"Are you fond of talking?" said Mr. Evan, as soon as they were placed at table.

Margaret thought the question an odd one; but she said that she had never considered the subject, and that she should hardly think herself a good judge of her own peculiarities.

"Singular now, what different replies people give to the same question," said her companion. "Most young ladies say, oh, no, Mr. Evan! Or, how can you ask such things, Mr. Conway? Or, dear me, what makes you think so? You may imagine how much refreshed I feel, when a young lady makes an answer which shows something like thought and originality. Pray who taught you to sing?"

"I believe, I taught myself," said Margaret, amused by the singularity of her neighbour.

"Very industrious of you!" said he smiling. "It is a great exertion to teach oneself any-thing. One has to undergo the double labour of master and scholar—both hard situations. Do you like the society in this neighbourhood?"

"I know nothing of it. I arrived to-day, just before dinner."

"But the general aspect of it—do pronounce an opinion. What a combination of grace and intelligence in the ladies! and—and—what is the corresponding virtue in the gentlemen?"

"I cannot tell," said Margaret.

"Oh! let us come to a decision—or, suppose we illustrate. The man opposite, whom that amiable girl is trying to encourage, mistaking awkwardness for shyness,—is he your beau-ideal?"

"I will not tell you," said Margaret.

"Poor Humphries!" said Mr. Evan, still looking at the couple on the other side. "He will go home now, and swear she is his devoted admirer! How well Miss Bremer hits off a scene of that kind in the new novel of the H— Family."

"I recollect it," said Margaret, smiling.

"His letter to his brother—ha! ha!—You ladies see the bye-play of society so very keenly."

"I am not an authoress," said Margaret.

"I am aware of that. You do not look in the least like one, I can assure you."

"What do they look like, then?"

"Green spectacles, frizzled hair, which they obstinately refuse to cover with a cap. Large hands in black mittens—ditto feet, in villainous thick shoes. In fact, every thing that is most odious in women, and to crown all, when they walk abroad, or take the air, or whatever phrase they may employ to indicate their savage peregrinations, they exhibit to the world an old straw bonnet adorned with a broken black feather—this costume is invariable."

"I do not believe that picture to be always correct," said Margaret laughing.

"But it has entirely answered my purpose, it has made you laugh; and a genuine merry laugh is not a thing to be met with every day in the week."

"But a description is of no value if it is devoid of truth," said Margaret.

"Truth, my dear Miss Capel, is a very excellent lady or gentleman, (I am not quite certain of the gender) and I do not dispute its value; for you may have often remarked that the things are valuable in proportion to their scarcity. The most ill-favoured curiosities fetch a high price in the market. Nobody denies that truth is scarce enough to be a curiosity, and in most cases a very ill-favoured one. You don't agree with me, and I'm very sorry for it—but I cannot alter my opinion."

"I was not going to oppose it," said Margaret. "I have no mania for making converts."

"No. You were merely saying to yourself that you had come in the way of a monstrous odd person. That you did not agree with a word he said; but that it was not worth while to oppose the fancies of a passing acquaintance."

Margaret laughed.

"Now, by way of returning good for evil, I will give you some excellent advice. Never touch either curry or ice at this house. They do not manage well the two extremes of hot and cold. The curry is stuffed with rhubarb, and the ice with ground-glass. I found a splinter in my mouth the other day. On the contrary, their farm yard is famous—no end of chickens and turkies, and fresh eggs and cream; it is quite a country-house you see. Well, it is very hard you will not believe any thing I say."

"I was not going to contradict you," said Margaret.

"But you have no idea how transparent your countenance is. It will take four or five years more before you will be able to conceal your sentiments. You did not think, when first I was introduced to you, that I was such a *causeur*. But, reflect, my dear Miss Capel, upon the extreme difficulty of keeping up any kind of conversation with my sister Harriet. A single word introduced edgeways, is the amount of any one's share in a dialogue with her. She is fond of talking, and so am I; and, of course, as a lady, I always yield her the precedence. Do not run away with the idea that I am a satirical person. I am by no means rapid in detecting the weak points in my neighbour's characters. Do you mean to hunt next Tuesday?"

"Oh, no!"

"Why not? Harriet would give you an infallible mount; I believe that is their phrase. For my own part, I never was on a horse in my life."

"Oh! am I to believe that?"

"Why not? It is out of my line. Depend upon it, there is something in the atmosphere of a stable that impairs a man's brains, supposing he sets out in life with any; and the few I may possess are the only means of earning salt to my porridge. I have, therefore, always rather shunned four-footed animals. But that reason does not apply to you."

