

HENRY WOOD

EAST LYNNE

Henry Wood

East Lynne

«Public Domain»

Wood H.

East Lynne / H. Wood — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

CHAPTER I	5
CHAPTER II	10
CHAPTER III	14
CHAPTER IV	21
CHAPTER V	24
CHAPTER VI	29
CHAPTER VII	36
CHAPTER VIII	38
CHAPTER IX	43
CHAPTER X	48
CHAPTER XI	55
CHAPTER XII	61
CHAPTER XIII	67
CHAPTER XIV	70
CHAPTER XV	73
CHAPTER XVI	77
CHAPTER XVII	80
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	85

Mrs. Henry Wood

East Lynne

CHAPTER I

THE LADY ISABEL

In an easy-chair of the spacious and handsome library of his town-house, sat William, Earl of Mount Severn. His hair was gray, the smoothness of his expansive brow was defaced by premature wrinkles, and his once attractive face bore the pale, unmistakable look of dissipation. One of his feet was cased in folds of linen, as it rested on the soft velvet ottoman, speaking of gout as plainly as any foot ever spoke yet. It would seem—to look at the man as he sat there—that he had grown old before his time. And so he had. His years were barely nine and forty, yet in all save years, he was an aged man.

A noted character had been the Earl of Mount Severn. Not that he had been a renowned politician, or a great general, or an eminent statesman, or even an active member in the Upper House; not for any of these had the earl's name been in the mouths of men. But for the most reckless among the reckless, for the spendthrift among spendthrifts, for the gamester above all gamesters, and for a gay man outstripping the gay—by these characteristics did the world know Lord Mount Severn. It was said his faults were those of his head; that a better heart or a more generous spirit never beat in human form; and there was much truth in this. It had been well for him had he lived and died plain William Vane. Up to his five and twentieth year, he had been industrious and steady, had kept his terms in the Temple, and studied late and early. The sober application of William Vane had been a by word with the embryo barristers around; Judge Vane, they ironically called him; and they strove ineffectually to allure him away to idleness and pleasure. But young Vane was ambitious, and he knew that on his own talents and exertions must depend his own rising in the world. He was of excellent family, but poor, counting a relative in the old Earl of Mount Severn. The possibility of his succeeding to the earldom never occurred to him, for three healthy lives, two of them young, stood between him and the title. Yet those have died off, one of apoplexy, one of fever, in Africa, the third boating at Oxford; and the young Temple student, William Vane, suddenly found himself Earl of Mount Severn, and the lawful possessor of sixty thousand a year.

His first idea was, that he should never be able to spend the money; that such a sum, year by year, could *not* be spent. It was a wonder his head was not turned by adulation at the onset, for he was courted, flattered and caressed by all classes, from a royal duke downward. He became the most attractive man of his day, the lion in society; for independent of his newly-acquired wealth and title, he was of distinguished appearance and fascinating manners. But unfortunately, the prudence which had sustained William Vane, the poor law student, in his solitary Temple chambers entirely forsook William Vane, the young Earl of Mount Severn, and he commenced his career on a scale of speed so great, that all staid people said he was going to ruin and the deuce headlong.

But a peer of the realm, and one whose rent-roll is sixty thousand per annum, does not go to ruin in a day. There sat the earl, in his library now, in his nine-and-fortieth year, and ruin had not come yet—that is, it had not overwhelmed him. But the embarrassments which had clung to him, and been the destruction of his tranquility, the bane of his existence, who shall describe them? The public knew them pretty well, his private friends knew better, his creditors best; but none, save himself knew, or could ever know, the worrying torment that was his portion, wellnigh driving him to distraction. Years ago, by dint of looking things steadily in the face, and by economizing, he might have retrieved

his position; but he had done what most people do in such cases—put off the evil day *sine die*, and gone on increasing his enormous list of debts. The hour of exposure and ruin was now advancing fast.

Perhaps the earl himself was thinking so, as he sat there before an enormous mass of papers which strewed the library table. His thoughts were back in the past. That was a foolish match of his, that Gretna Green match for love, foolish so far as prudence went; but the countess had been an affectionate wife to him, had borne with his follies and his neglect, had been an admirable mother to their only child. One child alone had been theirs, and in her thirteenth year the countess had died. If they had but been blessed with a son—the earl moaned over the long-continued disappointment still—he might have seen a way out of his difficulties. The boy, as soon as he was of age, would have joined with him in cutting off the entail, and—

“My lord,” said a servant entering the room and interrupting the earl’s castles in the air, “a gentleman is asking to see you.”

“Who?” cried the earl, sharply, not perceiving the card the man was bringing. No unknown person, although wearing the externals of a foreign ambassador, was ever admitted unceremoniously to the presence of Lord Mount Severn. Years of duns had taught the servants caution.

“His card is here, my lord. It is Mr. Carlyle, of West Lynne.”

“Mr. Carlyle, of West Lynne,” groaned the earl, whose foot just then had an awful twinge, “what does he want? Show him up.”

The servant did as he was bid, and introduced Mr. Carlyle. Look at the visitor well, reader, for he will play his part in this history. He was a very tall man of seven and twenty, of remarkably noble presence. He was somewhat given to stooping his head when he spoke to any one shorter than himself; it was a peculiar habit, almost to be called a bowing habit, and his father had possessed it before him. When told of it he would laugh, and say he was unconscious of doing it. His features were good, his complexion was pale and clear, his hair dark, and his full eyelids drooped over his deep gray eyes. Altogether it was a countenance that both men and women liked to look upon—the index of an honorable, sincere nature—not that it would have been called a handsome face, so much as a pleasing and a distinguished one. Though but the son of a country lawyer, and destined to be a lawyer himself, he had received the training of a gentleman, had been educated at Rugby, and taken his degree at Oxford. He advanced at once to the earl, in the straightforward way of a man of business—of a man who has come on business.

“Mr. Carlyle,” said the latter, holding out his hand—he was always deemed the most affable peer of the age—“I am happy to see you. You perceive I cannot rise, at least without great pain and inconvenience. My enemy, the gout, has possession of me again. Take a seat. Are you staying in town?”

“I have just arrived from West Lynne. The chief object of my journey was to see your lordship.”

“What can I do for you?” asked the earl, uneasily; for a suspicion had crossed his mind that Mr. Carlyle might be acting for some one of his many troublesome creditors.

Mr. Carlyle drew his chair nearer to the earl, and spoke in a low tone,—

“A rumor came to my ears, my lord, that East Lynne was in the market.”

“A moment, sir,” exclaimed the earl, with reserve, not to say hauteur in his tone, for his suspicions were gaining ground; “are we to converse confidentially together, as men of honor, or is there something concealed behind?”

“I do not understand you,” said Mr. Carlyle.

“In a word—excuse my speaking plainly, but I must feel my ground—are you here on the part of some of my rascally creditors, to pump information out of me, that otherwise they would not get?”

“My lord,” uttered the visitor, “I should be incapable of so dishonorable an action. I know that a lawyer gets credit for possessing but lax notions on the score of honor, but you can scarcely suspect that I should be guilty of underhand work toward you. I never was guilty of a mean trick in my life, to my recollection, and I do not think I ever shall be.”

“Pardon me, Mr. Carlyle. If you knew half the tricks and *ruses* played upon me, you would not wonder at my suspecting all the world. Proceed with your business.”

“I heard that East Lynne was for private sale; your agent dropped half a word to me in confidence. If so, I should wish to be the purchaser.”

“For whom?” inquired the earl.

“Myself.”

“You!” laughed the earl. “Egad! Lawyering can’t be such bad work, Carlyle.”

“Nor is it,” rejoined Mr. Carlyle, “with an extensive, first-class connection, such as ours. But you must remember that a good fortune was left me by my uncle, and a large one by my father.”

“I know. The proceeds of lawyering also.”

“Not altogether. My mother brought a fortune on her marriage, and it enabled my father to speculate successfully. I have been looking out for an eligible property to invest my money upon, and East Lynne will suit me well, provided I can have the refusal of it, and we can agree about the terms.”

Lord Mount Severn mused for a few moments before he spoke. “Mr. Carlyle,” he began, “my affairs are very bad, and ready money I must find somewhere. Now East Lynne is not entailed, neither is it mortgaged to anything like its value, though the latter fact, as you may imagine, is not patent to the world. When I bought it at a bargain, eighteen years ago, you were the lawyer on the other side, I remember.”

“My father,” smiled Mr. Carlyle. “I was a child at the time.”

“Of course, I ought to have said your father. By selling East Lynne, a few thousands will come into my hands, after claims on it are settled; I have no other means of raising the wind, and that is why I have resolved to part with it. But now, understand, if it were known abroad that East Lynne is going from me, I should have a hornet’s nest about my ears; so that it must be disposed of *privately*. Do you comprehend?”

“Perfectly,” replied Mr. Carlyle.

“I would as soon you bought it as anyone else, if, as you say, we can agree about terms.”

“What does your lordship expect for it—at a rough estimate?”

“For particulars I must refer you to my men of business, Warburton & Ware. Not less than seventy thousand pounds.”

“Too much, my lord,” cried Mr. Carlyle, decisively.

“And that’s not its value,” returned the earl.

“These forced sales never do fetch their value,” answered the plain-speaking lawyer. “Until this hint was given me by Beauchamp, I had thought East Lynne was settled upon your lordship’s daughter.”

“There’s nothing settled on her,” rejoined the earl, the contraction on his brow standing out more plainly. “That comes of your thoughtless runaway marriages. I fell in love with General Conway’s daughter, and she ran away with me, like a fool; that is, we were both fools together for our pains. The general objected to me and said I must sow my wild oats before he would give me Mary; so I took her to Gretna Green, and she became Countess of Mount Severn, without a settlement. It was an unfortunate affair, taking one thing with another. When her elopement was made known to the general, it killed him.”

“Killed him!” interrupted Mr. Carlyle.

“It did. He had disease of the heart, and the excitement brought on the crisis. My poor wife never was happy from that hour; she blamed herself for her father’s death, and I believe it led to her own. She was ill for years; the doctors called it consumption; but it was more like a wasting insensibly away, and consumption never had been in her family. No luck ever attends runaway marriages; I have noticed it since, in many, many instances; something bad is sure to turn up from it.”

“There might have been a settlement executed after the marriage,” observed Mr. Carlyle, for the earl had stopped, and seemed lost in thought.

“I know there might; but there was not. My wife had possessed no fortune; I was already deep in my career of extravagance, and neither of us thought of making provision for our future children; or, if we thought of it, we did not do it. There is an old saying, Mr. Carlyle, that what may be done at any time is never done.”

Mr. Carlyle bowed.

“So my child is portionless,” resumed the earl, with a suppressed sigh. “The thought that it may be an embarrassing thing for her, were I to die before she is settled in life, crosses my mind when I am in a serious mood. That she will marry well, there is little doubt, for she possesses beauty in a rare degree, and has been reared as an English girl should be, not to frivolity and foppery. She was trained by her mother, who save for the mad act she was persuaded into by me, was all goodness and refinement, for the first twelve years of her life, and since then by an admirable governess. No fear that she will be decamping to Gretna Green.”

“She was a very lovely child,” observed the lawyer; “I remember that.”

“Ay; you have seen her at East Lynne, in her mother’s lifetime. But, to return to business. If you become the purchaser of the East Lynne estate, Mr. Carlyle, it must be under the rose. The money that it brings, after paying off the mortgage, I must have, as I tell you, for my private use; and you know I should not be able to touch a farthing of it if the confounded public got an inkling of the transfer. In the eyes of the world, the proprietor of East Lynne must be Lord Mount Severn—at least for some little time afterwards. Perhaps you will not object to that.”

Mr. Carlyle considered before replying; and then the conversation was resumed, when it was decided that he should see Warburton and Ware the first thing in the morning, and confer with them. It was growing late when he rose to leave.

“Stay and dine with me,” said the earl.

Mr. Carlyle hesitated, and looked down at his dress—a plain, gentlemanly, morning attire, but certainly not a dinner costume for a peer’s table.

“Oh, that’s nothing,” said the earl; “we shall be quite alone, except my daughter. Mrs. Vane, of Castle Marling, is staying with us. She came up to present my child at the last drawing-room, but I think I heard something about her dining out to-day. If not, we will have it by ourselves here. Oblige me by touching the bell, Mr. Carlyle.”

The servant entered.

“Inquire whether Mrs. Vane dines at home,” said the earl.

“Mrs. Vane dines out, my lord,” was the man’s immediate reply. “The carriage is at the door now.”

“Very well. Mr. Carlyle remains.”

At seven o’clock the dinner was announced, and the earl wheeled into the adjoining room. As he and Mr. Carlyle entered it at one door, some one else came in by the opposite one. Who—what—was it? Mr. Carlyle looked, not quite sure whether it was a human being—he almost thought it more like an angel.

A light, graceful, girlish form; a face of surpassing beauty, beauty that is rarely seen, save from the imagination of a painter; dark shining curls falling on her neck and shoulders, smooth as a child’s; fair, delicate arms decorated with pearls, and a flowing dress of costly white lace. Altogether the vision did indeed look to the lawyer as one from a fairer world than this.

“My daughter, Mr. Carlyle, the Lady Isabel.”

They took their seats at the table, Lord Mount Severn at its head, in spite of his gout and his footstool. And the young lady and Mr. Carlyle opposite each other. Mr. Carlyle had not deemed himself a particular admirer of women’s beauty, but the extraordinary loveliness of the young girl before him nearly took away his senses and his self-possession. Yet it was not so much the perfect contour or the exquisite features that struck him, or the rich damask of the delicate cheek, or the luxuriant falling hair; no, it was the sweet expression of the soft dark eyes. Never in his life had he

seen eyes so pleasing. He could not keep his gaze from her, and he became conscious, as he grew more familiar with her face, that there was in its character a sad, sorrowful look; only at times was it to be noticed, when the features were at repose, and it lay chiefly in the very eyes he was admiring. Never does this unconsciously mournful expression exist, but it is a sure index of sorrow and suffering; but Mr. Carlyle understood it not. And who could connect sorrow with the anticipated brilliant future of Isabel Vane?

“Isabel,” observed the earl, “you are dressed.”

“Yes, papa. Not to keep old Mrs. Levison waiting tea. She likes to take it early, and I know Mrs. Vane must have kept her waiting dinner. It was half-past six when she drove from here.”

“I hope you will not be late to-night, Isabel.”

“It depends upon Mrs. Vane.”

“Then I am sure you will be. When the young ladies in this fashionable world of ours turn night into day, it is a bad thing for their roses. What say you, Mr. Carlyle?”

Mr. Carlyle glanced at the roses on the cheeks opposite to him; they looked too fresh and bright to fade lightly.

At the conclusion of dinner a maid entered the room with a white cashmere mantle, placing it over the shoulders of her young lady, as she said the carriage was waiting.

Lady Isabel advanced to the earl. “Good-bye, papa.”

“Good-night, my love,” he answered, drawing her toward him, and kissing her sweet face. “Tell Mrs. Vane I will not have you kept out till morning hours. You are but a child yet. Mr. Carlyle, will you ring? I am debarred from seeing my daughter to the carriage.”

“If your lordship will allow me—if Lady Isabel will pardon the attendance of one little used to wait upon young ladies, I shall be proud to see her to her carriage,” was the somewhat confused answer of Mr. Carlyle as he touched the bell.

The earl thanked him, and the young lady smiled, and Mr. Carlyle conducted her down the broad, lighted staircase and stood bareheaded by the door of the luxurious chariot, and handed her in. She put out her hand in her frank, pleasant manner, as she wished him good night. The carriage rolled on its way, and Mr. Carlyle returned to the earl.

“Well, is she not a handsome girl?” he demanded.

“Handsome is not the word for beauty such as hers,” was Mr. Carlyle’s reply, in a low, warm tone. “I never saw a face half so beautiful.”

“She caused quite a sensation at the drawing-room last week—as I hear. This everlasting gout kept me indoors all day. And she is as good as she is beautiful.”

The earl was not partial. Lady Isabel was wondrously gifted by nature, not only in mind and person but in heart. She was as little like a fashionable young lady as it was well possible to be, partly because she had hitherto been secluded from the great world, partly from the care bestowed upon her training. During the lifetime of her mother, she had lived occasionally at East Lynne, but mostly at a larger seat of the earl’s in Wales, Mount Severn; since her mother’s death, she had remained entirely at Mount Severn, under the charge of a judicious governess, a very small establishment being kept for them, and the earl paying them impromptu and flying visits. Generous and benevolent she was, timid and sensitive to a degree, gentle, and considerate to all. Do not cavil at her being thus praised—admire and love her whilst you may, she is worthy of it now, in her innocent girlhood; the time will come when such praise would be misplaced. Could the fate that was to overtake his child have been foreseen by the earl, he would have struck her down to death, in his love, as she stood before him, rather than suffer her to enter upon it.

CHAPTER II

THE BROKEN CROSS

Lady Isabel's carriage continued its way, and deposited her at the residence of Mrs. Levison. Mrs. Levison was nearly eighty years of age, and very severe in speech and manner, or, as Mrs. Vane expressed it, "crabbed." She looked the image of impatience when Isabel entered, with her cap pushed all awry, and pulling at the black satin gown, for Mrs. Vane had kept her waiting dinner, and Isabel was keeping her from her tea; and that does not agree with the aged, with their health or with their temper.

"I fear I am late," exclaimed Lady Isabel, as she advanced to Mrs. Levison; "but a gentleman dined with papa to-day, and it made us rather longer at table."

"You are twenty-five minutes behind your time," cried the old lady sharply, "and I want my tea. Emma, order it in."

Mrs. Vane rang the bell, and did as she was bid. She was a little woman of six-and-twenty, very plain in face, but elegant in figure, very accomplished, and vain to her fingers' ends. Her mother, who was dead, had been Mrs. Levison's daughter, and her husband, Raymond Vane, was presumptive heir to the earldom of Mount Severn.

"Won't you take that tippet off, child?" asked Mrs. Levison, who knew nothing of the new-fashioned names for such articles, mantles, burnous, and all the string of them; and Isabel threw it off and sat down by her.

"The tea is not made, grandmamma!" exclaimed Mrs. Vane, in an accent of astonishment, as the servant appeared with the tray and the silver urn. "You surely do not have it made in the room."

"Where should I have it made?" inquired Mrs. Levison.

"It is much more convenient to have it brought in, ready made," said Mrs. Vane. "I dislike the *embarass* of making it."

"Indeed!" was the reply of the old lady; "and get it slopped over in the saucers, and as cold as milk! You always were lazy, Emma—and given to use those French words. I'd rather stick a printed label on my forehead, for my part, 'I speak French,' and let the world know it in that way."

"Who makes tea for you in general?" asked Mrs. Vane, telegraphing a contemptuous glance to Isabel behind her grandmother.

But the eyes of Lady Isabel fell timidly and a blush rose to her cheeks. She did not like to appear to differ from Mrs. Vane, her senior, and her father's guest, but her mind revolted at the bare idea of ingratitude or ridicule cast on an aged parent.

"Harriet comes in and makes it for me," replied Mrs. Levison; "aye, and sits down and takes it with me when I am alone, which is pretty often. What do you say to that, Madame Emma—you, with your fine notions?"

"Just as you please, of course, grandmamma."

"And there's the tea-caddy at your elbow, and the urn's fizzing away, and if we are to have any tea to-night, it had better be made."

"I don't know how much to put in," grumbled Mrs. Vane, who had the greatest horror of soiling her hands or her gloves; who, in short, had a particular antipathy to doing anything useful.

"Shall I make it, dear Mrs. Levison?" said Isabel, rising with alacrity. "I had used to make it quite as often as my governess at Mount Severn, and I make it for papa."

"Do, child," replied the old lady. "You are worth ten of her."

Isabel laughed merrily, drew off her gloves, and sat down to the table; and at that moment a young and elegant man lounged into the room. He was deemed handsome, with his clearly-cut features, his dark eyes, his raven hair, and his white teeth; but to a keen observer those features had

not an attractive expression, and the dark eyes had a great knack of looking away while he spoke to you. It was Francis, Captain Levison.

He was grandson to the old lady, and first cousin to Mrs. Vane. Few men were so fascinating in manners, at times and seasons, in face and in form, few men won so completely upon their hearers' ears, and few were so heartless in their hearts of hearts. The world courted him, and society honored him; for, though he was a graceless spendthrift, and it was known that he was, he was the presumptive heir to the old and rich Sir Peter Levison.

The ancient lady spoke up, "Captain Levison, Lady Isabel Vane." They both acknowledged the introduction; and Isabel, a child yet in the ways of the world, flushed crimson at the admiring looks cast upon her by the young guardsman. Strange—strange that she should make the acquaintance of these two men in the same day, almost in the same hour; the two, of all the human race, who were to exercise so powerful an influence over her future life!

"That's a pretty cross, child," cried Mrs. Levison as Isabel stood by her when tea was over, and she and Mrs. Vane were about to depart on their evening visit.

She alluded to a golden cross, set with seven emeralds, which Isabel wore on her neck. It was of light, delicate texture, and was suspended from a thin, short, gold chain.

"Is it not pretty?" answered Isabel. "It was given me by my dear mamma just before she died. Stay, I will take it off for you. I only wear it upon great occasions."

This, her first appearance at the grand duke's, seemed a very great occasion to the simply-reared and inexperienced girl. She unclasped the chain, and placed it with the cross in the hands of Mrs. Levison.

"Why, I declare you have nothing on but that cross and some rubbishing pearl bracelets!" uttered Mrs. Vane to Isabel. "I did not look at you before."

"Mamma gave me both. The bracelets are those she used frequently to wear."

"You old-fashioned child! Because your mamma wore those bracelets, years ago, is that a reason for your doing so?" retorted Mrs. Vane. "Why did you not put on your diamonds?"

"I—did—put on my diamonds; but I—took them off again," stammered Isabel.

"What on earth for?"

"I did not like to look too fine," answered Isabel, with a laugh and a blush. "They glittered so! I feared it might be thought I had put them on *to look* fine."

"Ah! I see you mean to set up in that class of people who pretend to despise ornaments," scornfully remarked Mrs. Vane. "It is the refinement of affectation, Lady Isabel."

The sneer fell harmlessly on Lady Isabel's ear. She only believed something had put Mrs. Vane out of temper. It certainly had; and that something, though Isabel little suspected it, was the evident admiration Captain Levison evinced for her fresh, young beauty; it quite absorbed him, and rendered him neglectful even of Mrs. Vane.

"Here, child, take your cross," said the old lady. "It is very pretty; prettier on your neck than diamonds would be. You don't want embellishing; never mind what Emma says."

Francis Levison took the cross and chain from her hand to pass them to Lady Isabel. Whether he was awkward, or whether her hands were full, for she held her gloves, her handkerchief, and had just taken up her mantle, certain it is that it fell; and the gentleman, in his too quick effort to regain it, managed to set his foot upon it, and the cross was broken in two.