"Not exactly that reason; but it is equally out of my line. I mean hunting, for I am very fond of riding. It is very becoming to Harriet; but in me, it would be only an imitation, and a very awkward one."

"You do seem to be one of those whom the winds of Heaven should not visit too roughly," said Mr. Evan. "What, rising already? Harriet is in a great hurry to dissolve the house to-night. Will you sit next me to-morrow?"

Margaret was the last person to give a favourable answer to so bold a request. She gathered together her gloves and her handkerchief in silence, and followed the ladies into the drawing-room.

"Well, what do you think of Evan?" asked Harriet eagerly, as soon as she could reach Margaret.

"I think him very clever, but I could not get rid of the impression that he was laughing at me."

Harriet fell on an ottoman in a burst of merriment.

"Dear, little innocent; laughing at you, depend on it men never laugh at any thing so pretty. Miss Lydia Pottinger, don't you think my friend here the prettiest woman in Somersetshire."

The young lady thus appealed to, would much rather have been burned than have allowed such a truth. She was not generous enough even to think Margaret pretty, much less to say so; therefore, after a little cough, which Harriet watched with much amusement, she exclaimed with great naivetè:

"Oh! talking of beauty, dear Miss Conway, you can't think the number of pretty women we saw at Boulogne. Hetty and I remarked that really every other woman was good looking."

"Really!" said Harriet directing towards her the proud stare that Margaret had sometimes noticed at Chirke Weston, when any one in company displeased her. "I say, Margaret, the creature supposes I do not see her poor evasion; I know it would have choked her to admit your beauty, but I wished her choked!" and Harriet stood with her foot on the fender, and her hand on the mantel-piece, looking whole volumes of scorn that Miss Lydia had not been willing to undergo strangulation at her desire.

"Look, ma mie," she continued, "do you like these candlesticks of gold filagree? These people are going to stay all to-morrow and part of the next day. Fancy! that is the way we visit in this part of the country. Did you see how I manœuvred Miss Markham into the chair next Mr. Humphries? Pretended that I should be wanted to carve the fowls, a thing I never did, and never shall do, and gave her my place; so, never say that I neglect the interests of my aunt's guests."

"Did you like Mr. Gordon?"

"After all the trouble I took to get him; no. He was very conceited; so I merely told him to hold his tongue, and amused myself by watching you and Evan."

"Do you not think," said Margaret timidly, "had you not better talk a little to some of the young ladies?"

"I—why no—I think not," said Harriet, throwing her haughty glance around, "I am not a very popular character among them. Do you try the Markhams, and if you find them bearable, I'll see about it."

So Margaret did as she was desired, and the usual nothings were exchanged between her and the young ladies.

Harriet remained standing in the same attitude looking at their proceedings in the glass, and of course got the credit of spending the time in contemplating her own face. Nothing could be more independent than her proceeding. She prepared herself a cup of coffee, placed it on the chimney-piece, and drank it at intervals; still keeping her eyes fixed on the glass. Then she came sauntering up to Miss Markham who was talking to Margaret.

"Well, Miss Markham," she said, "how did you like Mr. Humphries?"

"Oh! very much," said Miss Markham, drawing her gold chain through her fingers, "he improves upon acquaintance."

"He had need," returned Harriet shortly, and she turned away and loitered about the room until the gentlemen appeared.

"Here comes the English Moriani!" she exclaimed, as Mr. Humphries made his appearance in the door-way. "Come, Mr. Humphries, lose no time, begin singing directly."

He scraped with one foot, gave a very wide smile, and said he should be happy, if she had anything he knew, and if she would take the trouble to accompany him.

Harriet pointed to a heap of music; told him to select three or four songs, and sent Miss Markham to play for him: while she threw herself on a sofa near, and summoned Margaret to sit by her.

"Come here, ma mie," she said, "you have been very good and civil, and Aunt Singleton has been smiling her approbation of you for the last half hour. Now rest yourself. Is it not strange what a fine voice that seal has? Look at him turning the leaves with his short fins. He will be the death of me! But you should see him hunt; he has a capital stud, and rides well though you would not believe it. Will you have him?"

"No thank you," said Margaret laughing.

"Then I will not interfere with Miss Markham. What is that commotion, I wonder, among the dogs in the hall? It cannot be an arrival at this time of night. I must go and sing that duet from the *Andronico* with Mr. Humphries. You will admire it extremely."

Mr. Humphries and Harriet sang admirably, Margaret was delighted, and drew near the piano to listen. Most of the gentlemen came round to applaud and admire, while the young ladies contented themselves with remarking that they had been taught in a different style, and had been always recommended to avoid such theatrical music as the unhappy duet now under discussion.

Meantime, while the fine voices of the singers were gliding through the charming little movement, *O voce soave*, all unconscious of the imputations thrown upon their efforts, Margaret was very much surprised to see the door thrown open, and Mr. Gage walk leisurely up to Mrs. Singleton. She concluded that he was staying in the house, and that having dined out, he was only just returned. Nothing could be farther from the fact.

Having paid his compliments to the lady of the house, he advanced to Mr. Singleton, who greeted him with a start and a shout, and many other boisterous indications of surprise and pleasure; and seizing him by the arm, hurried him among the group round the piano; where regardless of Harriet's occupation, he tapped her on the shoulder, and bade her welcome an old friend of hers. Now Mr. Singleton had always taken Mr. Gage's part, although he stood too much in awe of Harriet to contend the point with her; but she well knew his opinion, and had no idea of making her welcome a very warm one.

Without the slightest sign of embarrassment or surprise, without even interrupting her part in the duet, which was now drawn to a close, she allowed him to touch her hand, stooped her head a little, and then directed her glance steadily over Miss Markham's shoulder to the pages of the music book from which she was reading. Mr. Gage was not given to betray his feelings any more than herself—perhaps he had anticipated no kinder reception—he drew himself up, stared haughtily at the company, arranged his moustaches, looked at his watch, told Mr. Singleton he had not expected to arrive so soon; and then perceiving Margaret, advanced to her, believed—was *sure* he had the pleasure of addressing Miss Capel; pressed her hand with remarkable earnestness, told her how rejoiced he was to meet her again so unexpectedly; hoped that her stay at Singleton Manor was likely to be a long one; and, in fact, tried very hard to make an impression. It was plain he had either forgotten, or forgiven her rejection of Hubert, and so far Margaret was pleased; for the rest, she knew what his extreme civility meant. This lasted until the company had done thanking and complimenting the singers; and then Margaret expected that Harriet would have addressed a few words to Mr. Gage, who was standing close beside her; but she perversely turned round and addressed Mr. Humphries.

"Well," she said, "you and I, Mr. Humphries, have done something wonderful, according to all these good people. I think we *did* get on very well."

"Oh! I am glad of that, Miss Conway. Was I quite right in that last part?"

"Quite; it never went better."

"Oh! I was afraid of that E. It is such an awkward interval."

"Very. A seventh always is; and it is more difficult to hit in concerted music than in a solo."

"Yes. Shall you hunt to-morrow?"

"I have not made up my mind; and you know even if I had, I might change it: women are not always to be depended upon."

"Oh! I don't know. I like—I have not a bad opinion of women, do you know, Miss Conway."

"I am sure all the women are much obliged to you for your good opinion, Mr. Humphries," said Harriet, fixing her brilliant eyes upon him, without the slightest appearance of irony in their expression; "it is a proof of your good sense not to follow in the common track of unmeaning abuse against our sex."

"Yes; that is what I think—there is no sense in it: and people who have mothers—and that—"

Mr. Humphries evidently thought his sentence complete; and Harriet, leaning over Margaret, whispered, "Mothers, *and that*:—to think that old Chaucer's delicate idea should have found its way into such a head, no wonder it comes out again rather garbled!"

Still Mr. Gage stood fronting Harriet, with his eyes fixed full upon her; and still she perversely avoided meeting his glance.

"We owe you a thousand thanks, Miss Markham," she said, turning graciously to that young lady, "for your accompaniment:—the second movement is no sinecure to play."

"I was very happy, I am sure, to be of any use," said Miss Markham, amiably.

"Perhaps you will be able to induce Mr. Humphries to give us 'Di pescator ignobile.' I forget who was your singing master, Mr. Humphries?"

"Oh! I learned when I was at Oxford of one of the choristers. I had three lessons a week all the time I was there; and glee meetings besides of an evening."

"All you ever did learn there, I'll engage!" whispered Harriet, as Mr. Humphries went to the piano.

Margaret looked anxiously at Harriet, and at Mr. Gage; she seemed so determined not to notice him, and he looked equally resolved to make her speak.

"So it was you making all that noise," said Harriet, turning carelessly round; "I thought the dogs had gone mad!"

"Donald recognised me, I believe," said Mr. Gage; "the noise was of his making, not mine."