"There! Now whose fault was that?" cried Mrs. Levison.

Isabel did not answer; her heart was very full. She took the broken cross, and the tears dropped from her eyes; she could not help it.

"Why! You are never crying over a stupid bauble of a cross!" uttered Mrs. Vane, interrupting Captain Levison's expression of regret at his awkwardness.

"You can have it mended, dear," interposed Mrs. Levison.

Lady Isabel chased away the tears, and turned to Captain Levison with a cheerful look. "Pray do not blame yourself," she good-naturedly said; "the fault was as much mine as yours; and, as Mrs. Levison says, I can get it mended."

She disengaged the upper part of the cross from the chain as she spoke, and clasped the latter round her throat.

"You will not go with that thin string of gold on, and nothing else!" uttered Mrs. Vane.

"Why not?" returned Isabel. "If people say anything, I can tell them an accident happened to the cross."

Mrs. Vane burst into a laugh of mocking ridicule. "If people say anything!" she repeated, in a tone according with the laugh. "They are not likely to 'say anything,' but they will deem Lord Mount Severn's daughter unfortunately short of jewellery."

Isabel smiled and shook her head. "They saw my diamonds at the drawing-room."

"If you had done such an awkward thing for me, Frank Levison," burst forth the old lady, "my doors should have been closed against you for a month. There, if you are to go, Emma, you had better go; dancing off to begin an evening at ten o'clock at night! In my time we used to go at seven; but it's the custom now to turn night into day."

"When George the Third dined at one o'clock upon boiled mutton and turnips," put in the graceless captain, who certainly held his grandmother in no greater reverence than did Mrs. Vane.

He turned to Isabel as he spoke, to hand her downstairs. Thus she was conducted to her carriage the second time that night by a stranger. Mrs. Vane got down by herself, as she best could, and her temper was not improved by the process.

"Good-night," said she to the captain.

"I shall not say good-night. You will find me there almost as soon as you."

"You told me you were not coming. Some bachelor's party in the way."

"Yes, but I have changed my mind. Farewell for the present, Lady Isabel."

"What an object you will look, with nothing on your neck but a schoolgirl's chain!" began Mrs. Vane, returning to the grievance as the carriage drove on.

"Oh, Mrs. Vane, what does it signify? I can only think of my broken cross. I am sure it must be an evil omen."

"An evil—what?"

"An evil omen. Mamma gave me that cross when she was dying. She told me to let it be to me as a talisman, always to keep it safely; and when I was in any distress, or in need of counsel, to look at it and strive to recall what her advice would be, and to act accordingly. And now it is broken—broken!"

A glaring gaslight flashed into the carriage, right into the face of Isabel. "I declare," uttered Mrs. Vane, "you are crying again! I tell you what it is, Isabel, I am not going to chaperone red eyes to the Duchess of Dartford's, so if you can't put a stop to this, I shall order the carriage home, and go on alone."

Isabel meekly dried her eyes, sighing deeply as she did so. "I can have the pieces joined, I dare say; but it will never be the same cross to me again."

"What have you done with the pieces?" irascibly asked Mrs. Vane.

"I folded them in the thin paper Mrs. Levison gave me, and put it inside my frock. Here it is," touching the body. "I have no pocket on."

Mrs. Vane gave vent to a groan. She never had been a girl herself—she had been a woman at ten; and she complimented Isabel upon being little better than an imbecile. "Put it inside my frock!" she uttered in a torrent of scorn. "And you eighteen years of age! I fancied you left off 'frocks' when you left the nursery. For shame, Isabel!"

"I meant to say my dress," corrected Isabel.

"Meant to say you are a baby idiot!" was the inward comment of Mrs. Vane.

A few minutes and Isabel forgot her grievance. The brilliant rooms were to her as an enchanting scene of dreamland, for her heart was in its springtide of early freshness, and the satiety of experience had not come. How could she remember trouble, even the broken cross, as she bent to the homage offered her and drank in the honeyed words poured forth into her ear?

“Halloo!” cried an Oxford student, with a long rent-roll in prospective, who was screwing himself against the wall, not to be in the way of the waltzers, “I thought you had given up coming to these places?”

“So I had,” replied the fast nobleman addressed, the son of a marquis. “But I am on the lookout, so am forced into them again. I think a ball-room the greatest bore in life.”

“On the lookout for what?”

“For a wife. My governor has stopped supplies, and has vowed by his beard not to advance another shilling, or pay a debt, till I reform. As a preliminary step toward it, he insists upon a wife, and I am trying to choose one for I am deeper in debt than you imagine.”

“Take the new beauty, then.”

“Who is she?”

“Lady Isabel Vane.”

“Much obliged for the suggestion,” replied the earl. “But one likes a respectable father-in-law, and Mount Severn is going to smash. He and I are too much in the same line, and might clash, in the long run.”

“One can’t have everything; the girl’s beauty is beyond common. I saw that rake, Levison, make up to her. He fancies he can carry all before him, where women are concerned.”

“So he does, often,” was his quiet reply.

“I hate the fellow! He thinks so much of himself, with his curled hair and shining teeth, and his white skin; and he’s as heartless as an owl. What was that hushed-up business about Miss Charteris?”

“Who’s to know? Levison slipped out of the escapade like an eel, and the woman protested that he was more sinned against than sinning. Three-fourths of the world believed them.”

“And she went abroad and died; and Levison here he comes! And Mount Severn’s daughter with him.”

They were approaching at that moment, Francis Levison and Lady Isabel. He was expressing his regret at the untoward accident of the cross for the tenth time that night. “I feel that it can never be atoned for,” whispered he; “that the heartfelt homage of my whole life would not be sufficient compensation.”

He spoke in a tone of thrilling gentleness, gratifying to the ear but dangerous to the heart. Lady Isabel glanced up and caught his eyes gazing upon her with the deepest tenderness—a language hers had never yet encountered. A vivid blush again arose to her cheek, her eyelids fell, and her timid words died away in silence.

“Take care, take care, my young Lady Isabel,” murmured the Oxonian under his breath, as they passed him, “that man is as false as he is fair.”

“I think he is a rascal,” remarked the earl.

“I know he is; I know a thing or two about him. He would ruin her heart for the renown of the exploit, because she’s a beauty, and then fling it away broken. He has none to give in return for the gift.”

“Just as much as my new race-horse has,” concluded the earl. “She is very beautiful.”

CHAPTER III

BARBARA HARE

West Lynne was a town of some importance, particularly in its own eyes, though being neither a manufacturing one nor a cathedral one, nor even the chief town of the county, it was somewhat primitive in its manners and customs. Passing out at the town, toward the east, you came upon several detached gentleman's houses, in the vicinity of which stood the church of St. Jude, which was more aristocratic, in the matter of its congregation, than the other churches of West Lynne. For about a mile these houses were scattered, the church being situated at their commencement, close to that busy part of the place, and about a mile further on you came upon the beautiful estate which was called East Lynne.

Between the gentlemen's houses mentioned and East Lynne, the mile of road was very solitary, being much overshadowed with trees. One house alone stood there, and that was about three-quarters of a mile before you came to East Lynne. It was on the left hand side, a square, ugly, red brick house with a weathercock on the top, standing some little distance from the road. A flat lawn extended before it, and close to the palings, which divided it from the road, was a grove of trees, some yards in depth. The lawn was divided by a narrow middle gravel path, to which you gained access from the portico of the house. You entered upon a large flagged hall with a reception room on either hand, and the staircase, a wide one, facing you; by the side of the staircase you passed on to the servants' apartments and offices. That place was called the Grove, and was the property and residence of Richard Hare, Esq., commonly called Mr. Justice Hare.

The room to the left hand, as you went in, was the general sitting-room; the other was very much kept boxed up in lavender and brown Holland, to be opened on state occasions. Justice and Mrs. Hare had three children, a son and two daughters. Anne was the elder of the girls, and had married young; Barbara, the younger was now nineteen, and Richard the eldest—but we shall come to him hereafter.

In this sitting-room, on a chilly evening, early in May, a few days subsequent to that which had witnessed the visit of Mr. Carlyle to the Earl of Mount Severn, sat Mrs. Hare, a pale, delicate woman, buried in shawls and cushions: but the day had been warm. At the window sat a pretty girl, very fair, with blue eyes, light hair, a bright complexion, and small aquiline features. She was listlessly turning over the leaves of a book.

“Barbara, I am sure it must be tea-time now.”

“The time seems to move slowly with you, mamma. It is scarcely a quarter of an hour since I told you it was but ten minutes past six.”

“I am so thirsty!” announced the poor invalid. “Do go and look at the clock again, Barbara.”

Barbara Hare rose with a gesture of impatience, not suppressed, opened the door, and glanced at the large clock in the hall. “It wants nine and twenty minutes to seven, mamma. I wish you would put your watch on of a day; four times you have sent me to look at that clock since dinner.”

“I am so thirsty!” repeated Mrs. Hare, with a sort of sob. “If seven o'clock would but strike! I am dying for my tea.”

It may occur to the reader, that a lady in her own house, “dying for her tea,” might surely order it brought in, although the customary hour had not struck. Not so Mrs. Hare. Since her husband had first brought her home to that house, four and twenty-years ago, she had never dared to express a will in it; scarcely, on her own responsibility, to give an order. Justice Hare was stern, imperative, obstinate, and self-conceited; she, timid, gentle and submissive. She had loved him with all her heart, and her life had been one long yielding of her will to his; in fact, she had no will; his was all in all. Far was she from feeling the servitude a yoke: some natures do not: and to do Mr. Hare justice, his

powerful will that *must* bear down all before it, was in fault: not his kindness: he never meant to be unkind to his wife. Of his three children, Barbara alone had inherited his will.

“Barbara,” began Mrs. Hare again, when she thought another quarter of an hour at least must have elapsed.

“Well, mamma?”

“Ring, and tell them to be getting it in readiness so that when seven strikes there may be no delay.”

“Goodness, mamma! You know they do always have it ready. And there’s no such hurry, for papa may not be at home.” But she rose, and rang the bell with a petulant motion, and when the man answered it, told him to have tea in to its time.

“If you knew dear, how dry my throat is, how parched my mouth, you would have more patience with me.”

Barbara closed her book with a listless air, and turned listlessly to the window. She seemed tired, not with fatigue but with what the French express by the word *ennui*. “Here comes papa,” she presently said.

“Oh, I am so glad!” cried poor Mrs. Hare. “Perhaps he will not mind having the tea in at once, if I told him how thirsty *I* am.”

The justice came in. A middle sized man, with pompous features, and a pompous walk, and a flaxen wig. In his aquiline nose, compressed lips, and pointed chin, might be traced a resemblance to his daughter; though he never could have been half so good-looking as was pretty Barbara.

“Richard,” spoke up Mrs. Hare from between her shawls, the instant he opened the door.

“Well?”

“Would you please let me have tea in now? Would you very much mind taking it a little earlier this evening? I am feverish again, and my tongue is so parched I don’t know how to speak.”

“Oh, it’s near seven; you won’t have long to wait.”

With this exceedingly gracious answer to an invalid’s request, Mr. Hare quitted the room again and banged the door. He had not spoken unkindly or roughly, simply with indifference. But ere Mrs. Hare’s meek sigh of disappointment was over, the door re-opened, and the flaxen wig was thrust in again.

“I don’t mind if I do have it now. It will be a fine moonlight night and I am going with Pinner as far as Beauchamp’s to smoke a pipe. Order it in, Barbara.”

The tea was made and partaken of, and the justice departed for Mr. Beauchamp’s, Squire Pinner calling for him at the gate. Mr. Beauchamp was a gentleman who farmed a great deal of land, and who was also Lord Mount Severn’s agent or steward for East Lynne. He lived higher up the road some little distance beyond East Lynne.

“I am so cold, Barbara,” shivered Mrs. Hare, as she watched the justice down the gravel path. “I wonder if your papa would say it was foolish of me, if I told them to light a bit of fire?”

“Have it lighted if you like,” responded Barbara, ringing the bell. “Papa will know nothing about it, one way or the other, for he won’t be home till after bedtime. Jasper, mamma is cold, and would like a fire lighted.”

“Plenty of sticks, Jasper, that it may burn up quickly,” said Mrs. Hare, in a pleading voice, as if the sticks were Jasper’s and not hers.

Mrs. Hare got her fire, and she drew her chair in front, and put her feet on the fender, to catch its warmth. Barbara, listless still, went into the hall, took a woollen shawl from the stand there, threw it over her shoulders, and went out. She strolled down the straight formal path, and stood at the iron gate, looking over it into the public road. Not very public in that spot, and at that hour, but as lonely as one could wish. The night was calm and pleasant, though somewhat chilly for the beginning of May, and the moon was getting high in the sky.

“When will he come home?” she murmured, as she leaned her head upon the gate. “Oh, what would life be like without him? How miserable these few days have been! I wonder what took him there! I wonder what is detaining him! Corny said he was only gone for a day.”

The faint echo of footsteps in the distance stole upon her ear, and Barbara drew a little back, and hid herself under the shelter of the trees, not choosing to be seen by any stray passer-by. But, as they drew near, a sudden change came over her; her eyes lighted up, her cheeks were dyed with crimson, and her veins tingled with excess of rapture—for she knew those footsteps, and loved them, only too well.

Cautiously peeping over the gate again, she looked down the road. A tall form, whose very height and strength bore a grace of which its owner was unconscious, was advancing rapidly toward her from the direction of West Lynne. Again she shrank away; true love is ever timid; and whatever may have been Barbara Hare’s other qualities, her love at least was true and deep. But instead of the gate opening, with the firm quick motion peculiar to the hand which guided it, the footsteps seemed to pass, and not to have turned at all toward it. Barbara’s heart sank, and she stole to the gate again, and looked out with a yearning look.

Yes, sure enough he was striding on, not thinking of her, not coming to her; and she, in the disappointment and impulse of the moment, called to him,—

“Archibald!”

Mr. Carlyle—it was no other—turned on his heel, and approached the gate.

“Is it you, Barbara! Watching for thieves and poachers? How are you?”

“How are you?” she returned, holding the gate open for him to enter, as he shook hands, and striving to calm down her agitation. “When did you return?”

“Only now, by the eight o’clock train, which got in beyond its time, having drawled unpardonably at the stations. They little thought they had me in it, as their looks betrayed when I got out. I have not been home yet.”

“No! What will Cornelia say?”

“I went to the office for five minutes. But I have a few words to say to Beauchamp, and am going up at once. Thank you, I cannot come in now; I intend to do so on my return.”

“Papa has gone up to Mr. Beauchamp’s.”

“Mr. Hare! Has he?”

“He and Squire Pinner,” continued Barbara. “They have gone to have a smoking bout. And if you wait there with papa, it will be too late to come in, for he is sure not to be home before eleven or twelve.”

Mr. Carlyle bent his head in deliberation. “Then I think it is of little use my going on,” said he, “for my business with Beauchamp is private. I must defer it until to-morrow.”

He took the gate out of her hand, closed it, and placed the hand within his own arm, to walk with her to the house. It was done in a matter-of-fact, real sort of way; nothing of romance or sentiment hallowed it; but Barbara Hare felt that she was in Eden.

“And how have you all been, Barbara, these few days?”

“Oh, very well. What made you start off so suddenly? You never said you were going, or came to wish us good-bye.”

“You have just expressed it, Barbara—‘suddenly.’ A matter of business suddenly arose, and I suddenly went upon it.”

“Cornelia said you were only gone for a day.”

“Did she? When in London I find so many things to do! Is Mrs. Hare better?”

“Just the same. I think mamma’s ailments are fancies, half of them; if she would rouse herself she would be better. What is in that parcel?”

“You are not to inquire, Miss Barbara. It does not concern you. It only concerns Mrs. Hare.”

“Is it something you have brought for mamma, Archibald?”

“Of course. A countryman’s visit to London entails buying presents for his friends; at least, it used to be so, in the old-fashioned days.”

“When people made their wills before starting, and were a fortnight doing the journey in a wagon,” laughed Barbara. “Grandpapa used to tell us tales of that, when we were children. But is it really something for mamma?”

“Don’t I tell you so? I have brought something for you.”

“Oh! What is it?” she uttered, her color rising, and wondering whether he was in jest or earnest.

“There’s an impatient girl! ‘What is it?’ Wait a moment, and you shall see what it is.”

He put the parcel or roll he was carrying upon a garden chair, and proceeded to search his pockets. Every pocket was visited, apparently in vain.

“Barbara, I think it is gone. I must have lost it somehow.”

Her heart beat as she stood there, silently looking up at him in the moonlight. *Was it lost? What had it been?*

But, upon a second search, he came upon something in the pocket of his coat-tail. “Here it is, I believe; what brought it there?” He opened a small box, and taking out a long, gold chain, threw it around her neck. A locket was attached to it.

Her cheeks’ crimson went and came; her heart beat more rapidly. She could not speak a word of thanks; and Mr. Carlyle took up the roll, and walked on into the presence of Mrs. Hare.

Barbara followed in a few minutes. Her mother was standing up, watching with pleased expectation the movements of Mr. Carlyle. No candles were in the room, but it was bright with firelight.

“Now, don’t laugh at me,” quoth he, untying the string of the parcel. “It is not a roll of velvet for a dress, and it is not a roll of parchment, conferring twenty thousand pounds a year. But it is—an air cushion!”

It was what poor Mrs. Hare, so worn with sitting and lying, had often longed for. She had heard such a luxury was to be bought in London, but never remembered to have seen one. She took it almost with a greedy hand, casting a grateful look at Mr. Carlyle.

“How am I to thank you for it?” she murmured through her tears.

“If you thank me at all, I will never bring you anything again,” cried he, gaily. “I have been telling Barbara that a visit to London entails bringing gifts for friends,” he continued. “Do you see how smart I have made her?”

Barbara hastily took off the chain, and laid it before her mother.

“What a beautiful chain!” muttered Mrs. Hare, in surprise. “Archibald, you are too good, too generous! This must have cost a great deal; this is beyond a trifle.”

“Nonsense!” laughed Mr. Carlyle. “I’ll tell you both how I happened to buy it. I went into a jeweller’s about my watch, which has taken to lose lately in a most unceremonious fashion, and there I saw a whole display of chains hanging up; some ponderous enough for a sheriff, some light and elegant enough for Barbara. I dislike to see a thick chain on a lady’s neck. They put me in mind of the chain she lost, the day she and Cornelia went with me to Lynchborough, which loss Barbara persisted in declaring was my fault, for dragging her through the town sight-seeing, while Cornelia did her shopping—for it was then the chain was lost.”

“But I was only joking when I said so,” was the interruption of Barbara. “Of course it would have happened had you not been with me; the links were always snapping.”

“Well, these chains in the shop in London put me in mind of Barbara’s misfortune, and I chose one. Then the shopman brought forth some lockets, and enlarged upon their convenience for holding deceased relatives’ hair, not to speak of sweethearts’, until I told him he might attach one. I thought it might hold that piece of hair you prize, Barbara,” he concluded, dropping his voice.

“What piece?” asked Mrs. Hare.

Mr. Carlyle glanced round the room, as if fearful the very walls might hear his whisper. “Richard’s. Barbara showed it me one day when she was turning out her desk, and said it was a curl taken off in that illness.”

Mrs. Hare sank back in her chair, and hid her face in her hands, shivering visibly. The words evidently awoke some poignant source of deep sorrow. “Oh, my boy! My boy!” she wailed—“my boy! My unhappy boy! Mr. Hare wonders at my ill-health, Archibald; Barbara ridicules it; but there lies the source of all my misery, mental and bodily. Oh, Richard! Richard!”

There was a distressing pause, for the topic admitted of neither hope nor consolation. “Put your chain on again, Barbara,” Mr. Carlyle said, after a while, “and I wish you health to wear it out. Health and reformation, young lady!”

Barbara smiled and glanced at him with her pretty blue eyes, so full of love. “What have you brought for Cornelia?” she resumed.

“Something splendid,” he answered, with a mock serious face; “only I hope I have not been taken in. I bought her a shawl. The venders vowed it was true Parisian cashmere. I gave eighteen guineas for it.”

“That is a great deal,” observed Mrs. Hare. “It ought to be a very good one. I never gave more than six guineas for a shawl in all my life.”

“And Cornelia, I dare say, never more than half six,” laughed Mr. Carlyle. “Well, I shall wish you good evening, and go to her; for if she knows I am back all this while, I shall be lectured.”

He shook hands with them both. Barbara, however, accompanied him to the front door, and stepped outside with him.

“You will catch cold, Barbara. You have left your shawl indoors.”

“Oh, no, I shall not. How very soon you are leaving. You have scarcely stayed ten minutes.”

“But you forget I have not been at home.”

“You were on your road to Beauchamp’s, and would not have been at home for an hour or two in that case,” spoke Barbara, in a tone that savored of resentment.

“That was different; that was upon business. But, Barbara, I think your mother looks unusually ill.”

“You know she suffers a little thing to upset her; and last night she had what she calls one of her dreams,” answered Barbara. “She says that it is a warning that something bad is going to happen, and she has been in the most unhappy, feverish state possible all day. Papa has been quite angry over her being so weak and nervous, declaring that she ought to rouse herself out of her ‘nerves.’ Of course we dare not tell him about the dream.”

“It related to—the—”

Mr. Carlyle stopped, and Barbara glanced round with a shudder, and drew closer to him as she whispered. He had not given her his arm this time.

“Yes, to the murder. You know mamma has always declared that Bethel had something to do with it; she says her dreams would have convinced her of it, if nothing else did; and she dreamt she saw him with—with—you know.”

“Hallijohn?” whispered Mr. Carlyle.

“With Hallijohn,” assented Barbara, with a shiver. “He was standing over him as he lay on the floor; just as he *did* lay on it. And that wretched Afy was standing at the end of the kitchen, looking on.”

“But Mrs. Hare ought not to suffer dreams to disturb her peace by day,” remonstrated Mr. Carlyle. “It is not to be surprised at that she dreams of the murder, because she is always dwelling upon it; but she should strive and throw the feeling from her with the night.”

“You know what mamma is. Of course she ought to do so, but she does not. Papa wonders what makes her get up so ill and trembling of a morning; and mamma has to make all sorts of evasive excuses; for not a hint, as you are aware, must be breathed to him about the murder.”

Mr. Carlyle gravely nodded.

“Mamma does so harp about Bethel. And I know that dream arose from nothing in the world but because she saw him pass the gate yesterday. Not that she thinks that it was he who did it; unfortunately, there is no room for that; but she will persist that he had a hand in it in some way, and he haunts her dreams.”

Mr. Carlyle walked on in silence; indeed there was no reply that he could make. A cloud had fallen upon the house of Mr. Hare, and it was an unhappy subject. Barbara continued,—

“But for mamma to have taken it into her head that ‘some evil is going to happen,’ because she had this dream, and to make herself miserable over it, is so absurd, that I have felt quite cross with her all day. Such nonsense, you know, Archibald, to believe that dreams give signs of what is going to happen, so far behind these enlightened days!”