"Oh, do you hear him!" cried Harriet; "is not that good. I must tell Uncle Singleton that when I can catch him. Did any body give you any dinner, Mr. Gage, when you arrived?"

"Thank you—no. I underwent that ceremony on the road."

"I envy you. I like dining at an inn; don't you, Margaret?"

"I have not yet had an opportunity of congratulating you on the marriage of your sister with *Lord Raymond*," said Mr. Gage, with emphasis.

"Thank you very much," returned Harriet; "only the affair is almost a fortnight old, and one has nearly forgotten all about it. How long do you think, Mr. Gordon, one may offer congratulations after a wedding?"

"I really have hardly considered the subject," said Mr. Gordon; "I should say, perhaps, during the honeymoon a very good distinction; so you see, Mr. Gage, you have still a fortnight left."

"I was surprised, I own," said Mr. Gage; "I had not imagined *Lord Raymond*'s selection would have fallen where it did."

"*Lord Raymond* was a wise man, Mr. Gage," said Harriet, laughing; "and knew when he was well off."

Mr. Gage looked earnestly at her for a few moments, and then moved away.

"Hark you, ma mie," said Harriet, leaning towards Margaret, "you would hardly believe how I long for a good laugh at this moment. I know George so well!—Now, he has actually taken the trouble to get leave of absence as soon as ever he heard of this marriage, and to come over here to see how I bear the shock of *Lord Raymond*'s marriage. He believes me a disappointed wretch; and

that the very good spirits I am in to-night are merely forced, to conceal the anguish of a breaking heart;" and Harriet, unable any longer to restrain her laughter, fell back in her chair, and gave way to one burst of merriment after another.

"Did you see, Margaret, how he fixed his eyes upon me to detect, if he could, the constraint I was putting on my feelings; how he watched for some trace of suffering in my voice; something to betray the anguish within; and the stress he laid on *Lord Raymond*, as if he would have asked how I liked parting with my especial property. I would not have missed this scene for any thing in life!"

"Oh, Harriet! do not laugh so. He is looking at you!"

"No great wonder in that, my dear, since he has come all the way from Ireland for that especial purpose."

"Mr. Gage! I wish to show you the bracelet Lord Raymond gave me on the morning of his marriage. Look! this is Lucy's hair. I told him not to put any of his straw-coloured stuff along with it, to spoil the effect. I rather like those dolphins fretted with rubies; they have an eastern look. He would clasp it on, over my swansdown cuff, and I did not like to take it off, though I had the pleasure of telling him he had done me an incredible deal of mischief."

Mr. Gage stood looking attentively at the bracelet, which she had unclasped, and given into his hand.

"Do you not think it very handsome?" she said.

"Very. It would almost have reconciled you to the match had you been averse to it," said Mr. Gage.

"It did not reconcile me to his crushing my beautiful swansdown," said Harriet. "Here, give it me; you cannot put it on. Margaret shall clasp it."

"It must have been a trying day to you on the whole," said Mr. Gage, employing himself as he spoke in fastening the bracelet on Harriet's arm, regardless of her hint.

"Why, between you and I, it was," said Harriet, holding up her embroidered handkerchief by two corners, and contemplating the pattern of the point lace, as she leaned back in the chair. "First, I had to get up early—a thing I detest in cold weather; then—let me see, what was my next trouble? Oh! my shoes were too long; and I was obliged to steal a pair of Lucy's:—and then, Margaret, when Lucy was nearly dressed, and I expected her to sit down by the fire, and have some breakfast in peace and quietness she suddenly leaned up against mamma's bureau, and burst out crying. I was never so taken aback in my life; for she is not given to demonstrations; and what to say to her, I knew not. I could not tell her she was not going to be married; and that seemed to be the cause of her grief. However, we managed with salts and essences, and scolding and coaxing, to bring her round; and then we got on very well till after breakfast, when we came to the parting. Now, you know, Margaret, in the same county, it can hardly be called a parting. But then Lucy began again; and Lord Raymond did so fuss, and so stammer, by way of consoling her. And when they were off, and the company melted away—what do you think I did? I got into plain clothes again as fast as possible; and sat down to stuff your box of cake full of bon-bons, I took you for the little girl you were when I left you. Mr. Gage, a compliment, Sir, quick now!"

"I would not offend Miss Capel by supposing that I could compliment her," said Mr. Gage.

"Aha! Margaret, the fun we will have at Wardencourt! The riding and driving; the parties and dances; the plays—the tableaux!"

And Harriet went on eagerly planning a visit with Margaret to her sister, as soon as Lord and Lady Raymond were settled at Wardencourt. Mr. Gage seemed for a wonder to be completely puzzled. He remained gazing at Harriet in the greatest uncertainty, endeavouring to reconcile to himself the sparkling and mischievous enjoyment that her looks expressed, with the misery she must be feeling upon the destruction of all her ambitious hopes. Harriet, regardless of those remorseless eyes, went on conversing gaily with Mr. Humphries and two or three other gentlemen; while Mr. Gage sometimes concluded that she was the best actress in the world; sometimes, that as her heart

was not engaged in the matter, she was able to bear without much pain the loss of a good match; sometimes, that whatever her feelings might have been, she intended to console herself with the hand of Mr. Humphries.

This idea filled him with indignation; for Mr. Humphries, without the merit of a title, was more unprepossessing in appearance than Lord Raymond himself; and Mr. Gage, like many men in the army, thought, that next to good birth and the glory of serving Her Majesty, stood the inestimable and incalculable advantage of possessing a fine person.

"Harriet is looking well, don't you think?" said Mr. Singleton, coming up to Mr. Gage.

The fact was too incontestible to admit of a dispute, for Harriet was looking handsomer than ever she had done in her life; and Mr. Gage said so. Harriet was at a little distance, about to leave the room for the night. Margaret rose to follow her.

"Ah!" said Mr. Singleton, on hearing Mr. Gage's flattering opinion of his niece, "Well, never mind; it will all come right one day yet."

Margaret overheard the exclamation, given in the hearty tone of the old sportsman; and Harriet's former remark seemed to ring in her ears:

"These things never do come right again, Margaret."

CHAPTER III

Wordes sharply wound, but greatest grief of scorning growes.

SPENSER.

*Tal d'un alma l'effanno sepolto
Si travede in un riso fallace,
Ché la pace mal finge nel volto
Chi si sente la guerra nel cor.*

METASTASIO.

Mr. Singleton breakfasted at nine o'clock; and it was the custom of the house for everybody to appear at that meal. At half past eight, the worthy squire read prayers in the chapel; and at this ceremony all the servants, and such visitors as pleased, attended.

This had been a custom in the house from the days of Edward the Sixth; and Mr. Singleton would on no account have omitted it; though his performance of this duty was something odd. Any one might have thought from his tones, that he was calling over the names of his hounds. Margaret made a point of attending; and found Mrs. Singleton, Harriet, and Mr. Humphries assembled.

As soon as prayers were over, Harriet hurried off to make breakfast; and commanded Margaret to sit beside her; and by degrees the rest of the visitors assembled round the table. Some little time after they were all collected, George Gage came into the room; made some very earnest inquiries after Mrs. Singleton's health; which that lady imperfectly heard, and replied to very mildly; and then begged to know whether Miss Capel had recovered the fatigue of her journey. Having received a satisfactory answer to this question, he remained standing on the hearth-rug, looking at all the people, as if they were eating and drinking for his sole amusement.

"Do you ever eat breakfast, Mr. Gage?" asked Harriet, after he had remained some time in the same position.

"Thank you—yes. I breakfasted an hour ago."

"How was that?" asked Mr. Singleton. "What made you so early afield?"

"I was anxious about one of my horses," said Mr. Gage. "I was afraid he had sprained his shoulder; and as I wished to see him early this morning—I breakfasted at the same time."

"Oh, but that is important!" said Mr. Humphries, rising hastily, and pulling the table-cloth crooked as he rose, "shall I go and have a look at him?"

"Sit still, Mr. Humphries;" said Harriet. "Horses, we know, are much more amiable and important than their masters. Still, as the masters must be fed some time or other, they had better take their meals at the proper hour. The horse will wait till you have finished your breakfast."

Mr. Singleton and Mr. Humphries laughed heartily at this address; and Mr. Gage informed Mr. Humphries, that he need not trouble him to look at the horse, for that he seemed to be perfectly well this morning.

Mr. Humphries nodded to express his acquiescence in this remark, and continued eating; and Mr. Singleton noticing, for the first time, that Harriet was not dressed in her habit, asked in astonishment why she was not going out hunting with them as usual.

"Yes, you will have a great loss in me," said Harriet laughing. "I intend to disappoint the field. I am not going to run off this first day that I have Miss Capel with me; and I have something to do—I intend to call on the Veseys in the course of the morning."