“Your mamma’s trouble is great, Barbara; and she is not strong.”

“I think all our troubles have been great since—since that dark evening,” responded Barbara.

“Have you heard from Anne?” inquired Mr. Carlyle, willing to change the subject.

“Yes, she is very well. What do you think they are going to name the baby? Anne; after her mamma. So very ugly a name! Anne!”

“I do not think so,” said Mr. Carlyle. “It is simple and unpretending, I like it much. Look at the long, pretentious names of our family—Archibald! Cornelia! And yours, too—Barbara! What a mouthful they all are!”

Barbara contracted her eyebrows. It was equivalent to saying that he did not like her name.

They reached the gate, and Mr. Carlyle was about to pass out of it when Barbara laid her hand on his arm to detain him, and spoke in a timid voice,—

“Archibald!”

“What is it?”

“I have not said a word of thanks to you for this,” she said, touching the chain and locket; “my tongue seemed tied. Do not deem me ungrateful.”

“You foolish girl! It is not worth them. There! Now I am paid. Good-night, Barbara.”

He had bent down and kissed her cheek, swung through the gate, laughing, and strode away. “Don’t say I never gave you anything,” he turned his head round to say, “Good-night.”

All her veins were tingling, all her pulses beating; her heart was throbbing with its sense of bliss. He had never kissed her, that she could remember, since she was a child. And when she returned indoors, her spirits were so extravagantly high that Mrs. Hare wondered.

“Ring for the lamp, Barbara, and you can get to your work. But don’t have the shutters closed; I like to look out on these light nights.”

Barbara, however, did not get to her work; she also, perhaps, liked “looking out on a light night,” for she sat down at the window. She was living the last half hour over again. “Don’t say I never gave you anything,” she murmured; “did he allude to the chain or to the—kiss? Oh, Archibald, why don’t you say that you love me?”

Mr. Carlyle had been all his life upon intimate terms with the Hare family. His father’s first wife—for the late lawyer Carlyle had been twice married—had been a cousin of Justice Hare’s, and this had caused them to be much together. Archibald, the child of the second Mrs. Carlyle, had alternately teased and petted Anne and Barbara Hare, boy fashion. Sometimes he quarreled with the pretty little girls, sometimes he caressed them, as he would have done had they been his sisters; and he made no scruple of declaring publicly to the pair that Anne was his favorite. A gentle, yielding girl she was, like her mother; whereas Barbara displayed her own will, and it sometimes clashed with young Carlyle’s.

The clock struck ten. Mrs. Hare took her customary sup of brandy and water, a small tumbler three parts full. Without it she believed she could never get to sleep; it deadened unhappy thought, she said. Barbara, after making it, had turned again to the window, but she did not resume her seat. She stood right in front of it, her forehead bent forward against its middle pane. The lamp, casting

a bright light, was behind her, so that her figure might be distinctly observable from the lawn, had any one been there to look upon it.

She stood there in the midst of dreamland, giving way to all its enchanting and most delusive fascinations. She saw herself, in anticipation, the wife of Mr. Carlyle, the envied, thrice envied, of all West Lynne; for, like as he was the dearest on earth to her heart, so was he the greatest match in the neighborhood around. Not a mother but what coveted him for her child, and not a daughter but would have said, "Yes, and thank you," to an offer from the attractive Archibald Carlyle. "I never was sure, quite sure of it till to-night," murmured Barbara, caressing the locket, and holding it to her cheek. "I always thought he meant something, or he might mean nothing: but to give me this—to kiss me—oh Archibald!"

A pause. Barbara's eyes were fixed upon the moonlight.

"If he would but say he loved me! If he would but save the suspense of my aching heart! But it must come; I know it will; and if that cantankerous toad of a Corny—"

Barbara Hare stopped. What was that, at the far end of the lawn, just in advance of the shade of the thick trees? Their leaves were not causing the movement, for it was a still night. It had been there some minutes; it was evidently a human form. What *was* it? Surely it was making signs to her!

Or else it looked as though it was. That was certainly its arm moving, and now it advanced a pace nearer, and raised something which it wore on its head—a battered hat with a broad brim, a "wide-awake," encircled with a wisp of straw.

Barbara Hare's heart leaped, as the saying runs, into her mouth, and her face became deadly white in the moonlight. Her first thought was to alarm the servants; her second, to be still; for she remembered the fear and mystery that attached to the house. She went into the hall, shutting her mamma in the parlor, and stood in the shade of the portico, gazing still. But the figure evidently followed her movement with its sight, and the hat was again taken off, and waved violently.

Barbara Hare turned sick with utter terror. *She* must fathom it; she must see who, and what it was; for the servants she dared not call, and those movements were imperative, and might not be disregarded. But she possessed more innate courage than falls to the lot of some young ladies.

"Mamma," she said, returning to the parlor and catching up her shawl, while striving to speak without emotion. "I shall just walk down the path and see if papa is coming."

Mrs. Hare did not reply. She was musing upon other things, in that quiescent happy mood, which a small portion of spirits will impart to one weak in body; and Barbara softly closed the door, and stole out again to the portico. She stood a moment to rally her courage, and again the hat was waved impatiently.

Barbara Hare commenced her walk towards it in dread unutterable, an undefined sense of evil filling her sinking heart; mingling with which, came, with a rush of terror, a fear of that other undefinable evil—the evil Mrs. Hare had declared was foreboded by her dream.

CHAPTER IV

THE MOONLIGHT INTERVIEW

Cold and still looked the old house in the moonbeams. Never was the moon brighter; it lighted the far-stretching garden, it illuminated even the weathercock aloft, it shone upon the portico, and upon one who appeared in it. Stealing to the portico from the house had come Barbara Hare, her eyes strained in dread affright on the grove of trees at the foot of the garden. What was it that had stepped out of that grove of trees, and mysteriously beckoned to her as she stood at the window, turning her heart to sickness as she gazed? Was it a human being, one to bring more evil to the house, where so much evil had already fallen? Was it a supernatural visitant, or was it but a delusion of her own eyesight? Not the latter, certainly, for the figure was now emerging again, motioning to her as before; and with a white face and shaking limbs, Barbara clutched her shawl around her and went down that path in the moonlight. The beckoning form retreated within the dark recess as she neared it, and Barbara halted.

“Who and what are you?” she asked, under her breath. “What do you want?”

“Barbara,” was the whispered, eager answer, “don’t you recognize me?”

Too surely she did—the voice at any rate—and a cry escaped her, telling more of sorrow than of joy, though betraying both. She penetrated the trees, and burst into tears as one in the dress of a farm laborer caught her in his arms. In spite of his smock-frock and his straw-wisped hat, and his false whiskers, black as Erebus, she knew him for her brother.

“Oh, Richard! Where have you come from? What brings you here?”

“Did you know me, Barbara?” was his rejoinder.

“How was it likely—in this disguise? A thought crossed my mind that it might be some one from you, and even that made me sick with terror. How could you run such a risk as to come here?” she added, wringing her hands. “If you are discovered, it is certain death; death—upon—you know!”

“Upon the gibbet,” returned Richard Hare. “I do know it, Barbara.”

“Then why risk it? Should mamma see you it will kill her outright.”

“I can’t live on as I am living,” he answered, gloomily. “I have been working in London ever since—”

“In London!” interrupted Barbara.

“In London, and have never stirred out of it. But it is hard work for me, and now I have an opportunity of doing better, if I can get a little money. Perhaps my mother can let me have it; it is what I have come to ask for.”

“How are you working? What at?”

“In a stable-yard.”

“A stable-yard!” she uttered, in a deeply shocked tone. “Richard!”

“Did you expect it would be as a merchant, or a banker, or perhaps as secretary to one of her majesty’s ministers—or that I was a gentleman at large, living on my fortune?” retorted Richard Hare, in a tone of chafed anguish, painful to hear. “I get twelve shillings a week, and that has to find me in everything!”

“Poor Richard, poor Richard!” she wailed, caressing his hand and weeping over it. “Oh, what a miserable night’s work that was! Our only comfort is, Richard, that you must have committed the deed in madness.”

“I did not commit it at all,” he replied.

“What!” she exclaimed.

“Barbara, I swear that I am innocent; I swear I was not present when the man was murdered; I swear that from my own positive knowledge, my eyesight, I know no more who did it than you.

The guessing at it is enough for me; and my guess is as sure and true a one as that the moon is in the heavens.”

Barbara shivered as she drew close to him. It was a shivering subject. “You surely do not mean to throw the guilt on Bethel?”

“Bethel!” lightly returned Richard Hare. “He had nothing to do with it. He was after his gins and his snares, that night, though, poacher as he is!”

“Bethel is no poacher, Richard.”

“Is he not?” rejoined Richard Hare, significantly. “The truth as to what he is may come out, some time. Not that I wish it to come out; the man has done no harm to me, and he may go on poaching with impunity till doomsday for all I care. He and Locksley—”

“Richard,” interrupted his sister, in a hushed voice, “mamma entertains one fixed idea, which she cannot put from her. She is certain that Bethel had something to do with the murder.”

“Then she is wrong. Why should she think so?”

“How the conviction arose at first, I cannot tell you; I do not think she knows herself. But you remember how weak and fanciful she is, and since that dreadful night she is always having what she calls ‘dreams’—meaning that she dreams of the murder. In all these dreams Bethel is prominent; and she says she feels an absolute certainty that he was, in some way or other, mixed up in it.”

“Barbara, he was no more mixed up in it than you.”

“And—you say that you were not?”

“I was not even at the cottage at the time; I swear it to you. The man who did the deed was Thorn.”

“Thorn!” echoed Barbara, lifting her head. “Who is Thorn?”

“I don’t know who. I wish I did; I wish I could unearth him. He was a friend of Afy’s.”

Barbara threw back her neck with a haughty gesture. “Richard!”

“What?”

“You forget yourself when you mention that name to me.”

“Well,” returned Richard. “It was not to discuss these things that I put myself in jeopardy; and to assert my innocence can do no good; it cannot set aside the coroner’s verdict of ‘Wilful murder against Richard Hare, the younger.’ Is my father as bitter against me as ever?”

“Quite. He never mentions your name, or suffers it to be mentioned; he gave his orders to the servants that it never was to be spoken in the house again. Eliza could not, or would not remember, and she persisted in calling your room ‘Mr. Richard’s.’ I think the woman did it heedlessly, not maliciously, to provoke papa; she was a good servant, and had been with us three years you know. The first time she transgressed, papa warned her; the second, he thundered at her as I believe nobody else in the world can thunder; and the third he turned her from the doors, never allowing her to get her bonnet; one of the others carrying her bonnet and shawl to the gate, and her boxes were sent away the same day. Papa took an oath—did you hear of it?”

“What oath? He takes many.”

“This was a solemn one, Richard. After the delivery of the verdict, he took an oath in the justice-room, in the presence of his brother magistrates, that if he could find you he would deliver you up to justice, and that he *would* do it, though you might not turn up for ten years to come. You know his disposition, Richard, and therefore may be sure he will keep it. Indeed, it is most dangerous for you to be here.”

“I know that he never treated me as he ought,” cried Richard, bitterly. “If my health was delicate, causing my poor mother to indulge me, ought that to have been a reason for his ridiculing me on every possible occasion, public and private? Had my home been made happier I should not have sought the society I did elsewhere. Barbara, I must be allowed an interview with my mother.”

Barbara Hare reflected before she spoke. “I do not see how it can be managed.”

“Why can’t she come out to me as you have done? Is she up, or in bed?”

“It is impossible to think of it to-night,” returned Barbara in an alarmed tone. “Papa may be in at any moment; he is spending the evening at Beauchamp’s.”

“It is hard to have been separated from her for eighteen months, and to go back without seeing her,” returned Richard. “And about the money? It is a hundred pounds that I want.”

“You must be here again to-morrow night, Richard; the money, no doubt, can be yours, but I am not so sure about your seeing mamma. I am terrified for your safety. But, if it is as you say, that you are innocent,” she added, after a pause, “could it not be proved?”

“Who is to prove it? The evidence is strong against me; and Thorn, did I mention him, would be as a myth to other people; nobody knew anything of him.”

“Is he a myth?” said Barbara, in a low voice.

“Are you and I myths?” retorted Richard. “So, even you doubt me?”

“Richard,” she suddenly exclaimed, “why not tell the whole circumstances to Archibald Carlyle? If any one can help you, or take measures to establish your innocence, he can. And you know that he is true as steel.”

“There’s no other man living should be trusted with the secret that I am here, except Carlyle. Where is it they suppose that I am, Barbara?”

“Some think that you are dead; some that you are in Australia; the very uncertainty has nearly killed mamma. A report arose that you had been seen at Liverpool, in an Australian-bound ship, but we could not trace it to any foundation.”

“It had none. I dodged my way to London, and there I have been.”

“Working in a stable-yard?”

“I could not do better. I was not brought up to anything, and I did understand horses. Besides, a man that the police-runners were after could be more safe in obscurity, considering that he was a gentleman, than—”

Barbara turned suddenly, and placed her hand upon her brother’s mouth. “Be silent for your life,” she whispered, “here’s papa.”

Voices were heard approaching the gate—those of Justice Hare and Squire Pinner. The latter walked on; the former came in. The brother and sister cowered together, scarcely daring to breathe; you might have heard Barbara’s heart beating. Mr. Hare closed the gate and walked on up the path.

“I must go, Richard,” said Barbara, hastily; “I dare not stay another minute. Be here again to-morrow night, and meanwhile I will see what can be done.”

She was speeding away, but Richard held her back. “You did not seem to believe my assertion of innocence. Barbara, we are here alone in the still night, with God above us; as truly as that you and I must sometime meet Him face to face, I told you the truth. It was Thorn murdered Hallijohn, and I had nothing whatever to do with it.”

Barbara broke out of the trees and flew along, but Mr. Hare was already in, locking and barring the door. “Let me in, papa,” she called out.

The justice opened the door again, and thrusting forth his flaxen wig, his aquiline nose, and his amazed eyes, gazed at Barbara.

“Halloo! What brings you out at this time of night, young lady?”

“I went down to the gate to look for you,” she panted, “and had—had—strolled over to the side path. Did you not see me?”

Barbara was truthful by nature and habit; but in such a cause, how could she avoid dissimulation?

“Thank you, papa,” she said, as she went in.

“You ought to have been in bed an hour ago,” angrily responded Mr. Justice Hare.

CHAPTER V

MR. CARLYLE'S OFFICE

In the centre of West Lynne stood two houses adjoining each other, one large, the other much smaller. The large one was the Carlyle residence, and the small one was devoted to the Carlyle offices. The name of Carlyle bore a lofty standing in the county; Carlyle and Davidson were known as first-class practitioners; no pettifogging lawyers were they. It was Carlyle & Davidson in the days gone by; now it was Archibald Carlyle. The old firm were brothers-in-law—the first Mrs. Carlyle having been Mr. Davidson's sister. She had died and left one child. The second Mrs. Carlyle died when her son was born—Archibald; and his half-sister reared him, loved him and ruled him. She bore for him all the authority of a mother; the boy had known no other, and, when a little child he had called her Mamma Corny. Mamma Corny had done her duty by him, that was undoubted; but Mamma Corny had never relaxed her rule; with an iron hand she liked to rule him now, in great things as in small, just as she had done in the days of his babyhood. And Archibald generally submitted, for the force of habit is strong. She was a woman of strong sense, but, in some things, weak of judgment; and the ruling passions of her life were love of Archibald and love of saving money. Mr. Davidson had died earlier than Mr. Carlyle, and his fortune—he had never married—was left equally divided between Cornelia and Archibald. Archibald was no blood relation to him, but he loved the open-hearted boy better than his niece Cornelia. Of Mr. Carlyle's property, a small portion only was bequeathed to his daughter, the rest to his son; and in this, perhaps there was justice, since the 20,000 pounds brought to Mr. Carlyle by his second wife had been chiefly instrumental in the accumulation of his large fortune.

Miss Carlyle, or, as she was called in town, Miss Corny, had never married; it was pretty certain she never would; people thought that her intense love of her young brother kept her single, for it was not likely that the daughter of the rich Mr. Carlyle had wanted for offers. Other maidens confess to soft and tender impressions. Not so Miss Carlyle. All who had approached her with the lovelorn tale, she sent quickly to the right-about.

Mr. Carlyle was seated in his own private room in his office the morning after his return from town. His confidential clerk and manager stood near him. It was Mr. Dill, a little, meek-looking man with a bald head. He was on the rolls, had been admitted years and years ago, but he had never set up for himself; perhaps he deemed the post of head manager in the office of Carlyle & Davidson, with its substantial salary, sufficient for his ambition; and manager he had been to them when the present Mr. Carlyle was in long petticoats. He was a single man, and occupied handsome apartments near.

Between the room of Mr. Carlyle and that of the clerks, was a small square space or hall, having ingress also from the house passage; another room opened from it, a narrow one, which was Mr. Dill's own peculiar sanctum. Here he saw clients when Mr. Carlyle was out or engaged, and here he issued private orders. A little window, not larger than a pane of glass, looked out from the clerk's office; they called it old Dill's peep-hole and wished it anywhere else, for his spectacles might be discerned at it more frequently than was agreeable. The old gentleman had a desk, also, in their office, and there he frequently sat. He was sitting there, in state, this same morning, keeping a sharp lookout around him, when the door timidly opened, and the pretty face of Barbara Hare appeared at it, rosy with blushes.

“Can I see Mr. Carlyle?”

Mr. Dill rose from his seat and shook hands with her. She drew him into the passage and he closed the door. Perhaps he felt surprised, for it was *not* the custom for ladies, young and single, to come there after Mr. Carlyle.

“Presently, Miss Barbara. He is engaged just now. The justices are with him.”

“The justices!” uttered Barbara, in alarm; “and papa one? Whatever shall I do? He must not see me. I would not have him see me here for the world.”

An ominous sound of talking; the justices were evidently coming forth. Mr. Dill laid hold of Barbara, whisked her through the clerks' room, not daring to take her the other way, lest he should encounter them, and shut her in his own. "What the plague brought papa here at this moment?" thought Barbara, whose face was crimson.

A few minutes and Mr. Dill opened the door again. "They are gone now, and the coast's clear, Miss Barbara."

"I don't know what opinion you must form of me, Mr. Dill," she whispered, "but I will tell you, in confidence, that I am here on some private business for mamma, who was not well enough to come herself. It is a little private matter that she does not wish papa to know of."

"Child," answered the manager, "a lawyer receives visits from many people; and it is not the place of those about him to 'think.'"

He opened the door as he spoke, ushered her into the presence of Mr. Carlyle, and left her. The latter rose in astonishment.

"You must regard me as a client, and pardon my intrusion," said Barbara, with a forced laugh, to hide her agitation. "I am here on the part of mamma—and I nearly met papa in your passage, which terrified me out of my senses. Mr. Dill shut me into his room."

Mr. Carlyle motioned to Barbara to seat herself, then resumed his own seat, beside his table. Barbara could not help noticing how different his manners were in his office from his evening manners when he was "off duty." Here he was the staid, calm man of business.

"I have a strange thing to tell you," she began, in a whisper, "but—it is impossible that any one can hear us," she broke off, with a look of dread. "It would be—it might be—death!"

"It is quite impossible," calmly replied Mr. Carlyle. "The doors are double doors; did you notice that they were?"

Nevertheless, she left her chair and stood close to Mr. Carlyle, resting her hand upon the table. He rose, of course.

"Richard is here!"

"Richard!" repeated Mr. Carlyle. "At West Lynne!"

"He appeared at the house last night in disguise, and made signs to me from the grove of trees. You may imagine my alarm. He has been in London all this while, half starving, working—I feel ashamed to mention it to you—in a stable-yard. And, oh, Archibald! He says he is innocent."

Mr. Carlyle made no reply to this. He probably had no faith in the assertion. "Sit down, Barbara," he said drawing her chair closer.

Barbara sat down again, but her manner was hurried and nervous. "Is it quite sure that no stranger will be coming in? It would look so peculiar to see me here; but mamma was too unwell to come herself—or rather, she feared papa's questioning, if he found out that she came."

"Be at ease," replied Mr. Carlyle; "this room is sacred from the intrusion of strangers. What of Richard?"

"He says that he was not in the cottage at the time the murder was committed; that the person who really did it was a man of the name of Thorn."

"What Thorn?" asked Mr. Carlyle, suppressing all signs of incredulity.

"I don't know; a friend of Afy's, he said. Archibald, he swore to it in the most solemn manner; and I believe, as truly as that I am now repeating it to you, that he was speaking the truth. I want you to see Richard, if possible; he is coming to the same place to-night. If he can tell his own tale to you, perhaps you may find out a way by which his innocence may be made manifest. You are so clever, you can do anything."

Mr. Carlyle smiled. "Not quite anything, Barbara. Was this the purport of Richard's visit—to say this?"

"Oh, no! He thinks it is of no use to say it, for nobody would believe him against the evidence. He came to ask for a hundred pounds; he says he has an opportunity of doing better, if he can have

that sum. Mamma has sent me to you; she has not the money by her, and she dare not ask papa for it, as it is for Richard. She bade me say that if you will kindly oblige her with the money to-day, she will arrange with you about the repayment.”

“Do you want it now?” asked Mr. Carlyle. “If so, I must send to the bank. Dill never keeps much money in the house when I’m away.”

“Not until evening. Can you manage to see Richard?”

“It is hazardous,” mused Mr. Carlyle; “for him, I mean. Still, if he is to be in the grove to-night, I may as well be there also. What disguise is he in?”

“A farm laborer’s, the best he could adopt about here, with large black whiskers. He is stopping about three miles off, he said, in some obscure hiding-place. And now,” continued Barbara, “I want you to advise me; had I better inform mamma that Richard is here, or not?”

Mr. Carlyle did not understand, and said so.

“I declare I am bewildered,” she exclaimed. “I should have premised that I have not yet told mamma it is Richard himself who is here, but that he has sent a messenger to beg for this money. Would it be advisable to acquaint her?”

“Why should you not? I think you ought to do so.”

“Then I will; I was fearing the hazard for she is sure to insist upon seeing him. Richard also wishes for an interview.”

“It is only natural. Mrs. Hare must be thankful to hear so far, that he is safe.”

“I never saw anything like it,” returned Barbara; “the change is akin to magic; she says it has put life into her anew. And now for the last thing; how can we secure papa’s absence from home to-night? It must be accomplished in some way. You know his temper: were I or mamma to suggest to him, to go and see some friend, or to go to the club, he would immediately stop at home. Can you devise any plan? You see I appeal to you in all my troubles,” she added, “like I and Anne used to do when we were children.”

It may be questioned if Mr. Carlyle heard the last remark. He had dropped his eyelids in thought. “Have you told me all?” he asked presently, lifting them.

“I think so.”

“Then I will consider it over, and—”

“I shall not like to come here again,” interrupted Barbara. “It—it might excite suspicions; some one might see me, too, and mention it to papa. Neither ought you to send to our house.”

“Well—contrive to be in the street at four this afternoon. Stay, that’s your dinner hour; be walking up the street at three, three precisely; I will meet you.”

He rose, shook hands, and escorted Barbara through the small hall, along the passage to the house door; a courtesy probably not yet shown to any client by Mr. Carlyle. The house door closed upon her, and Barbara had taken one step from it, when something large loomed down upon her, like a ship in full sail.

She must have been the tallest lady in the world—out of a caravan. A fine woman in her day, but angular and bony now. Still, in spite of the angles and the bones, there was majesty in the appearance of Miss Carlyle.

“Why—what on earth!” began she, “have *you* been with Archibald for?”

Barbara Hare, wishing Miss Carlyle over in Asia, stammered out the excuse she had given Mr. Dill.

“Your mamma sent you on business! I never heard of such a thing. Twice I have been to see Archibald, and twice did Dill answer that he was engaged and must not be interrupted. I shall make old Dill explain his meaning for observing a mystery over it to me.”

“There is no mystery,” answered Barbara, feeling quite sick lest Miss Carlyle should proclaim there was, before the clerks, or her father. “Mamma wanted Mr. Carlyle’s opinion upon a little private business, and not feeling well enough to come herself, she sent me.”

Miss Carlyle did not believe a word. "What business?" asked she unceremoniously.

"It is nothing that could interest you. A trifling matter, relating to a little money. It's nothing, indeed."

"Then, if it's nothing, why were you closeted so long with Archibald?"

"He was asking the particulars," replied Barbara, recovering her equanimity.

Miss Carlyle sniffed, as she invariably did, when dissenting from a problem. She was sure there was some mystery astir. She turned and walked down the street with Barbara, but she was none the more likely to get anything out of her.

Mr. Carlyle returned to his room, deliberated a few moments, and then rang his bell. A clerk answered it.

"Go to the Buck's Head. If Mr. Hare and the other magistrates are there, ask them to step over to me."

The young man did as he was bid, and came back with the noted justices at his heels. They obeyed the summons with alacrity, for they believed they had got themselves into a judicial scrape, and that Mr. Carlyle alone could get them out of it.

"I will not request you to sit down," began Mr. Carlyle, "for it is barely a moment I shall detain you. The more I think about this man's having been put in prison, the less I like it; and I have been considering that you had better all five, come and smoke your pipes at my house this evening, when we shall have time to discuss what must be done. Come at seven, not later, and you will find my father's old jar replenished with the best broadcut, and half a dozen churchwarden pipes. Shall it be so?"

The whole five accepted the invitation eagerly. And they were filing out when Mr. Carlyle laid his finger on the arm of Justice Hare.

"*You* will be sure to come, Hare," he whispered. "We could not get on without you; all heads," with a slight inclination towards those going out, "are not gifted with the clear good sense of yours."

"Sure and certain," responded the gratified justice; "fire and water shouldn't keep me away."

Soon after Mr. Carlyle was left alone another clerk entered.

"Miss Carlyle is asking to see you, sir, and Colonel Bethel's come again."

"Send in Miss Carlyle first," was the answer. "What is it, Cornelia?"

"Ah! You may well ask what? Saying this morning that you could not dine at six, as usual, and then marching off, and never fixing the hour. How can I give my orders?"

"I thought business would have called me out, but I am not going now. We will dine a little earlier, though, Cornelia, say a quarter before six. I have invited—"

"What's up, Archibald?" interrupted Miss Carlyle.

"Up! Nothing that I know of. I am very busy, Cornelia, and Colonel Bethel is waiting; I will talk to you at dinner-time. I have invited a party for to-night."

"A party!" echoed Miss Carlyle.

"Four or five of the justices are coming in to smoke their pipes. You must put out your father's leaden tobacco-box, and—"

"They shan't come!" screamed Miss Carlyle. "Do you think I'll be poisoned with tobacco smoke from a dozen pipes?"

"You need not sit in the room."

"Nor they either. Clean curtains are just put up throughout the house, and I'll have no horrid pipes to blacken them."

"I'll buy you some new curtains, Cornelia, if their pipes spoil these," he quietly replied. "And now, Cornelia, I really must beg you to leave me."

"When I have come to the bottom of this affair with Barbara Hare," resolutely returned Miss Corny, dropping the point of the contest as to the pipes. "You are very clever, Archie, but you can't do me. I asked Barbara what she came here for; business for mamma, touching money matters, was her reply. I ask you: to hear your opinion about the scrape the bench have got into, is yours. Now,

it's neither one nor the other; and I tell you, Archibald, I'll hear what it is. I should like to know what you and Barbara do with a secret between you."

Mr. Carlyle knew her and her resolute expression well, and he took his course, to tell her the truth. She was, to borrow the words Barbara had used to her brother with regard to him, true as steel. Confide to Miss Carlyle a secret, and she was trustworthy and impervious as he could be; but let her come to suspect that there was a secret which was being kept from her, and she would set to work like a ferret, and never stop until it was unearthed.

Mr. Carlyle bent forward and spoke in a whisper. "I will tell you, if you wish, Cornelia, but it is not a pleasant thing to hear. Richard Hare has returned."

Miss Carlyle looked perfectly aghast. "Richard Hare! Is he mad?"

"It is not a very sane proceeding. He wants money from his mother, and Mrs. Hare sent Barbara to ask me to manage it for her. No wonder poor Barbara was flurried and nervous, for there's danger on all sides."

"Is he at their house?"

"How could he be there and his father in it? He is in hiding two or three miles off, disguised as a laborer, and will be at the grove to-night to receive this money. I have invited the justices to get Mr. Hare safe away from his own house. If he saw Richard, he would undoubtedly give him up to justice, and—putting graver considerations aside—that would be pleasant for neither you nor for me. To have a connection gibbeted for a willful murder would be an ugly blot on the Carlyle escutcheon, Cornelia."

Miss Carlyle sat in silence revolving the news, a contraction on her ample brow.

"And now you know all, Cornelia, and I do beg you to leave me, for I am overwhelmed with work to-day."

CHAPTER VI

RICHARD HARE, THE YOUNGER

The bench of justices did not fail to keep their appointment; at seven o'clock they arrived at Miss Carlyle's, one following closely upon the heels of another. The reader may dissent from the expression "Miss Carlyle's," but it is the correct one, for the house was hers, not her brother's; though it remained his home, as it had been in his father's time, the house was among the property bequeathed to Miss Carlyle.

Miss Carlyle chose to be present in spite of the pipes and the smoke, and she was soon as deep in the discussion as the justices were. It was said in the town, that she was as good a lawyer as her father had been; she undoubtedly possessed sound judgment in legal matters, and quick penetration. At eight o'clock a servant entered the room and addressed his master.

"Mr. Dill is asking to see you, sir."

Mr. Carlyle rose, and came back with an open note in his hand.

"I am sorry to find that I must leave you for half an hour; some important business has arisen, but I will be back as soon as I can."

"Who has sent for you?" immediately demanded Miss Corny.

He gave her a quiet look which she interpreted into a warning not to question. "Mr. Dill is here, and will join you to talk the affair over," he said to his guests. "He knows the law better than I do; but I will not be long."

He quitted his house, and walked with a rapid step toward the Grove. The moon was bright as on the previous evening. After he had left the town behind him, and was passing the scattered villas already mentioned, he cast an involuntary glance at the wood, which rose behind them on his left hand. It was called Abbey Wood, from the circumstance that in old days an abbey had stood in its vicinity, all traces of which, save tradition, had passed away. There was one small house, or cottage, just within the wood, and in that cottage had occurred the murder for which Richard Hare's life was in jeopardy. It was no longer occupied, for nobody would rent it or live in it.

Mr. Carlyle opened the gate of the Grove, and glanced at the trees on either side of him, but he neither saw nor heard any signs of Richard's being concealed there. Barbara was at the window, looking out, and she came herself and opened the door to Mr. Carlyle.

"Mamma is in the most excited state," she whispered to him as he entered. "I knew how it would be."

"Has he come yet?"

"I have no doubt of it; but he has made no signal."

Mrs. Hare, feverish and agitated, with a burning spot on her delicate cheeks, stood by the chair, not occupying it. Mr. Carlyle placed a pocket-book in her hands. "I have brought it chiefly in notes," he said: "they will be easier for him to carry than gold."

Mrs. Hare answered only by a look of gratitude, and clasped Mr. Carlyle's hand in both hers. "Archibald, I *must* see my boy; how can it be managed? Must I go into the garden to him, or may he come in here?"

"I think he might come in; you know how bad the night air is for you. Are the servants astir this evening?"

"Things seem to have turned out quite kindly," spoke up Barbara. "It happens to be Anne's birthday, so mamma sent me just now into the kitchen with a cake and a bottle of wine, desiring them to drink her health. I shut the door and told them to make themselves comfortable; that if we wanted anything we would ring."

"Then they are safe," observed Mr. Carlyle, "and Richard may come in."

“I will go and ascertain whether he is come,” said Barbara.

“Stay where you are, Barbara; I will go myself,” interposed Mr. Carlyle. “Have the door open when you see us coming up the path.”

Barbara gave a faint cry, and, trembling, clutched the arm of Mr. Carlyle. “There he is! See! Standing out from the trees, just opposite this window.”

Mr. Carlyle turned to Mrs. Hare. “I shall not bring him in immediately; for if I am to have an interview with him, it must be got over first, that I may go back home to the justices, and keep Mr. Hare all safe.”

He proceeded on his way, gained the trees, and plunged into them; and, leaning against one, stood Richard Hare. Apart from his disguise, and the false and fierce black whiskers, he was a blue-eyed, fair, pleasant-looking young man, slight, and of middle height, and quite as yielding and gentle as his mother. In her, this mild yieldingness of disposition was rather a graceful quality; in Richard it was regarded as a contemptible misfortune. In his boyhood he had been nicknamed Leafy Dick, and when a stranger inquired why, the answer was that, as a leaf was swayed by the wind, so he was swayed by everybody about him, never possessing a will of his own. In short, Richard Hare, though of an amiable and loving nature, was not over-burdened with what the world calls brains. Brains he certainly had, but they were not sharp ones.

“Is my mother coming out to me?” asked Richard, after a few interchanged sentences with Mr. Carlyle.

“No. You are to go indoors. Your father is away, and the servants are shut up in the kitchen and will not see you. Though if they did, they could never recognize you in that trim. A fine pair of whiskers, Richard.”

“Let us go in, then. I am all in a twitter till I get away. Am I to have the money?”

“Yes, yes. But, Richard, your sister says you wish to disclose to me the true history of that lamentable night. You had better speak while we are here.”

“It was Barbara herself wanted you to hear it. I think it of little moment. If the whole place heard the truth from me, it would do no good, for I should get no belief—not even from you.”

“Try me, Richard, in as few words as possible.”

“Well, there was a row at home about my going so much to Hallijohn’s. The governor and my mother thought I went after Afy; perhaps I did, and perhaps I didn’t. Hallijohn had asked me to lend him my gun, and that evening, when I went to see Af—when I went to see some one—never mind—”

“Richard,” interrupted Mr. Carlyle, “there’s an old saying, and it is sound advice: ‘Tell the whole truth to your lawyer and your doctor.’ If I am to judge whether anything can be attempted for you, you must tell it to me; otherwise, I would rather hear nothing. It shall be sacred trust.”

“Then, if I must, I must,” returned the yielding Richard. “I did love the girl. I would have waited till I was my own master to make her my wife, though it had been for years and years. I could not do it, you know, in the face of my father’s opposition.”

“Your wife?” rejoined Mr. Carlyle, with some emphasis.

Richard looked surprised. “Why, you don’t suppose I meant anything else! I wouldn’t have been such a blackguard.”

“Well, go on, Richard. Did she return your love?”

“I can’t be certain. Sometimes I thought she did, sometimes not; she used to play and shuffle, and she liked too much to be with—him. I would think her capricious—telling me I must not come this evening, and I must not come the other; but I found out they were the evenings when she was expecting him. We were never there together.”

“You forget that you have not indicted ‘him’ by any name, Richard. I am at fault.”

Richard Hare bent forward till his black whiskers brushed Mr. Carlyle’s shoulder. “It was that cursed Thorn.”

Mr. Carlyle remembered the name Barbara had mentioned. “Who was Thorn? I never heard of him.”

“Neither had anybody else, I expect, in West Lynne. He took precious good care of that. He lives some miles away, and used to come over in secret.”

“Courting Afy?”

“Yes, he did come courting her,” returned Richard, in a savage tone. “Distance was no barrier. He would come galloping over at dusk, tie his horse to a tree in the wood, and pass an hour or two with Afy. In the house, when her father was not at home; roaming about the woods with her, when he was.”

“Come to the point, Richard—to the evening.”

“Hallijohn’s gun was out of order, and he requested the loan of mine. I had made an appointment with Afy to be at her house that evening, and I went down after dinner, carrying the gun with me. My father called after me to know where I was going; I said, out with young Beauchamp, not caring to meet his opposition; and the lie told against me at the inquest. When I reached Hallijohn’s, going the back way along the fields, and through the wood-path, as I generally did go, Afy came out, all reserve, as she could be at times, and said she was unable to receive me then, that I must go back home. We had a few words about it, and as we were speaking, Locksley passed, and saw me with the gun in my hand; but it ended in my giving way. She could do just what she liked with me, for I loved the very ground she trod on. I gave her the gun, telling her it was loaded, and she took it indoors, shutting me out. I did not go away; I had a suspicion that she had got Thorn there, though she denied it to me; and I hid myself in some trees near the house. Again Locksley came in view and saw me there, and called out to know why I was hiding. I shied further off, and did not answer him—what were my private movements to him?—and that also told against me at the inquest. Not long afterwards—twenty minutes, perhaps—I heard a shot, which seemed to be in the direction of the cottage. ‘Somebody having a late pop at the partridges,’ thought I; for the sun was then setting, and at the moment I saw Bethel emerge from the trees, and run in the direction of the cottage. That was the shot that killed Hallijohn.”

There was a pause. Mr. Carlyle looked keenly at Richard there in the moonlight.

“Very soon, almost in the same moment, as it seemed, some one came panting and tearing along the path leading from the cottage. It was Thorn. His appearance startled me: I had never seen a man show more utter terror. His face was livid, his eyes seemed starting, and his lips were drawn back from his teeth. Had I been a strong man I should surely have attacked him. I was mad with jealousy; for I then saw that Afy had sent me away that she might entertain him.”

“I thought you said this Thorn never came but at dusk,” observed Mr. Carlyle.

“I never knew him to do so until that evening. All I can say is, he was there then. He flew along swiftly, and I afterwards heard the sound of his horse’s hoofs galloping away. I wondered what was up that he should look so scared, and scutter away as though the deuce was after him; I wondered whether he had quarreled with Afy. I ran to the house, leaped up the two steps, and—Carlyle—I fell over the prostrate body of Hallijohn! He was lying just within, on the kitchen floor, dead. Blood was round about him, and my gun, just discharged, was thrown near. He had been shot in the side.”

Richard stopped for breath. Mr. Carlyle did not speak.

“I called to Afy. No one answered. No one was in the lower room; and it seemed that no one was in the upper. A sort of panic came over me, a fear. You know they always said at home I was a coward: I could not have remained another minute with that dead man, had it been to save my own life. I caught up the gun, and was making off, when—”

“Why did you catch up the gun?” interrupted Mr. Carlyle.

“Ideas pass through our minds quicker than we can speak them, especially in these sorts of moments,” was the reply of Richard Hare. “Some vague notion flashed on my brain that *my gun* ought not to be found near the murdered body of Hallijohn. I was flying from the door, I say, when Locksley

emerged from the wood, full in view; and what possessed me I can't tell, but I did the worst thing I could do—flung the gun indoors again, and got away, although Locksley called after me to stop.”

“Nothing told against you so much as that,” observed Mr. Carlyle. “Locksley deposed that he had seen you leave the cottage, gun in hand, apparently in great commotion; that the moment you saw him, you hesitated, as from fear, flung back the gun, and escaped.”

Richard stamped his foot. “Aye; and all owing to my cursed cowardice. They had better have made a woman of me, and brought me up in petticoats. But let me go on. I came upon Bethel. He was standing in that half-circle where the trees have been cut. Now I knew that Bethel, if he had gone straight in the direction of the cottage, must have met Thorn quitting it. ‘Did you encounter that hound?’ I asked him. ‘What hound?’ returned Bethel. ‘That fine fellow, that Thorn, who comes after Afy,’ I answered, for I did not mind mentioning her name in my passion. ‘I don’t know any Thorn,’ returned Bethel, ‘and I did not know anybody was after Afy but yourself.’ ‘Did you hear a shot?’ I went on. ‘Yes, I did,’ he replied; ‘I suppose it was Locksley, for he’s about this evening,’ ‘And I saw you,’ I continued, ‘just at the moment the shot was fired, turn round the corner in the direction of Hallijohn’s.’ ‘So I did,’ he said, ‘but only to strike into the wood, a few paces up. What’s your drift?’ ‘Did you not encounter Thorn, running from the cottage?’ I persisted. ‘I have encountered no one,’ he said, ‘and I don’t believe anybody’s about but ourselves and Locksley.’ I quitted him, and came off,” concluded Richard Hare. “He evidently had not seen Thorn, and knew nothing.”

“And you decamped the same night, Richard; it was a fatal step.”

“Yes, I was a fool. I thought I’d wait quiet, and see how things turned out; but you don’t know all. Three or four hours later, I went to the cottage again, and I managed to get a minute’s speech with Afy. I never shall forget it; before I could say one syllable she flew out at me, accusing me of being the murderer of her father, and she fell into hysterics out there on the grass. The noise brought people from the house—plenty were in it then—and I retreated. ‘If *she* can think me guilty, the world will think me guilty,’ was my argument; and that night I went right off, to stop in hiding for a day or two, till I saw my way clear. It never came clear; the coroner’s inquest sat, and the verdict floored me over. And Afy—but I won’t curse her—fanned the flame against me by denying that any one had been there that night. ‘She had been at home,’ she said, ‘and had strolled out at the back door, to the path that led from West Lynne, and was lingering there when she heard a shot. Five minutes afterward she returned to the house, and found Locksley standing over her dead father.’”

Mr. Carlyle remained silent, rapidly running over in his mind the chief points of Richard Hare’s communication. “Four of you, as I understand it, were in the vicinity of the cottage that night, and from one or the other the shot no doubt proceeded. You were at a distance, you say, Richard; Bethel, also, could not have been—”

“It was not Bethel who did it,” interrupted Richard; “it was an impossibility. I saw him, as I tell you, in the same moment that the gun was fired.”

“But now, where was Locksley?”

“It is equally impossible that it could have been Locksley. He was within my view at the same time, at right angles from me, deep in the wood, away from the paths altogether. It was Thorn did the deed, beyond all doubt, and the verdict ought to have been willful murder against him. Carlyle, I see you don’t believe my story.”

“What you say has startled me, and I must take time to consider whether I believe it or not,” said Mr. Carlyle, in his straightforward manner. “The most singular thing is, if you witnessed this, Thorn’s running from the cottage in the manner you describe, that you did not come forward and denounce him.”

“I didn’t do it, because I was a fool, a weak coward, as I have been all my life,” rejoined Richard. “I can’t help it; it was born with me, and will go with me to my grave. What would my word have availed that it was Thorn, when there was nobody to corroborate it? And the discharged gun, mine, was a damnatory proof against me.”

“Another thing strikes me as curious,” cried Mr. Carlyle. “If this man, Thorn, was in the habit of coming to West Lynne, evening after evening, how was it that he never was observed? This is the first time I have heard any stranger’s name mentioned in connection with the affair, or with Afy.”

“Thorn chose by-roads, and he never came, save that once, but at dusk and dark. It was evident to me at the time that he was striving to do it on the secret. I told Afy so, and that it augured no good for her. You are not attaching credit to what I say, and it is only as I expected; nevertheless, I swear that I have related the facts. As surely as that we—I, Thorn, Afy and Hallijohn, must one day meet together before our Maker, I have told you the truth.”

The words were solemn, their tone earnest, and Mr. Carlyle remained silent, his thoughts full.

“To what end, else, should I say this?” went on Richard. “It can do me no service; all the assertion I could put forth would not go a jot toward clearing me.”

“No, it would not,” assented Mr. Carlyle. “If ever you are cleared, it must be by proofs. But—I will keep my thought on the matter, and should anything arise—What sort of a man was this Thorn?”

“In age he might be three or four and twenty, tall and slender; an out-and-out aristocrat.”

“And his connections? Where did he live?”

“I never knew. Afy, in her boasting way, would say he had come from Swainson, a ten mile ride.”

“From Swainson?” quickly interrupted Mr. Carlyle.

“Could it be one of the Thorns of Swainson?”

“None of the Thorns that I know. He was a totally different sort of man, with his perfumed hands, and his rings, and his dainty gloves. That he was an aristocrat I believe, but of bad taste and style, displaying a profusion of jewellery.”

A half smile flitted over Carlyle’s face.

“Was it real, Richard?”

“It was. He would wear diamond shirt-studs, diamond rings, diamond pins; brilliants, all of the first water. My impression was, that he put them on to dazzle Afy. She told me once that she could be a grander lady, if she chose, than I could ever make her. ‘A lady on the cross,’ I answered, ‘but never on the square.’ Thorn was not a man to entertain honest intentions to one in the station of Afy Hallijohn; but girls are simple as geese.”

“By your description, it could not have been one of the Thorns of Swainson. Wealthy tradesmen, fathers of young families, short, stout, and heavy as Dutchmen, staid and most respectable. Very unlikely men are they, to run into an expedition of that sort.”

“What expedition?” questioned Richard. “The murder?”

“The riding after Afy. Richard, where is Afy?”

Richard Hare lifted his eyes in surprise. “How should I know? I was just going to ask you.”

Mr. Carlyle paused. He thought Richard’s answer an evasive one. “She disappeared immediately after the funeral; and it was thought—in short, Richard, the neighborhood gave her credit for having gone after and joined you.”

“No! did they? What a pack of idiots! I have never seen or heard of her, Carlyle, since that unfortunate night. If she went after anybody, it was after Thorn.”

“Was the man good-looking?”

“I suppose the world would call him so. Afy thought such an Adonis had never been coined, out of fable. He had shiny black hair and whiskers, dark eyes and handsome features. But his vain dandyism spoilt him; would you believe that his handkerchiefs were soaked in scent? They were of the finest cambric, silky as a hair, as fine as the one Barbara bought at Lynneborough and gave a guinea for; only hers had a wreath of embroidery around it.”

Mr. Carlyle could ascertain no more particulars, and it was time Richard went indoors. They proceeded up the path. “What a blessing it is the servants’ windows don’t look this way,” shivered Richard, treading on Mr. Carlyle’s heels. “If they should be looking out upstairs!”

His apprehensions were groundless, and he entered unseen.