"Wait till to-morrow, and I'll drive you over;" said Mr. Singleton. "I should like to call on the Veseys myself."

"Indeed you won't, Uncle Singleton," said Harriet. "You always knock my bonnet with your elbow as you get in and out of the carriage. I vowed the last time I let you drive me, you should not sacrifice my next best bonnet in that worthless way."

"Ha! ha!" said Mr. Singleton, "what does it signify? You have the best seat and the best horse in the country, and what matters spoiling your bonnet."

"Go! you have no feelings," said Harriet. "I mean to ride to the Veseys to-day, and Margaret and Evan shall accompany me; and so we shall trouble nobody, good uncle. Another cup of tea, Mr. Humphries? Why you make absolutely no breakfast! Is this a preparation for a day's hard hunting? Try that curried lobster."

"Ha! ha! thank you Miss Conway, I think I have done very well," said Mr. Humphries; looking on the wrecks scattered on and around his plate.

Everybody was inclined to be of his opinion; and Margaret wondered how Harriet could say such things with a grave face.

"I wish," pursued Mr. Humphries, "this was not a hunting morning, because it would be so pleasant to ride with you to the Veseys."

"But which is the attraction, Mr. Humphries? Is it Mrs. Vesey, or I, or my friend, Miss Capel? Do now be confidential and tell me; I will keep your secret, upon my word!"

Mr. Humphries laughed bashfully; he could not very well scrape his foot when seated; but he made a gesture something as if he wished to lift up the table-cloth, and disappear beneath it. George Gage, looking every moment more haughty, stared down upon Harriet and Mr. Humphries in speechless contempt.

At last he coldly recommended Mr. Humphries not to lose a day at that time of year; for that his groom predicted a frost soon, and he had never known the fellow mistaken in the weather.

"Is that the man you had from Mr. Singleton's," asked Harriet.

"Yes—Thompson," replied Mr. Gage.

"Ah!" returned Harriet, "he was well brought up; it would be his own fault if he did not learn to understand horses here."

"Did Captain Gage keep the lad I recommended him?" asked Mr. Singleton.

"Not long," replied Mr. Gage. "I never saw any thing so wretched as my father's management of his stables. He never bought a horse that he was not palpably cheated; and, if he chanced to buy a good one, the animal would be ruined, with that lame old sailor at the head of affairs."

"Don't say one word against Captain Gage," exclaimed Harriet. "Whatever he does is sure to be better than any body else. I do not mean wiser, Mr. Gage, but better. Perhaps no one else would choose to have a lame sailor with one eye to superintend his stables. It shows he has more kindness than his neighbours."

"He might have pensioned the old fellow, if he was so fond of him, instead of keeping him to do mischief," said Mr. Gage; pleased, however, with the tribute to his father's goodness of heart. "He once ruined a splendid pointer of mine with his nonsense; and even Hubert, a fellow who has spent his life in a frigate, could not help seeing how things were going on."

Here Mr. Humphries, whose extraordinary face had brightened up as much as it could, during this discussion, attempted to express incoherently, his admiration of Captain Gage's conduct.

"Depend on it, Mr. Humphries," said Harriet, "that sailors are the best people extant. They are all that is left of the romance of warfare. Like the knights of the Middle Ages, there is a simple reality about them that does not belong to the present time."

"Harriet means to say, they are the only people who are not humbugs," said Evan Conway, translating his sister's remark.

"It is very true, Miss Conway," said Mr. Humphries; who, it need not be said, did not understand one word that she had uttered; "I always liked sailors very much. Don't you think Miss Capel would be generally considered pretty?"

"Undoubtedly, Mr. Humphries. I was sure your good taste would discover that."

"They are bringing round the horses, Miss Conway. I wish we were to have the pleasure of your company."

"It is a great temptation, Mr. Humphries; but another time. How well you look in your red coat—it is the most becoming dress—"

"No—do you think so!" said Mr. Humphries, with a visible desire to vanish under the table. "No—I never noticed. I say, Miss Conway, I hope we shall have another duet this evening."

"So do I. You cannot suppose I often meet with such a second; and I am very fond of music."

"Come, Humphries," said Mr. Gage, stalking past them as he spoke; "there is your horse playing the deuce out yonder, standing so long."

This was a summons he could not neglect; and after scrambling for his pocket handkerchief, which had dropped under his chair, Mr. Humphries quitted the room.

"Oh, Harriet!" exclaimed Margaret, with a serious look, when the other ladies had disappeared in company with Mrs. Singleton.