Mr. Carlyle's part was over; he left the poor banned exile to his short interview with his hysterical and tearful mother, Richard nearly as hysterical as she, and made the best of his way home again, pondering over what he had heard.

The magistrates made a good evening of it. Mr. Carlyle entertained them to supper—mutton chops and bread and cheese. They took up their pipes for another whiff when the meal was over, but Miss Carlyle retired to bed; the smoke, to which she had not been accustomed since her father's death, had made her head ache and her eyes smart. About eleven they wished Mr. Carlyle good-night, and departed, but Mr. Dill, in obedience to a nod from his superior, remained.

"Sit down a moment, Dill; I want to ask you a question. You are intimate with the Thorns, of Swainson; do they happen to have any relative, a nephew or cousin, perhaps, a dandy young fellow?"

"I went over last Sunday fortnight to spend the day with young Jacob," was the answer of Mr. Dill, one wider from the point than he generally gave. Mr. Carlyle smiled.

"*Young Jacob!* He must be forty, I suppose."

"About that. But you and I estimate age differently, Mr. Archibald. They have no nephew; the old man never had but those two children, Jacob and Edward. Neither have they any cousin. Rich men they are growing now. Jacob has set up his carriage."

Mr. Carlyle mused, but he expected the answer, for neither had he heard of the brothers Thorn, tanners, curriers, and leather-dressers, possessing a relative of the name. "Dill," said he, "something has arisen which, in my mind, casts a doubt upon Richard Hare's guilt. I question whether he had anything to do with the murder."

Mr. Dill opened his eyes. "But his flight, Mr. Archibald, And his stopping away?"

"Suspicious circumstances, I grant. Still, I have good cause to doubt. At the time it happened, some dandy fellow used to come courting Afy Hallijohn in secret; a tall, slender man, as he is described to me, bearing the name of Thorn, and living at Swainson. Could it have been one of the Thorn family?"

"Mr. Archibald!" remonstrated the old clerk; "as if those two respected gentlemen, with their wives and babies, would come sneaking after that flyaway Afy!"

"No reflection on them," returned Mr. Carlyle. "This was a young man, three or four and twenty, a head taller than either. I thought it might be a relative."

"I have repeatedly heard them say that they are alone in the world; that they are the two last of the name. Depend upon it, it was nobody connected with them;" and wishing Mr. Carlyle good-night, he departed.

The servant came in to remove the glasses and the obnoxious pipes. Mr. Carlyle sat in a brown study; presently he looked round at the man.

"Is Joyce gone to bed?"

"No, sir. She is just going."

"Send her here when you have taken away those things."

Joyce came in—the upper servant at Miss Carlyle's. She was of middle height, and would never see five and thirty again; her forehead was broad, her gray eyes were deeply set, and her face was pale. Altogether she was plain, but sensible-looking. She was the half-sister of Afy Hallijohn.

"Shut the door, Joyce."

Joyce did as she was bid, came forward, and stood by the table.

"Have you ever heard from your sister, Joyce?" began Mr. Carlyle, somewhat abruptly.

"No, sir," was the reply; "I think it would be a wonder if I did hear."

"Why so?"

"If she would go off after Richard Hare, who had sent her father into his grave, she would be more likely to hide herself and her doings than to proclaim them to me, sir."

"Who was that other, that fine gentleman, who came after her?"

The color mantled in Joyce's cheeks, and she dropped her voice.

"Sir! Did you hear of him?"

"Not at that time. Since. He came from Swainson, did he not?"

"I believe so, sir. Afy never would say much about him. We did not agree upon the point. I said a person of his rank would do her no good; and Afy flew out when I spoke against him."

Mr. Carlyle caught her up. "His rank. What was his rank?"

"Afy bragged of his being next door to a lord; and he looked like it. I only saw him once; I had gone home early, and there sat him and Afy. His white hands were all glittering with rings, and his shirt was finished off with shining stones where the buttons ought to be."

"Have you seen him since?"

"Never since, never but once; and I don't think I should know him if I did see him. He got up, sir, as soon as I went into the parlor, shook hands with Afy, and left. A fine, upright man he was, nearly as tall as you, sir, but very slim. Those soldiers always carry themselves well."

"How do you know he was a soldier?" quickly rejoined Mr. Carlyle.

"Afy told me so. 'The Captain' she used to call him; but she said he was not a captain yet awhile—the next grade to it, a—a—"

"Lieutenant?" suggested Mr. Carlyle.

"Yes, sir, that was it—Lieutenant Thorn."

"Joyce," said Mr. Carlyle, "has it never struck you that Afy is more likely to have followed Lieutenant Thorn than Richard Hare?"

"No, sir," answered Joyce; "I have felt certain always that she is with Richard Hare, and nothing can turn me from the belief. All West Lynne is convinced of it."

Mr. Carlyle did not attempt to "turn her from her belief." He dismissed her, and sat on still, revolving the case in all its bearings.

Richard Hare's short interview with his mother had soon terminated. It lasted but a quarter of an hour, both dreading interruptions from the servants; and with a hundred pounds in his pocket, and desolation in his heart, the ill-fated young man once more quitted his childhood's home. Mrs. Hare and Barbara watched him steal down the path in the telltale moonlight, and gain the road, both feeling that those farewell kisses they had pressed upon his lips would not be renewed for years, and might not be forever.

CHAPTER VII

MISS CARLYLE AT HOME

The church clocks at West Lynne struck eight one lovely morning in July, and then the bells chimed out, giving token that it was Sunday.

East Lynne had changed owners, and now it was the property of Mr. Carlyle. He had bought it as it stood, furniture and all; but the transfer had been conducted with secrecy, and was suspected by none, save those engaged in the negotiations. Whether Lord Mount Severn thought it might prevent any one getting on the scent, or whether he wished to take farewell of a place he had formerly been fond of, certain it is that he craved a week or two's visit to it. Mr. Carlyle most readily and graciously acquiesced; and the earl, his daughter, and retinue had arrived the previous day.

West Lynne was in ecstasies. It called itself an aristocratic place, and it indulged hopes that the earl might be intending to confer permanently the light of his presence, by taking up his residence again at East Lynne. The toilettes prepared to meet his admiring eyes were prodigious and pretty. Barbara Hare was not the only young lady who had thereby to encounter the paternal storm.

Miss Carlyle was ready for church at the usual time, plainly, but well dressed. As she and Archibald were leaving their house, they saw something looming up the street, flashing and gleaming in the sun. A pink parasol came first, a pink bonnet and feather came behind it, a gray brocaded dress and white gloves.

"The vain little idiot!" ejaculated Miss Carlyle. But Barbara smiled up the street toward them, unconscious of the apostrophe.

"Well done, Barbara!" was the salutation of Miss Carlyle. "The justice might well call out—you are finer than a sunbeam!"

"Not half so fine as many another in the church will be to-day," responded Barbara, as she lifted her shy blue eyes and blushing face to answer the greetings of Mr. Carlyle. "West Lynne seems bent on out-dressing the Lady Isabel. You should have been at the milliner's yesterday morning, Miss Carlyle."

"Is all the finery coming out to-day?" gravely inquired Mr. Carlyle, as Barbara turned with them toward the church, and he walked by her side and his sister's, for he had an objection, almost invincible as a Frenchman's, to give his arm to two ladies.

"Of course," replied Barbara. "First impression is everything, you know, and the earl and his daughter will be coming to church."

"Suppose she should not be in peacock's plumes?" cried Miss Carlyle, with an imperturbable face.

"Oh! But she is sure to be—if you mean richly dressed," cried Barbara, hastily.

"Or, suppose they should not come to church?" laughed Mr. Carlyle. "What a disappointment to the bonnets and feathers!"

"After all, Barbara, what are they to us, or we to them?" resumed Miss Carlyle. "We may never meet. We insignificant West Lynne gentry shall not obtrude ourselves into East Lynne. It would scarcely be fitting—or be deemed so by the earl and Lady Isabel."

"That's just how papa went on," grumbled Barbara. "He caught sight of this bonnet yesterday; and when, by way of excuse, I said I had it to call on them, he asked whether I thought the obscure West Lynne families would venture to thrust their calls on Lord Mount Severn, as though they were of the county aristocracy. It was the feather that put him out."

"It is a very long one," remarked Miss Carlyle, grimly surveying it.

Barbara was to sit in the Carlyle pew that day, for she thought the farther she was from the justice the better; there was no knowing but he might take a sly revengeful cut at the feather in the

middle of service, and so dock its beauty. Scarcely were they seated when some strangers came quietly up the aisle—a gentleman who limped as he walked, with a furrowed brow and gray hair; and a young lady. Barbara looked round with eagerness, but looked away again; they could not be the expected strangers, the young lady's dress was too plain—a clear-looking muslin dress for a hot summer's day. But the old beadle in his many-caped coat, was walking before them sideways with his marshalling baton, and he marshaled them into the East Lynne pew, unoccupied for so many years.

“Who in the world can they be?” whispered Barbara to Miss Carlyle. “That old stupid is always making a mistake and putting people into the wrong places.”

“The earl and Lady Isabel.”

The color flushed into Barbara's face, and she stared at Miss Corny. “Why, she has no silks, and no feathers, and no anything!” cried Barbara. “She's plainer than anybody in the church!”

“Plainer than any of the fine ones—than you, for instance. The earl is much altered, but I should have known them both anywhere. I should have known her from the likeness to her poor mother—just the same eyes and sweet expression.”

Aye, those brown eyes, so full of sweetness and melancholy; few who had once seen could mistake or forget them; and Barbara Hare, forgetting where she was, looked at them much that day.

“She is very lovely,” thought Barbara, “and her dress is certainly that of a lady. I wish I had not had this streaming pink feather. What fine jackdaws she must deem us all!”

The earl's carriage, an open barouche, was waiting at the gate, at the conclusion of the service. He handed his daughter in, and was putting his gouty foot upon the step to follow her, when he observed Mr. Carlyle. The earl turned and held out his hand. A man who could purchase East Lynne was worthy of being received as an equal, though he was but a country lawyer.

Mr. Carlyle shook hands with the earl, approached the carriage and raised his hat to Lady Isabel. She bent forward with her pleasant smile, and put her hand into his.

“I have many things to say to you,” said the earl. “I wish you would go home with us. If you have nothing better to do, be East Lynne's guest for the remainder of the day.”

He smiled peculiarly as he spoke, and Mr. Carlyle echoed it. East Lynne's guest! That is what the earl was at present. Mr. Carlyle turned aside to tell his sister.

“Cornelia, I shall not be home to dinner; I am going with Lord Mount Severn. Good-day, Barbara.”

Mr. Carlyle stepped into the carriage, was followed by the earl, and it drove away. The sun shone still, but the day's brightness had gone out for Barbara Hare.

“How does he know the earl so well? How does he know Lady Isabel?” she reiterated in her astonishment.

“Archibald knows something of most people,” replied Miss Corny. “He saw the earl frequently, when he was in town in the spring, and Lady Isabel once or twice. What a lovely face hers is!”

Barbara made no reply. She returned home with Miss Carlyle, but her manner was as absent as her heart, and that had run away to East Lynne.

CHAPTER VIII

MR. KANE'S CONCERT

Before Lord Mount Severn had completed the fortnight of his proposed stay, the gout came on seriously. It was impossible for him to move away from East Lynne. Mr. Carlyle assured him he was only too pleased that he should remain as long as might be convenient, and the earl expressed his acknowledgments; he hoped soon to be re-established on his legs.

But he was not. The gout came, and the gout went—not positively laying him up in bed, but rendering him unable to leave his rooms; and this continued until October, when he grew much better. The county families had been neighborly, calling on the invalid earl, and occasionally carrying off Lady Isabel, but his chief and constant visitor had been Mr. Carlyle. The earl had grown to like him in no common degree, and was disappointed if Mr. Carlyle spent an evening away from him, so that he became, as it were, quite domesticated with the earl and Isabel. “I am not quite equal to general society,” he observed to his daughter, “and it is considerate and kind of Carlyle to come here and cheer my loneliness.”

“Extremely kind,” said Isabel. “I like him very much, papa.”

“I don't know anybody that I like half as well,” was the rejoinder of the earl.

Mr. Carlyle went up as usual the same evening, and, in the course of it, the earl asked Isabel to sing.

“I will if you wish, papa,” was the reply, “but the piano is so much out of tune that it is not pleasant to sing to it. Is there any one in West Lynne who could come here and tune my piano, Mr. Carlyle?” she added, turning to him.

“Certainly there is. Kane would do it. Shall I send him to-morrow?”

“I should be glad, if it would not be giving you too much trouble. Not that tuning will benefit it greatly, old thing that it is. Were we to be much at East Lynne, I should get papa to exchange it for a good one.”

Little thought Lady Isabel that that very piano was Mr. Carlyle's, and not hers. The earl coughed, and exchanged a smile and a glance with his guest.

Mr. Kane was the organist of St. Jude's church, a man of embarrassment and sorrow, who had long had a sore fight with the world. When he arrived at East Lynne, the following day, dispatched by Mr. Carlyle, Lady Isabel happened to be playing, and she stood by, and watched him begin his work. She was courteous and affable—she was so to every one—and the poor music master took courage to speak of his own affairs, and to prefer a humble request—that she and Lord Mount Severn would patronize and personally attend a concert he was about to give the following week. A scarlet blush came into his thin cheeks as he confessed that he was very poor, could scarcely live, and he was getting up this concert in his desperate need. If it succeeded well, he could then go on again; if not, he should be turned out of his home, and his furniture sold for the two years' rent he owed—and he had seven children.

Isabel, all her sympathies awakened, sought the earl. “Oh, papa! I have to ask you the greatest favor. Will you grant it?”

“Ay, child, you don't ask them often. What is it?”

“I want you to take me to a concert at West Lynne.”

The earl fell back in surprise, and stared at Isabel. “A concert at West Lynne!” he laughed. “To hear the rustics scraping the fiddle! My dear Isabel!”

She poured out what she had just heard, with her own comments and additions. “Seven children, papa! And if the concert does not succeed he must give up his home, and turn out into the streets with them—it is, you see, almost a matter of life or death with him. He is very poor.”

“I am poor myself,” said the earl.

“I was so sorry for him when he was speaking. He kept turning red and white, and catching up his breath in agitation; it was painful to him to tell of his embarrassments. I am sure he is a gentleman.”

“Well, you may take a pound’s worth of tickets, Isabel, and give them to the upper servants. A village concert!”

“Oh, papa, it is not—can’t you see it is not? If we, you and I, will promise to be present, all the families round West Lynne will attend, and he will have the room full. They will go because we do—he said so. Make a sacrifice for once, dearest papa, and go, if it be only for an hour. *I shall enjoy it if there’s nothing but a fiddle and a tambourine.*”

“You gipsy! You are as bad as a professional beggar. There—go and tell the fellow we will look in for half an hour.”

She flew back to Mr. Kane, her eyes dancing. She spoke quietly, as she always did, but her own satisfaction gladdened her voice.

“I am happy to tell you that papa has consented. He will take four tickets and we will attend the concert.”

The tears rushed into Mr. Kane’s eyes; Isabel was not sure but they were in her own. He was a tall, thin, delicate-looking man, with long, white fingers, and a long neck. He faltered forth his thanks with an inquiry whether he might be allowed to state openly that they would be present.

“Tell everybody,” said she, eagerly. “Everybody you come across, if, as you think, it will be the means of inducing people to attend. I shall tell all friends who call upon me, and ask them to go.”

When Mr. Carlyle came up in the evening, the earl was temporarily absent from the room. Isabel began to speak of the concert.

“It is a hazardous venture for Mr. Kane,” observed Mr. Carlyle. “I fear he will only lose money, and add to his embarrassments.”

“Why do you fear that?” she asked.

“Because, Lady Isabel, nothing gets patronized at West Lynne—nothing native; and people have heard so long of poor Kane’s necessities, that they think little of them.”

“Is he so very poor?”

“Very. He is starved half his time.”

“Starved!” repeated Isabel, an expression of perplexity arising to her face as she looked at Mr. Carlyle, for she scarcely understood him. “Do you mean that he does not have enough to eat?”

“Of bread he may, but not much better nourishment. His salary, as organist, is thirty pounds, and he gets a little stray teaching. But he has his wife and children to keep, and no doubt serves them before himself. I dare say he scarcely knows what it is to taste meat.”

The words brought a bitter pang to Lady Isabel.

“Not enough to eat! Never to taste meat!” And she, in her carelessness, her ignorance, her indifference—she scarcely knew what term to give it—had not thought to order him a meal in their house of plenty! He had walked from West Lynne, occupied himself an hour with her piano, and set off to walk back again, battling with his hunger. A word from her, and a repast had been set before him out of their superfluities such as he never sat down to, and that word she had not spoken.

“You are looking grave, Lady Isabel.”

“I’m taking contrition to myself. Never mind, it cannot now be helped, but it will always be a dark spot on my memory.”

“What is it?”

She lifted her repentant face to his and smiled. “Never mind, I say, Mr. Carlyle; what is past cannot be recalled. He looks like a gentleman.”

“Who? Kane? A gentleman bred; his father was a clergyman. Kane’s ruin was his love of music—it prevented his settling to any better paid profession; his early marriage also was a drawback and kept him down. He is young still.”

“Mr. Carlyle I would not be one of your West Lynne people for the world. Here is a young gentleman struggling with adversity, and you won’t put out your hand to help him!”

He smiled at her warmth. “Some of us will take tickets—I, for one; but I don’t know about attending the concert. I fear few would do that.”

“Because that’s just the thing that would serve him? If one went, another would. Well, I shall try and show West Lynne that I don’t take a lesson from their book; I shall be there before it begins, and never come out till the last song’s over. I am not too grand to go, if West Lynne is.”

“You surely do not think of going?”

“I surely do think of it; and papa goes with me—I persuaded him; and I have given Mr. Kane the promise.”

Mr. Carlyle paused. “I am glad to hear it; it will be a perfect boon to Kane. If it once gets abroad that Lord Mount Severn and Lady Isabel intend to honor the concert, there won’t be standing room.”

She danced round with a little gleeful step. “What high and mighty personages Lord Mount Severn and Lady Isabel seem to be! If you had any goodness of heart, Mr. Carlyle, you would enlist yourself in the cause also.”

“I think I will,” he smiled.

“Papa says you hold sway at West Lynne. If you proclaim that you mean to go, you will induce others.”

“I will proclaim that you do,” he answered; “that will be all sufficient. But, Lady Isabel, you must not expect much gratification from the performance.”

“A tambourine will be quite enough for me; I told papa so, I shan’t think of music; I shall think of poor Mr. Kane. Mr. Carlyle I know you can be kind if you like; I know you would rather be kind than otherwise—it is to be read in your face. Try and do what you can for him.”

“Yes, I will,” he warmly answered.

Mr. Carlyle sold no end of tickets the following day, or rather caused them to be sold. He praised up the concert far and wide, and proclaimed that Lord Mount Severn and his daughter would not think of missing it. Mr. Kane’s house was besieged for tickets, faster than he could write his signature in their corner; and when Mr. Carlyle went home to luncheon at midday, which he did not often do, he laid down two at Miss Corny’s elbow.

“What’s this? Concert tickets! Archibald, you have never gone and bought these!”

What would she have said had she known that the two were not the extent of his investment?

“Ten shillings to throw away upon two paltry bits of cardboard!” chafed Miss Carlyle. “You always were a noodle in money matters, Archibald, and always will be. I wish I had the keeping of your purse!”

“What I have given will not hurt me, Cornelia, and Kane is badly off. Think of his troop of children.”

“Oh, dear!” said Miss Corny. “I imagine he should think of them. I suppose it was his own fault they came. That’s always it. Poor folks get a heap of children about them, and then ask for pity. I should say it would be more just if they asked for blame.”

“Well, there the tickets are, bought and paid for, so they may as well be used. You will go with me, Cornelia.”

“And stick ourselves there upon empty benches, like two geese, and sit staring and counting the candles! A pleasant evening?”

“You need not fear empty benches. The Mount Severns are going, and West Lynne is in a fever, racing after tickets. I suppose you have got a—a cap,” looking at the nondescript article decorating his sister’s head, “that will be suitable to go in, Cornelia; if not you had better order one.”

This suggestion put up Miss Carlyle. “Hadn’t you better have your hair curled, and your coat tails lined with white satin, and a gold opera-glass, and a cocked hat?” retorted she. “My gracious

me! A fine new cap to go to their mess of a concert in, after paying ten shillings for the tickets! The world's coming to something."

Mr. Carlyle left her and her grumbling to return to the office. Lord Mount Severn's carriage was passing at the moment, and Isabel Vane was within it. She caused it to stop when she saw Mr. Carlyle, and he advanced to her.

"I have been to Mr. Kane's myself for the tickets," said she, with a beaming look. "I came into West Lynne on purpose. I told the coachman to find out where he lived, and he did. I thought if the people saw me and the carriage there, they would guess what I wanted. I do hope he will have a full concert."

"I am sure he will," replied Mr. Carlyle, as he released her hand. And Lady Isabel signed to the carriage to drive on.

As Mr. Carlyle turned away, he met Otway Bethel, a nephew of Colonel Bethel's, who was tolerated in the colonel's house because he had no other home, and appeared incapable to making himself one. Some persons persisted in calling him a gentleman—as he was by birth—others a *mauvais sujet*. The two are united sometimes. He was dressed in a velveteen suit, and had a gun in his hand. Indeed, he was rarely seen without a gun, being inordinately fond of sport; but, if all tales whispered were true, he supplied himself with game in other ways than by shooting, which had the credit of going up to London dealers. For the last six months or near upon it, he had been away from West Lynne.

"Why, where have you been hiding yourself?" exclaimed Mr. Carlyle. "The colonel has been inconsolable."

"Come, no gammon, Carlyle. I have been on the tramp through France and Germany. Man likes a change sometimes. As to the revered colonel, he would not be inconsolable if he saw me nailed up in a six-foot box, and carried out feet foremost."

"Bethel, I have a question to ask you," continued Mr. Carlyle, dropping his light manner and his voice together. "Take your thoughts back to the night of Hallijohn's murder."

"I wish you may get it," cried Mr. Bethel. "The reminiscence is not attractive."

"You'll do it," quietly said Mr. Carlyle. "It has been told me, though it did not appear at the inquest, that Richard Hare held a conversation with you in the wood a few minutes after the deed was done. Now—"

"Who told you that?" interrupted Bethel.

"That is not the question. My authority is indisputable."

"It is true that he did. I said nothing about it, for I did not want to make the case worse against Dick Hare than it already was. He certainly did accost me, like a man flurried out of his life."

"Asking if you had seen a certain lover of Afy's fly from the cottage. One Thorn."

"That was the purport. Thorn, Thorn—I think Thorn was the name he mentioned. My opinion was, that Dick was either wild or acting a part."

"Now, Bethel, I want you to answer me truly. The question cannot affect you either way, but I must know whether you did see this Thorn leave the cottage."

Bethel shook his head. "I know nothing whatever about any Thorn, and I saw nobody but Dick Hare. Not but what a dozen Thorns might have run from the cottage without my seeing them."

"You heard the shot fired?"

"Yes; but I never gave a thought to mischief. I knew Locksley was in the wood, and supposed it came from him. I ran across the path, bearing toward the cottage, and struck into the wood on the other side. By and by, Dick Hare pitched upon me, like one startled out of his seven senses, and asked if I had seen Thorn leave the cottage. Thorn—that *was* the name."

"And you had not?"

"I had seen nobody but Dick, excepting Locksley. My impression was, that nobody else was about; I think so still."

“But Richard—”

“Now look you here, Carlyle, I won’t do Dick Hare an injury, even by a single word, if I can help it; and it is of no use setting me on to it.”

“I should be the last to set you on to injure any one, especially Richard Hare,” rejoined Mr. Carlyle; “and my motive is to do Richard Hare good, not harm. I hold a suspicion, no matter whence gathered, that it was not Richard Hare who committed the murder, but another. Can you throw any light upon the subject?”

“No, I can’t. I have always thought poor wavering Dick was nobody’s enemy but his own; but, as to throwing any light on that night’s work, I can’t do it. Cords should not have dragged me to the inquest to give evidence against Dick, and for that reason I was glad Locksley never let out that I was on the spot. How the deuce it got about afterward that I was, I can’t tell; but that was no matter; *my* evidence did not help on the verdict. And talking of that, Carlyle, how has it come to your knowledge that Richard Hare accosted me? I have not opened my lips upon it to mortal man.”

“It is of no consequence now,” repeated Mr. Carlyle; “I do know it, and that is sufficient. I was in hopes you had really seen this man Thorn leave the cottage.”

Otway Bethel shook his head. “I should not lay too much stress upon any Thorns having been there, were I you, Carlyle. Dick Hare was as one crazy that night, and might see shapes and forms where there were none.”

CHAPTER IX

THE SONG AND THE DIRGE

The concert was to take place on Thursday, and on the following Saturday Lord Mount Severn intended finally to quit East Lynne. The necessary preparations for departure were in progress, but when Thursday morning dawned, it appeared a question whether they would not once more be rendered nugatory. The house was roused betimes, and Mr. Wainwright, the surgeon from West Lynne, summoned to the earl's bedside; he had experienced another and a violent attack. The peer was exceedingly annoyed and vexed, and very irritable.

"I may be kept here a week—a month—a fortnight—a month longer, now!" he uttered fretfully to Isabel.

"I am very sorry, papa. I dare say you do find East Lynne dull."

"Dull! That's not it; I have other reasons for wishing East Lynne to be quit of us. And now you can't go to the concert."

Isabel's face flushed. "Not go, papa?"

"Why, who is to take you. I can't get out of bed."

"Oh, papa, I must be there. Otherwise it would like almost as though—as though we had announced what we did not mean to perform. You know it was arranged that we should join the Ducies; the carriage can still take me to the concert room, and I can go in with them."

"Just as you please. I thought you would have jumped at any plea for staying away."

"Not at all," laughed Isabel. "I should like West Lynne to see that I don't despise Mr. Kane and his concert."

Later in the day the earl grew alarmingly worse; his paroxysms of pain were awful. Isabel, who was kept from the room, knew nothing of the danger, and the earl's groans did not penetrate to her ears. She dressed herself in a gleeful mode, full of laughing willfulness, Marvel, her maid, superintending in stiff displeasure, for the attire chosen did not meet her approbation. When ready, she went into the earl's room.

"Shall I do, papa?"

Lord Mount Severn raised his swollen eyelids and drew the clothes from his flushed face. A shining vision was standing before him, a beauteous queen, a gleaming fairy; he hardly knew what she looked like. She had put on a white lace hat and her diamonds; the dress was rich, and the jewels gleamed from her delicate arms: and her cheeks were flushed and her curls were flowing.

The earl stared at her in amazement. "How could you dress yourself off like that for a concert? You are out of your senses, Isabel."

"Marvel thinks so, too," was the gay answer; "she has had a cross face since I told her what to put on. But I did it on purpose, papa; I thought I would show those West Lynne people that *I* think the poor man's moment worth going to, and worth dressing for."

"You will have the whole room gaping at you."

"I don't mind. I'll bring you word all about it. Let them gape."

"You vain child! You have so dressed yourself to please your vanity. But, Isabel, you—oooh!"

Isabel started as she stood; the earl's groan of pain was dreadful.

"An awful twinge, child. There, go along; talking makes me worse."

"Papa, shall I stay at home with you?" she gravely asked. "Every consideration should give way to illness. If you would like me to remain, or if I can do any good, pray let me."

"Quite the contrary; I had rather you were away. You can do no earthly good, for I could not have you in the room. Good-bye, darling. If you see Carlyle, tell him I shall hope to see him tomorrow."

The room was partly full when Mrs. Ducie, her two daughters, and Lady Isabel entered, and were conducted to seats by Mr. Kane—seats he had reserved for them at the upper end, near the orchestra. The same dazzling vision which had burst on the sight of Lord Mount Severn fell on that of the audience, in Isabel, with her rich, white dress, her glittering diamonds, her flowing curls, and her wondrous beauty. The Misses Ducie, plain girls, in brown silks, turned up their noses worse than nature had done it for them, and Mrs. Ducie heaved an audible sigh.

“The poor motherless girl is to be pitied, my dears,” she whispered; “she has nobody to point out to her suitable attire. This ridiculous decking out must have been Marvel’s doings.”

But she looked like a lily among poppies and sunflowers whether the “decking out” was ridiculous or not. Was Lord Mount Severn right, when he accused her of dressing so in self-gratification? Very likely, for has not the great preacher said that childhood and youth are vanity?

Miss Carlyle, the justice, and Barbara also had seats near the orchestra; for Miss Carlyle, in West Lynne, was a person to be considered, and not hidden behind others. Mr. Carlyle, however, preferred to join the gentlemen who congregated and stood round about the door inside and out. There was scarcely standing room in the place; Mr. Kane had, as was anticipated, got a bumper, and the poor man could have worshipped Lady Isabel, for he knew he owed it to her.

It was very long—country concerts generally are—and was about three parts over when a powdered head, larger than any cauliflower ever grown, was discerned ascending the stairs, behind the group of gentlemen; which head, when it brought its body in full view, was discovered to belong to one of the footmen of Lord Mount Severn. The calves alone, cased in their silk stockings, were a sight to be seen; and these calves betook themselves inside the concert room, with a deprecatory bow for permission to the gentlemen they had to steer through—and there they came to a standstill, the cauliflower extending forward and turning itself about from right to left.

“Well, I’ll be jiffled!” cried an astonished old fox-hunter, who had been elbowed by the footman; “the cheek these fellows have!”

The fellow in question did not appear, however, to be enjoying any great amount of cheek just at that moment, for he looked perplexed, humble and uneasy. Suddenly his eye fell upon Mr. Carlyle, and it lighted up.

“Beg pardon, sir; could you happen to inform me whereabouts my young lady is sitting?”

“At the other end of the room, near the orchestra.”

“I’m sure I don’t know however I am to get to her, then,” returned the man more in self-soliloquy than to Mr. Carlyle. “The room is choke full, and I don’t like crushing by. My lord is taken alarmingly worse, sir,” he explained in an awe-stricken tone; “it is feared he is dying.”

Mr. Carlyle was painfully startled.

“His screams of pain were awful, sir. Mr. Wainwright and another doctor from West Lynne are with him, and an express has gone to Lynneboro’ for physicians. Mrs. Mason said we were to fetch my young lady right home, and not lose a moment; and we brought the carriage, sir, Wells galloping his horses all the way.”

“I will bring Lady Isabel,” said Mr. Carlyle.

“I am sure, sir, I should be under everlasting obligations if you would,” returned the man.

He worked his way through the concert room—he was tall and slender—many looking daggers at him, for a pathetic song was just then being given by a London lady. He disregarded all, and stood before Isabel.

“I thought you were not coming to speak to me to-night. Is it not a famous room? I am so pleased!”

“More than famous, Lady Isabel,” choosing his words, that they might not alarm her, “Lord Mount Severn does not find himself so well, and he has sent the carriage for you.”

“Papa not so well!” she quickly exclaimed.

“Not quite. At any rate, he wishes you to go home. Will you allow me to pilot you through the room?”

“Oh, my dear, considerate papa!” she laughed. “He fears I shall be weary, and would emancipate me before the time. Thank you, Mr. Carlyle, but I will wait till the conclusion.”

“No, no, Lady Isabel, it is not that. Lord Mount Severn is indeed worse.”

Her countenance changed to seriousness; but she was not alarmed. “Very well. When the song is over—not to disturb the room.”

“I think you had better lose no time,” he urged. “Never mind the song and the room.”

She rose instantly, and put her arm within Mr. Carlyle’s. A hasty word of explanation to Mrs. Ducie, and he led her away, the room, in its surprise, making for them what space it might. Many an eye followed them, but none more curiously and eagerly than Barbara Hare’s. “Where is he going to take her to?” involuntarily uttered Barbara.

“How should I know?” returned Miss Corny. “Barbara, you have done nothing but fidget all the night; what’s the matter with you? Folks come to a concert to listen, not to talk and fidget.”

Isabel’s mantle was procured from the ante-room where it had been left, and she descended the stairs with Mr. Carlyle. The carriage was drawn up close to the entrance, and the coachman had his reins gathered, ready to start. The footman—not the one who had gone upstairs—threw open the carriage door as he saw her. He was new in the service, a simple country native, just engaged. She withdrew her arm from Mr. Carlyle’s, and stood a moment before stepping in, looking at the man.

“Is papa much worse?”

“Oh, yes, my lady; he was screaming shocking. But they think he’ll live till morning.”

With a sharp cry, she seized the arm of Mr. Carlyle—seized it for support in her shock of agony. Mr. Carlyle rudely thrust the man away; he would willingly have flung him at full length on the pavement.

“Oh, Mr. Carlyle, why did you not tell me?” she shivered.

“My dear Lady Isabel, I am grieved that you are told now. But take comfort; you know how ill he frequently is, and this may be but an ordinary attack. Step in. I trust we shall find it nothing more.”

“Are you going home with me?”

“Certainly; I shall not leave you to go alone.”

She moved to the other side of the chariot, making room for him.

“Thank you. I will sit outside.”

“But the night is cold.”

“Oh, no.” He closed the door, and took his seat by the coachman; the footman got up behind, and the carriage sped away. Isabel gathered herself into her corner, and moaned aloud in her suspense and helplessness.

The coachman drove rapidly, and soon whipped his horses through the lodge-gates.

The housekeeper, Mrs. Mason, waited at the hall-door to receive Lady Isabel. Mr. Carlyle helped her out of the carriage, and gave her his arm up the steps. She scarcely dared to inquire.

“Is he better? May I go to his room?” she panted.

Yes, the earl was better—better, in so far as that he was quiet and senseless. She moved hastily toward his chamber. Mr. Carlyle drew the housekeeper aside.

“Is there any hope?”

“Not the slightest, sir. He is dying.”

The earl knew no one; pain was gone for the present, and he lay on his bed, calm; but his face, which had death in it all too plainly, startled Isabel. She did not scream or cry; she was perfectly quiet, save that she had a fit of shivering.

“Will he soon be better?” she whispered to Mr. Wainwright, who stood there.

The surgeon coughed. “Well, he—he—we must hope it, my lady.”

“But why does his face look like that? It is pale—gray; I never saw anybody else look so.”

“He has been in great pain, my lady, and pain leaves its traces on the countenance.”

Mr. Carlyle, who had come, and was standing by the surgeon, touched his arm to draw him from the room. He noticed the look on the earl’s face, and did not like it; he wished to question the surgeon. Lady Isabel saw that Mr. Carlyle was about to quit the room, and beckoned to him.

“Do not leave the house, Mr. Carlyle. When he wakes up, it may cheer him to see you here; he liked you very much.”

“I will not leave it, Lady Isabel. I did not think of doing so.”

In time—it seemed an age—the medical men arrived from Lynneborough—three of them—the groom had thought he could not summon too many. It was a strange scene they entered upon: the ghastly peer, growing restless again now, battling with his departing spirit, and the gala robes, the sparkling gems adorning the young girl watching at his side. They comprehended the case without difficulty; that she had been suddenly called from some scene of gayety.

They stooped to look at the earl, and felt his pulse, and touched his heart, and exchanged a few murmured words with Mr. Wainwright. Isabel had stood back to give them place, but her anxious eyes followed their every movement. They did not seem to notice her, and she stepped forward.

“Can you do anything for him? Will he recover?”

They all turned at the address, and looked at her. One spoke; it was an evasive answer.

“Tell me the truth!” she implored, with feverish impatience: “you must not trifle with me. Do you not know me? I am his only child, and I am here alone.”

The first thing was to get her away from the room, for the great change was approaching, and the parting struggle between the body and the spirit might be one of warfare—no sight for her. But in answer to their suggestion that she should go, she only leaned her head upon the pillow by her father and moaned in despair.

“She must be got out of the room,” cried one of the physicians, almost angrily. “Ma’am,” turning suddenly upon Mrs. Mason, “are there no reserves in the house—no one who can exert influence over the young lady?”

“She has scarcely any relatives in the world,” replied the housekeeper; “no near ones; and we happen to be, just now, quite alone.”

But Mr. Carlyle, seeing the urgency of the case, for the earl, with every minute, grew more excited, approached and whispered her: “You are as anxious as we can be for your father’s recovery?”

“As anxious!” she uttered reproachfully.

“You know what I would imply. Of course our anxiety can be as nothing to yours.”

“As nothing—as *nothing*. I think my heart will break.”

“Then—forgive me—you should not oppose the wishes of his medical attendants. They wish to be alone with him, and time is being lost.”

She rose up; she placed her hands on her brow, as if to collect the sense of the words, and then she addressed the doctors,—

“Is it really necessary that I should leave the room—necessary *for him?*”

“It is necessary, my lady—absolutely essential.”

She broke into a passion of tears and sobs as Mr. Carlyle lead her to another apartment.

“He is my dear father; I have but him in the wide world!” she exclaimed.

“I know—I know; I feel for you all that you are feeling. Twenty times this night I have wished—forgive me the thought—that you were my sister, so that I might express my sympathy more freely and comfort you.”

“Tell me the truth, then, why I am kept away. If you can show me sufficient cause, I will be reasonable and obey; but do not say again I should be disturbing him, for it is not true.”

“He is too ill for you to see him—his symptoms are too painful. In fact, it would not be proper; and were you to go in in defiance of advice, you would regret it all your after life.”

“Is he dying?”

Mr. Carlyle hesitated. Ought he to dissemble with her as the doctors had done? A strong feeling was upon him that he ought not.

“I trust to you not to deceive me,” she simply said.

“I fear he is—I believe he is.”

She rose up—she grasped his arm in the sudden fear that flashed over her.

“You are deceiving me, and he is dead!”

“I am not deceiving you, Lady Isabel. He is not dead, but—it may be very near.”

She laid her face down upon the soft pillow.

“Going forever from me—going forever? Oh, Mr. Carlyle, let me see him for a minute—just one farewell! Will you not try for me!”

He knew how hopeless it was, but he turned to leave the room.

“I will go and see. But you will remain here quietly—you will not come.”

She bowed her head in acquiescence, and he closed the door. Had she indeed been his sister, he would probably have turned the key upon her. He entered the earl’s chamber, but not many seconds did he remain in it.

“It is over,” he whispered to Mrs. Mason, whom he met in the corridor, “and Mr. Wainwright is asking for you.”

“You are soon back,” cried Isabel, lifting her head. “May I go?”

He sat down and took her hand, shrinking from his task.

“I wish I could comfort you!” he exclaimed, in a tone of deep emotion.

Her face turned of a ghastly whiteness—as white as another’s not far away.

“Tell me the worst,” she breathed.

“I have nothing to tell you but the worst. May God support you, dear Lady Isabel!”

She turned to hide her face and its misery away from him, and a low wail of anguish broke from her, telling its own tale of despair.

The gray dawn of morning was breaking over the world, advent of another bustling day in life’s history; but the spirit of William Vane, Earl of Mount Severn, had soared away from it forever.

CHAPTER X

THE KEEPERS OF THE DEAD

Events, between the death of Lord Mount Severn and his interment, occurred quickly; and to one of them the reader may feel inclined to demur, as believing that it could have no foundation in fact, in the actions of real life, but must be a wild creation of the author's brain. He would be wrong. The author is no more fond of wild creations than the reader. The circumstance did take place.

The earl died on Friday morning at daylight. The news spread rapidly. It generally does on the death of a peer, if he has been of note, whether good or bad, in the world, and was known in London before the day was over—the consequence of which was, that by Saturday morning, early, a shoal of what the late peer would have called harpies, had arrived, to surround East Lynne. There were creditors of all sorts; for small sums and for great, for five or ten pounds up to five or ten thousand. Some were civil, some impatient, some loud and rough and angry; some came to put in executions on the effects, and some—to *arrest the body!*

This last act was accomplished cleverly. Two men, each with a remarkably hooked nose, stole away from the hubbub of the clamorous, and peering cunningly about, made their way to the side or tradesman's entrance. A kitchen-maid answered their gentle appeal at the bell.

"Is the coffin come yet?" said they.

"Coffin—no!" was the girl's reply. "The shell ain't here yet. Mr. Jones didn't promise that till nine o'clock, and it haven't gone eight."

"It won't be long," quoth they; "its on its road. We'll go up to his lordship's room, please, and be getting ready for it."

The girl called the butler. "Two men from Jones', the undertaker's, sir," announced she. "The shell's coming on and they want to go up and make ready for it."

The butler marshaled them upstairs himself, and introduced them to the room. "That will do," said they, as he was about to enter with them, "we won't trouble you to wait." And closing the door upon the unsuspecting butler, they took up their station on either side of the dead, like a couple of ill-omened mutes. They had placed an arrest upon the corpse; it was theirs until their claim was satisfied, and they sat down to thus watch and secure it. Pleasant occupation!

It may have been an hour later that Lady Isabel, leaving her own chamber, opened noiselessly that of the dead. She had been in it several times during the previous day; at first with the housekeeper; afterward, when the nameless dread was somewhat effaced, alone. But she felt nervous again this morning, and had gained the bed before she ventured to lift her eyes from the carpet and encounter the sight. Then she started, for there sat two strange-looking men—and not attractive men either.

It darted through her mind that they must be people from the neighborhood, come to gratify an idle and unpardonable curiosity. Her first impulse was to summon the butler; her second, to speak to them herself.

"Do you want anything here?" she quietly said.

"Much obleeged for the inquiry, miss. We are all right."

The words and tone struck her as being singular in the extreme; and they kept their seats, too, as though they had a right to be there.

"Why are you here?" she repeated. "What are you doing?"

"Well, miss, I don't mind telling you, for I suppose you are his daughter"—pointing his left thumb over his shoulder at the late peer—"and we hear he have got no other relative anigh him. We have been obleeged, miss, to perform an unpleasant dooty and secure him."

The words were like Greek to her, and the men saw that they were.

“He unfortunately owed a slight amount of money, miss—as you, perhaps, be aware on, and our employers is in, deep. So, as soon as they heard what had happened, they sent us down to arrest the dead corpse, and we have done it.”

Amazement, horror, fear, struggled together in the shocked mind of Lady Isabel. Arrest the dead. She had never heard of a like calamity: nor could she have believed in such. Arrest it for what purpose? What to do? To disfigure it?—to sell it? With a panting heart and ashy lips, she turned from the room. Mrs. Mason happened to be passing near the stairs, and Isabel flew to her, laying hold of her with both hands, in her terror, as she burst into a fit of nervous tears.

“Those men—in there!” she gasped.

“What men, my lady?” returned Mrs. Mason, surprised.

“I don’t know; I don’t know. I think they are going to stop there; they say they have taken papa.”

After a pause of bewildered astonishment, the housekeeper left her standing where she was, and went to the earl’s chamber, to see if she could fathom the mystery of the words. Isabel leaned against the balustrades; partly for support, partly that she seemed afraid to stir from them; and the ominous disturbances downstairs reached her ears. Strangers, interlopers, appeared to be in the hall, talking vehemently, and complaining in bitter tones. More and more terrified, she held her breath to listen.

“Where’s the good of your seeing the young lady?” cried the butler, in a tone of remonstrance. “She knows nothing about the earl’s affairs; she is in grief enough just now, without any other worry.”

“I will see her,” returned a dogged voice. “If she’s too start-up and mighty to come down and answer a question or two, why I’ll find my way on to her. Here we are a shameful crowd of us, swindled out of our own, told there’s nobody we can speak to; nobody here but the young lady, and she must not be troubled. She didn’t find it trouble to help to spend our money. She has got no honor and feelings of a lady, if she don’t come and speak to us. There.”

Repressing her rebellious emotions, Lady Isabel glided partly down the staircase, and softly called to the butler. “What is all this?” she asked. “I must know.”

“Oh, my lady, don’t go amongst those rough men! You can’t do any good; pray go back before they see you. I have sent for Mr. Carlyle, and expect him here momentarily.”

“Did Papa owe them *all* money?” she said, shivering.

“I’m afraid he did, my lady.”

She went swiftly on; and passing through the few stragglers in the hall, entered the dining-room, where the chief mass had congregated, and the hubbub was loudest. All anger, at least external anger, was hushed at her sight. She looked so young, so innocent, so childlike in her pretty morning dress of peach-colored muslin, her fair face shaded by its falling curls, so little fit to combat with, or understand *their* business, that instead of pouring forth complaints, they hushed them into silence.

“I heard some one calling out that I ought to see you,” she began, her agitation causing the words to come forth in a jerking manner. “What did you want with me?”

Then they poured forth their complaints, but not angrily, and she listened till she grew sick. There were many and formidable claims; promissory notes and I O Us, overdue bills and underdue bills; heavy outstanding debts of all sorts, and trifles, comparatively speaking, for housekeeping, servants’ liveries, out-door servants’ wages, bread and meat.

What was Isabel Vane to answer? What excuse to offer? What hope or promise to give? She stood in bewilderment, unable to speak, turning from one to the other, her sweet eyes full of pity and contrition.

“The fact is, young lady,” spoke up one who bore the exterior of a gentleman, “we should not have come down troubling you—at least, I can answer for myself—but his lordship’s men of business, Warburton & Ware, to whom many of us hastened last evening, told us there would not be a shilling for anybody unless it could be got from furniture. When it comes to that, it is ‘first come, first served,’ and I got down by morning light, and levied an execution.”

“Which was levied before you came,” put in a man who might be brother to the two upstairs, to judge by his nose. “But what’s such furniture as this to our claims—if you come to combine ‘em? No more than a bucket of water is to the Thames.”