"Oh, little Puritan! what is the matter now?" returned Harriet, catching her round the waist, and whirling her in a rapid waltz round and round the large room.

"How you do flirt," said Margaret, pausing, with her hand to her side.

"You should be the last person to accuse me," said Harriet, laughing. "I asked you, if you would have the man. You declined the honour, and therefore it is no business of yours."

"It is a business of some other persons, then," said Margaret, archly.

"What other person?"

"Mr. Gage."

"You don't say so!" returned Harriet, crossing the room, and leaning through the deep oaken door-way, "Evan!"

"At your service," returned her brother, coming in with the morning paper in his hand.

"We mean to ride at two; and you may accompany us."

"Thank you very much."

"Will this be your first essay in horsemanship?" asked Margaret, smiling.

"Ha! Miss Capel, you remember what I said to you. A great point that—I feel highly flattered by it."

Margaret smiled quietly, and moved away. She had too much self-possession to be either flattered or pleased by his ironical civility.

When they went up-stairs to prepare for their ride, Harriet, whose ways were singularly independent, came into Margaret's room, half attired, and stood before the large glass arranging her habit.

"Look here, Margaret," said she, "you should wear a waistcoat."

"Masculine?"

"Not at all; copy me, my dear, I dress very well on horseback."

"So you do at all times, I think," said Margaret.

"Much obliged. I say, what do you think of Evan?"

"I should be so very likely to tell you truly," said Margaret.

"Then I will tell you what to think of him," said Harriet, "he has an excellent head, my dear, but no heart; he thinks he will be a very great man. I differ from him; no very great man ever was heartless. He will be only a little above the middle size. I like him very much."

"How odd you are, Harriet."

"Do you think so, ma mie? What a pretty Victorine you have—sable I see."

"Now, Mr. Humphries—ha! ha! one cannot help laughing when one thinks of him—has a capital heart, but no head. Which do you like best, Margaret?"

"The heart," replied Margaret.

"But then, my dear, like most Englishmen, his nerves are actually made of pack thread; he has not a grain of sensibility. He is ugly. I tell Evan sometimes that he is ugly to a misfortune; but this man is ugly to a fault. But he is an excellent son to a very tiresome old mother; honest, good-natured, rich, obstinate. I do not know if he has any other qualities, or I would tell you. I think it my duty to walk you over the course, you perceive."

"You make an excellent chaperon, Harriet."

"But Margaret," said Harriet with a hurried change of manner, "I never knew any-thing so good as George coming here just now. It gives me pleasure to see that I can torment his pride, not his feelings; but his absurd haughty conceit, that I was to remain his slave under all treatment. I do not care for him the least atom, and I despise his coming to pry into my concerns, to investigate and to triumph in my distress, as he thinks, on Lucy's marriage. I can turn the tables on him, and I will!"

"Indeed, Harriet," said Margaret, "it is hardly generous in you to take that view of Mr. Gage's conduct. I think he would not have taken so much trouble, if he had not been very much interested about you. I think ever since I have known you both, he has appeared to feel any-thing but indifference to you; and if you cannot return his feelings, is it fair to treat them with contempt?"

Margaret spoke earnestly, yet half afraid of giving offence; but to her surprise, as soon as she had finished, her eccentric friend caught her in her arms, and kissed her heartily; then gathering up the long folds of her habit she hastened down stairs.

Mr. Evan Conway was leaning against the neck of his sister's horse, without his hat, or any sign of being prepared to accompany the ladies; a groom was mounted, and in waiting. He helped them both to mount, arranged their dresses with great care and then left them.

"So we are not to have the honour of your company," Harriet called after him.

He replied by a shake of the head, and went into the house.

They paid their visit. Mrs. Vesey was a young married woman, with four or five small children, who very much occupied her time and thoughts. The conversation was chiefly made up of things which Johnny and Matilda had said; of the quarrel which Harry had with the nurse, and the beautiful cake which uncle Richard had sent to Mary on her birthday. Then the children were produced, in velvet frocks, and long trained ringlets of white hair, and these having been kissed and praised enough, the two friends took their leave.

"Ah, that is over!" said Harriet, when they rode off, "I like children well enough, Margaret, to make hay with, or play at blindman's buff; but I always long to pinch those little dressed up dolls. If Lucy should have any olive branches, I shall make them as rude and as natural as possible."

"How soft the wind is," said Margaret, "it is often colder than this in summer."