“What can I do?” shivered Lady Isabel. “What is it you wish me to do? I have no money to give you, I—”

“No, miss,” broke in a quiet, pale man; “if report tells me, you are worse wronged than we are, for you won’t have a roof to put your head under, or a guinea to call your own.”

“He has been a scoundrel to everybody,” interrupted an intemperate voice; “he has ruined thousands.”

The speech was hissed down; even they were not men gratuitously to insult a delicate young lady.

“Perhaps you’ll just answer us a question, miss,” persisted the voice, in spite of the hisses. “Is there any ready money that can—”

But another person had entered the room—Mr. Carlyle. He caught sight of the white face and trembling hands of Isabel, and interrupted the last speaker with scant ceremony.

“What is the meaning of this?” he demanded, in a tone of authority. “What do you want?”

“If you are a friend of the late peer’s, you ought to know what we want,” was the response. “We want our debts paid.”

“But this is not the place to come to,” returned Mr. Carlyle; “your coming here flocking in this extraordinary manner, will do no good. You must go to Warburton & Ware.”

“We have been to them and received their answer—a cool assurance that there’ll be nothing for anybody.”

“At any rate, you’ll get nothing here,” observed Mr. Carlyle, to the assembly, collectively. “Allow me to request that you leave the house at once.”

It was little likely that they would for him, and they said it.

“Then I warn you of the consequences of a refusal,” quietly said Mr. Carlyle; “you are trespassing upon a stranger’s property. This house is not Lord Mount Severn’s; he sold it some time back.”

They knew better. Some laughed, and said these tricks were stale.

“Listen, gentlemen,” rejoined Mr. Carlyle, in the plain, straightforward manner that carried its own truth. “To make an assertion that could be disproved when the earl’s affairs come to be investigated, would be simply foolish. I give you my word of honor as a gentleman—nay, as a fellow-man—that this estate, with the house and all it contains, passed months ago, from the hands of Lord Mount Severn; and, during his recent sojourn here, he was a visitor in it. Go and ask his men of business.”

“Who purchased it?” was the inquiry.

“Mr. Carlyle, of West Lynne. Some of you may possibly know him by reputation.”

Some of them did.

“A cute young lawyer,” observed a voice; “as his father was before him.”

“I am he,” proceeded Mr. Carlyle; “and, being a ‘cute lawyer,’ as you do me the honor to decide, you cannot suppose I should risk my money upon any sale not perfectly safe and legal. I was not an agent in the affair; I employed agents; for it was my own money that I invested, and East Lynne is mine.”

“Is the purchase money paid over?” inquired more than one.

“It was paid over at the time—last June.”

“What did Lord Mount Severn do with the money?”

“I do not know,” replied Mr. Carlyle. “I am not cognizant of Lord Mount Severn’s private affairs.”

Significant murmurs arose. “Strange that the earl should stop two or three months at a place that wasn’t his.”

“It may appear so to you, but allow me to explain,” returned Mr. Carlyle. “The earl expressed a wish to pay East Lynne a few days’ visit, by way of farewell, and I acceded. Before the few days were over, he was taken ill, and remained, from that time, too ill to quit it. This very day—this day, gentlemen, as we stand here, was at length fixed for his departure.”

“And you tell us you bought the furniture?”

“Everything as it stands. You need not doubt my word, for the proofs will be forthcoming. East Lynne was in the market for sale; I heard of it, and became the purchaser—just as I might have bought an estate from any of you. And now, as this is my house, and you have no claim upon me, I shall be obliged to you to withdraw.”

“Perhaps you’ll claim the horses and carriages next, sir,” cried the man with the hooked nose.

Mr. Carlyle raised his head haughtily. “What is mine is mine, legally purchased and paid for—a fair, just price. The carriages and horses I have nothing to do with; Lord Mount Severn brought them down with him.”

“And I have got a safe watcher over them in the out premises, to see as they don’t run away,” nodded the man, complacently; “and if I don’t mistake, there’s a safe watcher over something else upstairs.”

“What a cursed scoundrel Mount Severn was.”

“Whatever he may have been, it does not give you the right to outrage the feelings of his daughter,” warmly interrupted Mr. Carlyle; “and I should have thought that men, calling themselves Englishmen, would have disdained the shame. Allow me, Lady Isabel,” he added, imperatively taking her hand to lead her from the room. “I will remain and deal with this business.”

But she hesitated and stopped. The injury her father had done these men was telling painfully on her sense of right, and she essayed to speak a word of apology, of sorrow; she thought she ought to do so; she did not like them to deem her quite heartless. But it was a painful task, and the color went and came in her pale face, and her breath was labored with the excess of her tribulation.

“I am very sorry,” she stammered; and with the effort of speaking, emotion quite got the better of her, and she burst into tears. “I did not know anything of all this; my father’s affairs were not spoken of before me. I believe I have not anything; if I had, I would divide it amongst you as equally as I could. But, should the means ever be in my power—should money ever be mine, I will thankfully pay all your claims.”

All your claims! Lady Isabel little thought what that “all” would comprise. However, such promises, made at such a moment, fell heedlessly upon the ear. Scarcely one present but felt sympathy and sorrow for her, and Mr. Carlyle drew her from the room. He closed the door upon the noisy crew, and then sobs came forth hysterically.

“I am so grieved, Lady Isabel! Had I foreseen this annoyance, you should have been spared it. Can you go upstairs alone, or shall I call Mrs. Mason?”

“Oh, yes! I can go alone; I am not ill, only frightened and sick. This is not the worst,” she shivered. “There are two men up—up—with papa.”

“Up with papa.” Mr. Carlyle was puzzled. He saw that she was shaking from head to foot, as she stood before him.

“I cannot understand it, and it terrifies me,” she continued, attempting an explanation. “They are sitting in the room, close to him: they have taken him, they say.”

A blank, thunderstruck pause. Mr. Carlyle looked at her—he did not speak; and then he turned and looked at the butler, who was standing near. But the man only responded by giving his head a half shake, and Mr. Carlyle saw that it was an ominous one.

“I will clear the house of these,” he said to Lady Isabel, pointing back to the dining-room, “and then join you upstairs.”

“Two ruffians, sir, and they have got possession of the body,” whispered the butler in Mr. Carlyle’s ear, as Lady Isabel departed. “They obtained entrance to the chamber by a sly, deceitful trick, saying they were the undertaker’s men, and that he can’t be buried unless their claims are paid, if it’s for a month to come. It has upset all our stomachs, sir; Mrs. Mason while telling me—for she was the first one to know it—was as sick as she could be.”

At present Mr. Carlyle returned to the dining-room, and bore the brunt of the anger of those savage, and it may be said, ill-used men. Not that it was vented upon him—quite the contrary—but on the memory of the unhappy peer, who lay overhead. A few had taken the precaution to insure the earl’s life, and they were the best off. They left the house after a short space of time; for Mr. Carlyle’s statement was indisputable, and they knew the law better than to remain, trespassers on his property.

But the custodians of the dead could not be got rid of. Mr. Carlyle proceeded to the death-chamber, and examined their authority. A similar case had never occurred under his own observation, though it had under his father’s, and Mr. Carlyle remembered hearing of it. The body of a church dignitary, who had died deeply in debt, was arrested as it was being carried through the cloisters to its grave in the cathedral. These men, sitting over Lord Mount Severn, enforced heavy claims; and there they must sit until the arrival of Mr. Vane from Castle Marling—now the Earl of Mount Severn.

On the following morning, Sunday, Mr. Carlyle proceeded again to East Lynne, and found, to his surprise, that there was no arrival. Isabel sat in the breakfast-room alone, the meal on the table untouched, and she shivering—as it seemed—on a low ottoman before the fire. She looked so ill that Mr. Carlyle could not forbear remarking upon it.

“I have not slept, and I am very cold,” she answered. “I did not close my eyes all night, I was so terrified.”

“Terrified at what?” he asked.

“At those men,” she whispered. “It is strange that Mr. Vane has not come.”

“Is the post in?”

“I don’t know,” she apathetically replied. “I have received nothing.”

She had scarcely spoke when the butler entered with his salver full of letters, most of them bearing condolence with Lady Isabel. She singled out one and hastened to open it, for it bore the Castle Marling post-mark. “It is Mrs. Vane’s handwriting,” she remarked to Mr. Carlyle.

CASTLE MARLING, Saturday.

“MY DEAR ISABEL—I am dreadfully grieved and shocked at the news conveyed in Mr. Carlyle’s letter to my husband, for he has gone cruising in his yacht, and I opened it. Goodness knows where he may be, round the coast somewhere, but he said he should be home for Sunday, and as he is pretty punctual in keeping his word, I expect him. Be assured he will not lose a moment in hastening to East Lynne.

“I cannot express what I feel for you, and am too *bouleversee* to write more. Try and keep up your spirits, and believe me, dear Isabel, with sincere sympathy and regret, faithfully yours,

“EMMA MOUNT SEVERN.”

The color came into Isabel’s pale cheek when she read the signature. She thought, had she been the writer, she should, in that first, early letter, have still signed herself Emma Vane. Isabel handed the note to Mr. Carlyle. “It is very unfortunate,” she sighed.

Mr. Carlyle glanced over it as quickly as Mrs. Vane’s illegible writing allowed him, and drew in his lips in a peculiar manner when he came to the signature. Perhaps at the same thought which had struck Isabel.

“Had Mrs. Vane been worth a rush, she would have come herself, knowing your lonely situation,” he uttered, impulsively.

Isabel leaned her head upon her hand. All the difficulties and embarrassments of her position came crowding on her mind. No orders had been given in preparation for the funeral, and she felt that she had no right to give any. The earls of Mount Severn were buried at Mount Severn; but to

take her father thither would involve great expense; would the present earl sanction that? Since the previous morning, she seemed to have grown old in the world's experience; her ideas were changed, the bent of her thoughts had been violently turned from its course. Instead of being a young lady of high position, of wealth and rank, she appeared to herself more in the light of an unfortunate pauper and interloper in the house she was inhabiting. It has been the custom in romance to present young ladies, especially if they be handsome and interesting, as being entirely oblivious of matter-of-fact cares and necessities, supremely indifferent to future prospects of poverty—poverty that brings hunger and thirst and cold and nakedness; but, be assured, this apathy never existed in real life. Isabel Vane's grief for her father—whom, whatever may have been the aspect he wore for others, *she* had deeply loved and revered—was sharply poignant; but in the midst of that grief, and of the singular troubles his death had brought forth, she could not shut her eyes to her own future. Its blank uncertainty, its shadowed-forth embarrassments did obtrude themselves and the words of that plain-speaking creditor kept ringing in her ears: "You won't have a roof to put your head under, or a guinea to call your own." Where was she to go? With whom to live? She was in Mr. Carlyle's house now. And how was she to pay the servants? Money was owing to them all.

"Mr. Carlyle, how long has this house been yours?" she asked, breaking the silence.

"It was in June that the purchase was completed. Did Lord Mount Severn never tell you he had sold it to me?"

"No, never. All these things are yours?" glancing round the room.

"The furniture was sold with the house. Not these sort of things," he added, his eye falling on the silver on the breakfast table; "not the plate and linen."

"Not the plate and linen! Then those poor men who were here yesterday have a right to them," she quickly cried.

"I scarcely know. I believe the plate goes with the entail—and the jewels go also. The linen cannot be of consequence either way."

"Are my clothes my own?"

He smiled as he looked at her; smiled at her simplicity, and assured her that they were nobody's else.

"I did not know," she sighed; "I did not understand. So many strange things have happened in the last day or two, that I seem to understand nothing."

Indeed, she could not understand. She had no definite ideas on the subject of this transfer of East Lynne to Mr. Carlyle; plenty of indefinite ones, and they were haunting her. Fears of debt to him, and of the house and its contents being handed over to him in liquidation, perhaps only partial, were working in her brain.

"Does my father owe you any money?" she breathed in a timid tone.

"Not any," he replied. "Lord Mount Severn was never indebted to me in his life."

"Yet you purchased East Lynne?"

"As any one else might have done," he answered, discerning the drift of her thoughts. "I was in search of an eligible estate to invest money in, and East Lynne suited me."

"I feel my position, Mr. Carlyle," she resumed, the rebellious tears forcing themselves to her eyes; "thus to be intruding upon you for a shelter. And I cannot help myself."

"You can help grieving me," he gently answered, "which you do much when you talk of obligation. The obligation is on my side, Lady Isabel; and when I express a hope that you will continue at East Lynne while it can be of service, however prolonged that period may be, I assure you, I say it in all sincerity."

"You are very kind," she faltered; "and for a few days; until I can think; until—Oh, Mr. Carlyle, are papa's affairs really so bad as they said yesterday?" she broke off, her perplexities recurring to her with vehement force. "Is there nothing left?"

Now Mr. Carlyle might have given the evasive assurance that there would be plenty left, just to tranquilize her. But to have used deceit with her would have pricked against every feeling of his nature; and he saw how implicitly she relied upon his truth.

“I fear things are not very bright,” he answered. “That is, so far as we can see at present. But there may have been some settlement effected for you that you do not know of. Warburton & Ware—”

“No,” she interrupted: “I never heard of a settlement, and I am sure there is none. I see the worst plainly. I have no home, no home and no money. This house is yours; the town house and Mount Severn go to Mr. Vane; and I have nothing.”

“But surely Mr. Vane will be delighted to welcome you to your old home. The houses pass to him—it almost seems as though you had the greater right in them, than he or Mrs. Vane.”

“My home with them!” she retorted, as if the words had stung her. “What are you saying, Mr. Carlyle?”

“I beg your pardon, Lady Isabel. I should not have presumed to touch upon these points myself, but—”

“Nay, I think I ought to beg yours,” she interrupted, more calmly. “I am only grateful for the interest you take in them—the kindness you have shown. But I could not make my home with Mrs. Vane.”

Mr. Carlyle rose. He could do no good by remaining, and did not think it well to intrude longer. He suggested that it might be more pleasant if Isabel had a friend with her; Mrs. Ducie would no doubt be willing to come, and she was a kind, motherly woman.

Isabel shook her head with a passing shudder. “Have strangers, here, with—all—that—in papa’s chamber!” she uttered. “Mrs. Ducie drove over yesterday, perhaps to remain—I don’t know; but I was afraid of questions, and would not see her. When I think of—that—I feel thankful that I am alone.”

The housekeeper stopped Mr. Carlyle as he was going out.

“Sir, what is the news from Castle Marling? Pound said there was a letter. Is Mr. Vane coming?”

“He was out yachting. Mrs. Vane expected him home yesterday, so it is to be hoped he will be here to-day.”

“Whatever will be done if he does not come?” she breathed. “The leaden coffin ought to be soldered down, for you know, sir, the state he was in when he died.”

“It can be soldered down without Mr. Vane.”

“Of course—without Mr. Vane. It’s not that, sir. Will those men allow it to be done? The undertakers were here this morning at daybreak, and those men intimated that they were not going to *lose sight* of the dead. The words sounded significant to us, but we asked them no questions. Have they a right to prevent it, sir?”

“Upon my word I cannot tell,” replied Mr. Carlyle. “The proceeding is so rare a one, that I know little what right of law they have or have not. Do not mention this to Lady Isabel. And when Mr. Va—when Lord Mount Severn arrives, send down to apprise me of it.”

CHAPTER XI

THE NEW PEER—THE BANK-NOTE

A post-chaise was discerned thundering up the avenue that Sunday afternoon. It contained the new peer, Lord Mount Severn. The more direct line of rail from Castle Marling, brought him only to within five miles of West Lynne, and thence he had travelled in a hired chaise. Mr. Carlyle soon joined him, and almost at the same time Mr. Warburton arrived from London. Absence from town at the period of the earl's death had prevented Mr. Warburton's earlier attendance. Business was entered upon immediately.

The present earl knew that his predecessor had been an embarrassed man, but he had no conception of the extent of the evil; they had not been intimate, and rarely came in contact. As the various items of news were now detailed to him—the wasteful expenditure, the disastrous ruin, the total absence of provision for Isabel—he stood petrified and aghast. He was a tall stout man, of three-and-forty years, his nature honorable, his manner cold, and his countenance severe.

“It is the most iniquitous piece of business I ever heard of!” he exclaimed to the two lawyers. “Of all the reckless fools, Mount Severn must have been the worst!”

“Unpardonably improvident as regards his daughter,” was the assenting remark.

“Improvident! It must have been rank madness!” retorted the earl. “No man in his senses could leave a child to the mercy of the world, as he has left her. She has not a shilling—literally, not a shilling in her possession. I put the question to her, what money there was in the house when the earl died. Twenty or twenty-five pounds, she answered, which she had given to Mason, who required it for housekeeping purposes. If the girl wants a yard of ribbon for herself, she has not the pence to pay for it! Can you realize such a case to the mind?” continued the excited peer. “I will stake my veracity that such a one never occurred yet.”

“No money for her own personal wants!” exclaimed Mr. Carlyle.

“Not a halfpenny in the world. And there are no funds, and will be none, that I can see, for her to draw upon.”

“Quite correct, my lord,” nodded Mr. Warburton. “The entailed estates go to you, and what trifling matter of personal property may be left the creditors will take care of.”

“I understand East Lynne is yours,” cried the earl, turning sharply upon Mr. Carlyle; “Isabel has just said so.”

“It is,” was the reply. “It became mine last June. I believe his lordship kept the fact a close secret.”

“He was obliged to keep it a secret,” interposed Mr. Warburton, addressing Lord Mount Severn, “for not a stiver of the purchase money could he have fingered had it got wind. Except ourselves and Mr. Carlyle's agents, the fact was made known to none.”

“It is strange, sir, that you could not urge the claims of his child upon the earl,” rejoined the new peer to Mr. Warburton, his tone one of harsh reproof. “You were in his confidence; you knew the state of his affairs; it was in your line of duty to do it.”

“Knowing the state of his affairs, my lord, we knew how useless the urging it would be,” returned Mr. Warburton. “Your lordship has but a faint idea of the burdens Lord Mount Severn had upon him. The interest alone upon his debts was frightful—and the deuce's own work it was to get it. Not to speak of the kites he let loose; he would fly them, and nothing could stop him; and they had to be provided for.”

“Oh, I know,” replied the earl, with a gesture of contempt. “Drawing one bill to cover another; that was his system.”

“Draw!” echoed Mr. Warburton. “He would have drawn a bill on Aldgate pump. It was a downright mania with him.”

“Urged to it by his necessities, I conclude,” put in Mr. Carlyle.

“He had no business to have such necessities, sir,” cried the earl, wrathfully. “But let us proceed to business. What money is there lying at his banker’s, Mr. Warburton? Do you know?”

“None,” was the blank reply. “We overdrew the account ourselves, a fortnight ago, to meet one of his pressing liabilities. We hold a little; and, had he lived a week or two longer, the autumn rents would have been paid in—though they must have been as quickly paid out again.”

“I’m glad there’s something. What is the amount?”

“My lord,” answered Mr. Warburton, shaking his head in a self-condoling manner, “I am sorry to tell you that what we hold will not half satisfy our own claims; money actually paid out of our pockets.”

“Then where on earth is the money to come from, sir? For the funeral—for the servants’ wages—for everything, in fact?”

“There is none to come from anywhere,” was the reply of Mr. Warburton.

Lord Mount Severn strode the carpet more fiercely. “Wicked improvidence! Shameful profligacy; callous-hearted man! To live a rogue and die a beggar—leaving his daughter to the charity of strangers!”

“Her case presents the worst feature of the whole,” remarked Mr. Carlyle. “What will she do for a home?”

“She must, of course, find it with me,” replied his lordship; “and, I should hope, a better one than this. With all these debts and duns at his elbow, Mount Severn’s house could not have been a bower of roses.”

“I fancy she knew nothing of the state of affairs; had seen little, if anything, of the embarrassments,” returned Mr. Carlyle.

“Nonsense!” said the peer.

“Mr. Carlyle is right, my lord,” observed Mr. Warburton, looking over his spectacles. “Lady Isabel was in safety at Mount Severn till the spring, and the purchase money from East Lynne—what the earl could touch of it—was a stop-gap for many things, and made matters easy for the moment. However, his imprudences are at an end now.”

“No, they are not at an end,” returned Lord Mount Severn; “they leave their effects behind them. I hear there was a fine scene yesterday morning; some of the unfortunate wretches he has taken in made their appearance here, all the way from town.”

“Oh, they are Jews half of them,” slightly spoke Mr. Warburton. “If they do lose a little, it will be an agreeable novelty to them.”

“Jews have as much right to their own as we have, Mr. Warburton,” was the peer’s angry reprimand. “And if they were Turks and infidels, it would not excuse Mount Severn’s practices. Isabel says it was you, Mr. Carlyle, who contrived to get rid of them.”

“By convincing them that East Lynne and its furniture belonged to me. But there are those two men upstairs, in possession of—of him; I could not get rid of them.”

The earl looked at him. “I do not understand you.”

“Did you not know that they have seized the corpse?” asked Mr. Carlyle, dropping his voice. “Two men have been posted over it, like sentinels, since yesterday morning. And there’s a third in the house, I hear, who relieves each other by turn, that they may go down in the hall and take their meals.”

The earl had halted in his walk and drawn near to Mr. Carlyle, his mouth open, his face a marvel of consternation. “By George!” was all Mr. Warburton uttered, and snatched off his glasses.

“Mr. Carlyle, do I understand you aright—that the body of the late earl has been seized for a debt?” demanded the peer, solemnly. “Seize a dead body! Am I awake or dreaming?”

“It is what they have done. They got into the room by stratagem.”

“Is it possible that transactions so infamous are permitted by our law?” ejaculated the earl. “Arrest a dead man! I never heard of such a thing. I am shocked beyond expression. Isabel said something about two men, I remember; but she was so full of grief and agitation altogether, that I but half comprehended what she did say upon the subject. Why, what will be done? Can’t we bury him?”

“I fancy not. The housekeeper told me, this morning, she feared they would not even suffer the coffin to be closed down. And that ought to be done with all convenient speed.”

“It is perfectly horrible!” uttered the earl.

“Who has done it—do you know?” inquired Mr. Warburton.

“Somebody of the name of Anstey,” replied Mr. Carlyle. “In the absence of any member of the family, I took upon myself to pay the chamber a visit and examine into the men’s authority. The claim is about three thousand pounds.”

“If it’s Anstey who has done it it is a personal debt of the earl’s, really owing, every pound of it,” observed Mr. Warburton. “A sharp man, though, that Anstey, to hit upon such a scheme.”

“And a shameless and a scandalous man,” added Lord Mount Severn. “Well, this is a pretty thing. What’s to be done?”