It was certainly a mild day for November. Although the twilight was coming on, there was nothing chilly in the air. The wind drove slowly before it large floating masses of grey clouds; the leafless trees rocked majestically to and fro in the dim light; and the scent of the air, and of the fallen leaves was soft and refreshing.

Before they had gone very far they were overtaken by Mr. Gage and Mr. Humphries, who were returning from hunting.

"Well—oh! now—come!" exclaimed Mr. Humphries, who was sometimes troubled with incoherence, "how glad I am that we came home this way."

"It is, indeed, a very fortunate circumstance," said Mr. Gage, addressing himself pointedly to Margaret, "I hope you will really value our escort now that it is growing so dark."

"Yes, it is a lonely road about here," said Mr. Humphries, closing up to Harriet.

"I never am afraid of any-thing," said Harriet, "but I am glad of your company, because I wish to know what sort of a run you had."

Mr. Humphries was very much enlivened by this demand upon his descriptive powers. By the aid of a very few words, and a great many extraordinary gestures, he conveyed to Harriet the information she desired.

Mr. Gage, looking the very impersonation of injured pride, suffered them to take the lead, and then riding up close to Margaret, and laying his hand affectionately on the mane of her horse, he exerted all his powers to make himself agreeable.

He was intent on persuading Margaret to ride some day to the place where the hunters met. It was a very gay scene on a fine morning, and would make a pleasant change for her. Although nobody could disapprove more strongly than he did, a lady following the hounds, yet just to ride to cover, and go quietly home again, he thought quite feminine, and perfectly allowable.

Margaret, who readily perceived that Mr. Gage was extremely angry with Harriet, and that this was the cause of his invectives against ladies hunting, could not help smiling, but she willingly consented to his plan, provided he could secure her a horse so conveniently stupid, as not to become excited by the scene. And then, the spirit of romance being not yet extinguished within her, she began turning over in her own mind how she could manage that Mr. Gage should ride next to Harriet. Chance effected the transfer for her; in turning down a lane, Mr. Humphries reined back his horse, and Mr. Gage pushing forward at the same time, the manœuvre was accomplished. But it seemed to very little purpose. Harriet kept her head perversely turned to the hedge-row, as if bent on counting the feathered clusters of traveller's ivy, which adorned the wayside, or else leaning back in her saddle, she addressed some laughing remark to those behind. While Margaret rose very high in the opinion of Mr. Humphries, from the simple and kind answers she gave to all his questions, and from the grace with which she guided her delicate looking steed. He began to think that she might be deserving of a share in the rich estates which his prudent mamma was always cautioning him against offering to any lady who gave evidence of particularly wishing for them. It was very easy to see that this worthy young man was not gifted with any great degree of sensibility, but yet Margaret was a little surprised when, after a few remarks interchanged about their favourite colours for dogs, horses, &c.; her companion, looking rather uncomfortable, which was his nearest approach to a sentimental state of mind, suddenly asked her if some fellow who wrote had not said that music was the food of love, and if she thought it was.

Margaret, with her gentle voice, turned to him and said that Shakspeare was very great authority; and that such love as he depicted in his lighter plays she dared say could be fed very well upon music. That she thought, after all, he put it as a question, not as a remark, but that she would ask Harriet, who was a great reader of Shakspeare.

"No, don't," said Mr. Humphries uneasily, "Miss Conway would only laugh."

But Harriet, having caught the word love, insisted on the question being referred to her, and as soon as she could speak for laughing, "Look you, Mr. Humphries," she said, "music is the food of love, and love is the food of fools; but if you have any curiosity to hear the line in question it is this,— 'If music be the food of love, play on.'"

Mr. Humphries thanked Harriet, made several gestures expressive of great confusion, and then resumed his dialogue with Margaret.

"Do you think, Miss Capel," he continued, "that anybody can love twice?"

"No, Mr. Humphries," returned Margaret quietly.

"No, Miss Capel?" said Mr. Humphries uneasily.

"I think not," replied Margaret smiling at the question.

"But then, Miss Capel, if one is prevented from marrying one's first love, what can one do?"

"Those who think love necessary must remain, single you know, Mr. Humphries; but most people will marry some one else."

And so completely did she feel that love with her was past for ever, that she discussed the topic with as much calmness as if she had been fifty years old.

"But one would not like to keep single for ever, you know, Miss Capel," said Mr. Humphries.

Margaret highly amused at the idea of being selected as a confidante on such short notice, merely laughed at this declaration; which Mr. Humphries enforced by one of his widest smiles thereby disclosing, the only beauty he possessed; namely, a singularly fine set of teeth.

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