While they consult, let us look for a moment at Lady Isabel. She sat alone, in great perplexity, indulging the deepest grief. Lord Mount Severn had intimated to her, kindly and affectionately, that henceforth she must find her home with him and his wife. Isabel returned a faint “Thank you” and as soon as he left her, burst into a paroxysm of rebellious tears. “Have her home with Mrs. Vane!” she uttered to her own heart; “No, never; rather would she die—rather would she eat a crust and drink water!” and so on, and so on. Young demoiselles are somewhat prone to indulge in these flights of fancy; but they are in most cases impracticable and foolish—exceedingly so in that of Lady Isabel Vane. Work for their living? It may appear very feasible in theory; but theory and practice are as opposite as light and dark. The plain fact was, that Isabel had no alternative whatever, save that of accepting a home with Lady Mount Severn; and the conviction that it must be so stole over her spirit, even while her hasty lips were protesting that she would not.

Two mourners only attended the funeral—the earl and Mr. Carlyle. The latter was no relative of the deceased, and but a very recent friend; but the earl had invited him, probably not liking the parading, solus, his trappings of woe. Some of the county aristocracy were pallbearers, and many private carriages followed.

All was bustle on the following morning. The earl was to depart, and Isabel was to depart, but not together. In the course of the day the domestics would disperse. The earl was speeding to London, and the chaise to convey him to the railway station at West Lynne was already at the door when Mr. Carlyle arrived.

“I was getting fidgety fearing you would not be here, for I have barely five minutes to spare,” observed the earl, as he shook hands. “You are sure you fully understood about the tombstone?”

“Perfectly,” replied Mr. Carlyle. “How is Lady Isabel?”

“Very down-hearted, I fear, poor child, for she did not breakfast with me,” replied the earl. “Mason privately told me that she was in a convulsion of grief. A bad man, a *bad* man, was Mount Severn,” he emphatically added, as he rose and rang the bell.

“Let Lady Isabel be informed that I am ready to depart, and that I wait to see her,” he said to the servant who answered it. “And while she is coming, Mr. Carlyle,” he added, “allow me to express my obligations to you. How I should have got along in this worrying business without you, I cannot divine. You have promised, mind, to pay me a visit, and I shall expect it speedily.”

“Promised conditionally—that I find myself in your neighborhood,” smiled Mr. Carlyle. “Should—”

Isabel entered, dressed also, and ready, for she was to depart immediately after the earl. Her crape veil was over her face, but she threw it back.

“My time is up, Isabel, and I must go. Is there anything you wish to say to me?”

She opened her lips to speak, but glanced at Mr. Carlyle and hesitated. He was standing at the window, his back towards them.

“I suppose not,” said the earl, answering himself, for he was in a fever of hurry to be off, like many others are when starting on a journey. “You will have no trouble whatever, my dear; only mind you get some refreshments in the middle of the day, for you won’t be at Castle Marling before dinner-time. Tell Mrs. Va—tell Lady Mount Severn that I had no time to write, but will do so from town.”

But Isabel stood before him in an attitude of uncertainty—of expectancy, it may be said, her color varying.

“What is it, you wish to say something?”

She certainly did wish to say something, but she did not know how. It was a moment of embarrassment to her, intensely painful, and the presence of Mr. Carlyle did not tend to lessen it. The latter had no idea his absence was wished for.

“Bless me, Isabel! I declare I forgot all about it,” cried the earl, in a tone of vexation. “Not being accustomed to—this aspect of affairs is so new—” He broke off his disjointed sentences, unbuttoned his coat, drew out his purse, and paused over its contents.

“Isabel, I have run myself very short, and have but little beyond what will take me to town. You must make three pounds do for now, my dear. Once at Castle Marling—Pound has the funds for the journey—Lady Mount Severn will supply you; but you must tell her, or she will not know.”

He shot some gold out of his purse as he spoke, and left two sovereigns and two half sovereigns on the table. “Farewell, my dear; make yourself happy at Castle Marling. I shall be home soon.”

Passing from the room with Mr. Carlyle, he stood talking with that gentleman a minute, his foot on the step of the chaise, and the next was being whisked away. Mr. Carlyle returned to the breakfast-room, where Isabel, an ashy whiteness having replaced the crimson on her cheeks, was picking up the gold.

“Will you do me a favor, Mr. Carlyle?”

“I will do anything I can for you.”

She pushed a sovereign and a half toward him. “It is for Mr. Kane. I told Marvel to send in and pay him, but it seems she forgot it, or put it off, and he is not paid. The tickets were a sovereign; the rest is for tuning the piano. Will you kindly give it him? If I trust one of the servants it may be forgotten again in the hurry of their departure.”

“Kane’s charge for tuning a piano is five shillings,” remarked Mr. Carlyle.

“But he was a long time occupied with it, and did something with the leathers. It is not too much; besides I never ordered him anything to eat. He wants money even worse than I do,” she added, with a poor attempt at a smile. “But for thinking of him I should not have mustered the courage to beg of Lord Mount Severn, as you have just heard me do. In that case do you know what I should have done?”

“What should you have done?” he smiled.

“I should have asked you to pay him for me, and I would have repaid you as soon as I had any money. I had a great mind to ask you, do you know; it would have been less painful than being obliged to beg of Lord Mount Severn.”

“I hope it would,” he answered, in a low, earnest tone. “What else can I do for you?”

She was about to answer “Nothing—that he had done enough,” but at that moment their attention was attracted by a bustle outside, and they moved to the window.

It was the carriage coming round for Lady Isabel—the late earl’s chariot, which was to convey her to the railway station six or seven miles off. It had four post-horses to it, the number having been designated by Lord Mount Severn, who appeared to wish Isabel to leave the neighborhood in as much state as she had entered it. The carriage was packed, and Marvel was perched outside.

“All is ready,” she said, “and the time is come for me to go. Mr. Carlyle I am going to leave you a legacy—those pretty gold and silver fish that I bought a few weeks back.”

“But why do you not take them?”

“Take them to Lady Mount Severn! No, I would rather leave them with you. Throw a few crumbs into the globe now and then.”

Her face was wet with tears, and he knew that she was talking hurriedly to cover her emotion.

“Sit down a few minutes,” he said.

“No—no. I had better go at once.”

He took her hand to conduct her to the carriage. The servants were gathered in the hall, waiting for her. Some had grown gray in her father’s service. She put out her hand, she strove to say a word of thanks and of farewell, and she thought she would choke at the effort of keeping down the sobs. At length it was over; a kind look around, a yearning wave of the hand, and she passed on with Mr. Carlyle.

Pound had ascended to his place by Marvel, and the postboys were awaiting the signal to start, but Mr. Carlyle had the carriage door open again, and was bending in holding her hand.

“I have not said a word of thanks to you for all your kindness, Mr. Carlyle,” she cried, her breath very labored. “I am sure you have seen that I could not.”

“I wish I could have done more; I wish I could have shielded you from the annoyances you have been obliged to endure!” he answered. “Should we never meet again—”

“Oh, but we shall meet again,” she interrupted. “You promised Lord Mount Severn.”

“True; we may so meet casually—once in a way; but our ordinary paths in life lie far and wide apart. God forever bless you, dear Lady Isabel!”

The postboys touched their horses, and the carriage sped on. She drew down the blinds and leaned back in an agony of tears—tears for the house she was leaving, for the father she had lost. Her last thoughts had been of gratitude to Mr. Carlyle: but she had more cause to be grateful to him than she yet knew of. Emotion soon spent itself, and, as her eyes cleared, she saw a bit of crumpled paper lying on her lap, which appeared to have fallen from her hand. Mechanically she took it up and opened it; it was a bank-note for one hundred pounds.

Ah, reader! You will say that this is a romance of fiction, and a far-fetched one, but it is verily and indeed true. Mr. Carlyle had taken it with him to East Lynne, that morning, with its destined purpose.

Lady Isabel strained her eyes, and gazed at the note—gazed and gazed again. Where could it have come from? What had brought it there? Suddenly the undoubted truth flashed upon her; Mr. Carlyle had left it in her hand.

Her cheeks burned, her fingers trembled, her angry spirit rose up in arms. In that first moment of discovery, she was ready to resent it as an insult; but when she came to remember the sober facts of the last few days, her anger subsided into admiration of his wondrous kindness. Did he not know that she was without a home to call her own, without money—absolutely without money, save what would be given her in charity?

When Lord Mount Severn reached London, and the hotel which the Vanes were in the habit of using, the first object his eyes lighted on was his own wife, whom he had believed to be safe at Castle Marling. He inquired the cause.

Lady Mount Severn gave herself little trouble to explain. She had been up a day or two—could order her mourning so much better in person—and William did not seem well, so she brought him up for a change.

“I am sorry you came to town, Emma,” remarked the earl, after listening. “Isabel is gone to-day to Castle Marling.”

Lady Mount Severn quickly lifted her head, “What’s she gone there for?”

“It is the most disgraceful piece of business altogether,” returned the earl, without replying to the immediate question. “Mount Severn has died, worse than a beggar, and there’s not a shilling for Isabel.”

“It never was expected there would be much.”

“But there’s nothing—not a penny; nothing for her own personal expenses. I gave her a pound or two to-day, for she was completely destitute!”

The countess opened her eyes. “Where will she live? What will become of her?”

“She must live with us. She—”

“With us!” interrupted Lady Mount Severn, her voice almost reaching a scream. “That she never shall.”

“She must, Emma. There is nowhere else for her to live. I have been obliged to decide it so; and she is gone, as I tell you, to Castle Marling to-day.”

Lady Mount Severn grew pale with anger. She rose from her seat and confronted her husband, the table being between them. “Listen, Raymond; I *will not* have Isabel Vane under my roof. I hate her. How could you be cajoled into sanctioning such a thing?”

“I was not cajoled, and my sanction was not asked,” he mildly replied. “I proposed it. Where else is she to be?”

“I don’t care where,” was the obstinate retort. “Never with us.”

“She is at Castle Marling now—gone to it as her home,” resumed the earl; “and even you, when you return, will scarcely venture to turn her out again into the road, or to the workhouse. She will not trouble you long,” carelessly continued the earl. “One so lovely as Isabel will be sure to marry early; and she appears as gentle and sweet-tempered a girl as I ever saw; so whence can arise your dislike to her, I don’t pretend to guess. Many a man will be ready to forget her want of fortune for the sake of her face.”

“She shall marry the first who asks her,” snapped the angry lady; “I’ll take care of that.”

CHAPTER XII

LIFE AT CASTLE MARLING

Isabel had been in her new home about ten days, when Lord and Lady Mount Severn arrived at Castle Marling, which was not a castle, you may as well be told, but only the name of a town, nearly contiguous to which was their residence, a small estate. Lord Mount Severn welcomed Isabel; Lady Mount Severn also, after a fashion; but her manner was so repellent, so insolently patronizing, that it brought the indignant crimson to the cheeks of Lady Isabel. And if this was the case at the first meeting, what do you suppose it must have been as time went on? Galling slights, petty vexations, chilling annoyances were put upon her, trying her powers of endurance to the very length of their tether; she would wring her hands when alone, and passionately wish that she could find another refuge.

The earl and countess had two children, both boys, and in February the younger one, always a delicate child, died. This somewhat altered their plans. Instead of proceeding to London after Easter, as had been decided upon, they would not go till May. The earl had passed part of the winter at Mount Severn, looking after the repairs and renovations that were being made there. In March he went to Paris, full of grief for the loss of his boy—far greater grief than was experienced by Lady Mount Severn.

April approached and with it Easter. To the unconcealed dismay of Lady Mount Severn, her grandmother, Mrs. Levison, wrote her word that she required change, and should pass Easter with her at Castle Marling. Lady Mount Severn would have given her diamonds to have got out of it, but there was no escape—diamonds that were once Isabel's—at least, that Isabel had worn. On the Monday in Passion Week the old lady arrived, and with her Francis Levison. They had no other guests. Things went on pretty smoothly till Good Friday.

On Good Friday afternoon, Isabel strolled out with little William Vane; Captain Levison joined them, and they never came in till nearly dinner-time, when the three entered together, Lady Mount Severn doing penance all the time, and nursing her rage against Isabel, for Mrs. Levison kept her indoors. There was barely time to dress for dinner, and Isabel went straight to her room. Her dress was off, her dressing-gown on. Marvel was busy with her hair, and William chattering at her knee, when the door was flung open, and my lady entered.

“Where have you been?” demanded she, shaking with passion. Isabel knew the signs.

“Strolling about in the shrubberies and grounds,” answered Isabel.

“How dare you so disgrace yourself!”

“I do not understand you,” said Isabel, her heart beginning to beat unpleasantly. “Marvel, you are pulling my hair.”

When women liable to intemperate fits of passion give the reins to them, they neither know nor care what they say. Lady Mount Severn broke into a torrent of reproach and abuses, most degrading and unjustifiable.

“Is it not sufficient that you are allowed an asylum in my house, but you must also disgrace it! Three hours have you been hiding yourself with Francis Levison! You have done nothing but flirt with him from the moment he came; you did nothing else at Christmas.”

The attack was longer and broader, but that was the substance of it, and Isabel was goaded to resistance, to anger little less great than that of the countess. This!—and before her attendant! She, an earl's daughter, so much better born than Emma Mount Severn, to be thus insultingly accused in the other's mad jealousy. Isabel tossed her hair from the hands of Marvel, rose up and confronted the countess, constraining her voice to calmness.

“I do not flirt!” she said; “I have never flirted. I leave that”—and she could not wholly suppress in tone the scorn she felt—“to married women; though it seems to me that it is a fault less venial in them than in single ones. There is but one inmate of this house who flirts, so far as I have seen since I have lived in it; is it you or I, Lady Mount Severn?”

The home truth told on her ladyship. She turned white with rage, forgot her manners, and, raising her right hand, struck Isabel a stinging blow upon the left cheek. Confused and terrified, Isabel stood in pain, and before she could speak or act, my lady’s left hand was raised to the other cheek, and a blow left on that. Lady Isabel shivered as with a sudden chill, and cried out—a sharp, quick cry—covered her outraged face, and sank down upon the dressing chair. Marvel threw up her hands in dismay, and William Vane could not have burst into a louder roar had he been beaten himself. The boy—he was of a sensitive nature—was frightened.

My good reader, are you one of the inexperienced ones who borrow notions of “fashionable life” from the novels got in a library, taking their high-flown contents for gospel, and religiously believing that lords and ladies live upon stilts, speak, eat, move, breathe, by the rules of good-breeding only? Are you under the delusion—too many are—that the days of dukes and duchesses are spent discussing “pictures, tastes, Shakespeare, and the musical glasses?”—that they are strung on polite wires of silver, and can’t get off the hinges, never giving vent to angry tempers, to words unorthodox, as commonplace mortals do? That will come to pass when the Great Creator shall see fit to send men into the world free from baneful tempers, evil passions, from the sins bequeathed from the fall of Adam.

Lady Mount Severn finished up the scene by boxing William for his noise, jerked him out of the room, and told him he was a monkey.

Isabel Vane lived through the livelong night, weeping tears of anguish and indignation. She would not remain at Castle Marling—who would, after so great an outrage? Yet where was she to go? Fifty times in the course of the night did she wish that she was laid beside her father, for her feelings obtained the mastery of her reason; in her calm moments she would have shrunk from the idea of death as the young and healthy must do.

She rose on the Saturday morning weak and languid, the effects of the night of grief, and Marvel brought her breakfast up. William Vane stole into her room afterward; he was attached to her in a remarkable degree.

“Mamma’s going out,” he exclaimed, in the course of the morning. “Look, Isabel.”

Isabel went to the window. Lady Mount Severn was in the pony carriage, Francis Levison driving.

“We can go down now, Isabel, nobody will be there.”

She assented, and went down with William; but scarcely were they in the drawing-room when a servant entered with a card on a salver.

“A gentleman, my lady, wishes to see you.”

“To see me!” returned Isabel, in surprise, “or Lady Mount Severn?”

“He asked for you, my lady.”

She took up the card. “Mr. Carlyle.” “Oh!” she uttered, in a tone of joyful surprise, “show him in.”

It is curious, nay, appalling, to trace the thread in a human life; how the most trivial occurrences lead to the great events of existence, bringing forth happiness or misery, weal or woe. A client of Mr. Carlyle’s, travelling from one part of England to the other, was arrested by illness at Castle Marling—grave illness, it appeared to be, inducing fears of death. He had not, as the phrase goes, settled his affairs, and Mr. Carlyle was telegraphed for in haste, to make his will, and for other private matters. A very simple occurrence it appeared to Mr. Carlyle, this journey, and yet it was destined to lead to events that would end only with his own life.

Mr. Carlyle entered, unaffected and gentlemanly as ever, with his noble form, his attractive face, and his drooping eyelids. She advanced to meet him, holding out her hand, her countenance betraying her pleasure.

“This is indeed unexpected,” she exclaimed. “How very pleased I am to see you.”

“Business brought me yesterday to Castle Marling. I could not leave it again without calling on you. I hear that Lord Mount Severn is absent.”

“He is in France,” she rejoined. “I said we should be sure to meet again; do you remember, Mr. Carlyle? You—”

Isabel suddenly stopped; for with the word “remember,” she also remembered something—the hundred pound note—and what she was saying faltered on her tongue. Confused, indeed, grew she: for, alas! she had changed and partly spent it. *How* was it possible to ask Lady Mount Severn for money? And the earl was nearly always away. Mr. Carlyle saw her embarrassment, though he may not have detected its cause.

“What a fine boy!” exclaimed he, looking at the child.

“It is Lord Vane,” said Isabel.

“A truthful, earnest spirit, I am sure,” he continued, gazing at his open countenance. “How old are you, my little man?”

“I am six, sir; and my brother was four.”

Isabel bent over the child—an excuse to cover her perplexity. “You do not know this gentleman, William. It is Mr. Carlyle, and he has been very kind to me.”

The little lord had turned his thoughtful eyes on Mr. Carlyle, apparently studying his countenance. “I shall like you, sir, if you are kind to Isabel. Are you kind to her?”

“Very, very kind,” murmured Lady Isabel, leaving William, and turning to Mr. Carlyle, but not looking at him. “I don’t know what to say; I ought to thank you. I did not intend to use the—to use it; but I—I—”

“Hush!” he interrupted, laughing at her confusion. “I do not know what you are talking of. I have a great misfortune to break to you, Lady Isabel.”

She lifted her eyes and her glowing cheeks, somewhat aroused from her own thoughts.

“Two of your fish are dead. The gold ones.”

“Are they?”

“I believe it was the frost killed them; I don’t know what else it could have been. You may remember those bitter days we had in January; they died then.”

“You are very good to take care of them all this while. How is East Lynne looking? Dear East Lynne! Is it occupied?”

“Not yet. I have spent some money upon it, and it repays the outlay.”

The excitement of his arrival had worn off, and she was looking herself again, pale and sad; he could not help observing that she was changed.

“I cannot expect to look so well at Castle Marling as I did at East Lynne,” she answered.

“I trust it is a happy home to you?” said Mr. Carlyle, speaking upon impulse.

She glanced up at him a look that he would never forget; it certainly told of despair. “No,” she said, shaking her head, “it is a miserable home, and I cannot remain in it. I have been awake all night, thinking where I can go, but I cannot tell; I have not a friend in the wide world.”

Never let people talk secrets before children, for be assured that they comprehend a vast deal more than is expedient; the saying “that little pitchers have great ears” is wonderfully true. Lord Vane held up his hand to Mr. Carlyle,—

“Isabel told me this morning that she should go away from us. Shall I tell you why? Mamma beat her yesterday when she was angry.”

“Be quiet, William!” interrupted Lady Isabel, her face in a flame.

“Two great slaps upon her cheeks,” continued the young viscount; “and Isabel cried so, and I screamed, and then mamma hit me. But boys are made to be hit; nurse says so. Marvel came into the nursery when we were at tea, and told nurse about it. She says Isabel’s too good-looking, and that’s why mamma—”

Isabel stopped the child’s tongue, rang a peal on the bell, and marched him to the door, dispatching him to the nursery by the servant who answered it.

Mr. Carlyle’s eyes were full of indignant sympathy. “Can this be true?” he asked, in a low tone when she returned to him. “You do, indeed, want a friend.”

“I must bear my lot,” she replied, obeying the impulse which prompted her to confide in Mr. Carlyle; “at least till Lord Mount Severn returns.”

“And then?”

“I really do not know,” she said, the rebellious tears rising faster than she could choke them down. “He has no other home to offer me; but with Lady Mount Severn I cannot and will not remain. She would break my heart, as she has already well-nigh broken my spirit. I have not deserved it of her, Mr. Carlyle.”

“No, I am sure you have not,” he warmly answered. “I wish I could help you! What can I do?”

“You can do nothing,” she said. “What can any one do?”

“I wish, I wish I could help you!” he repeated. “East Lynne was not, take it for all in all, a pleasant home to you, but it seems you changed for the worse when you left.”

“Not a pleasant home?” she echoed, its reminiscences appearing delightful in that moment, for it must be remembered that all things are estimated by comparison. “Indeed it was; I may never have so pleasant a one again. Mr. Carlyle, do not disparage East Lynne to me! Would I could awake and find the last few months but a hideous dream!—that I could find my dear father alive again!—that we were still living peacefully at East Lynne. It would be a very Eden to me now.”

What was Mr. Carlyle about to say? What emotion was it that agitated his countenance, impeded his breath, and dyed his face blood-red? His better genius was surely not watching over him, or those words had never been spoken.

“There is but one way,” he began, taking her hand and nervously playing with it, probably unconscious that he did so; “only one way in which you could return to East Lynne. And that way—I may not presume, perhaps, to point it out.”

She looked at him and waited for an explanation.

“If my words offend you, Lady Isabel, check them, as their presumption deserves, and pardon me. May I—dare I—offer you to return to East Lynne as its mistress?”

She did not comprehend him in the slightest degree: the drift of his meaning never dawned upon her. “Return to East Lynne as its mistress?” she repeated, in bewilderment.

“And as my wife?”

No possibility of misunderstanding him now, and the shock and surprise were great. She had stood there by Mr. Carlyle’s side conversing confidentially with him, esteeming him greatly, feeling as if he were her truest friend on earth, clinging to him in her heart as to a powerful haven of refuge, loving him almost as she would a brother, suffering her hand to remain in his. *But to be his wife!* the idea had never presented itself to her in any shape until this moment, and her mind’s first emotion was one of entire opposition, her first movement to express it, as she essayed to withdraw herself and her hand away from him.

But not so; Mr. Carlyle did not suffer it. He not only retained that hand, but took the other also, and spoke, now the ice was broken, eloquent words of love. Not unmeaning phrases of rhapsody, about hearts and darts and dying for her, such as somebody else might have given utterance to, but earnest-hearted words of deep tenderness, calculated to win upon the mind’s good sense, as well as upon the ear and heart; and it may be that, had her imagination not been filled up with that “somebody else,” she would have said “Yes,” there and then.

They were suddenly interrupted. Lady Mount Severn entered, and took in the scene at a glance; Mr. Carlyle's bent attitude of devotion, his imprisonment of the hands, and Isabel's perplexed and blushing countenance. She threw up her head and her little inquisitive nose, and stopped short on the carpet; her freezing looks demanded an explanation, as plainly as looks can do it. Mr. Carlyle turned to her, and by way of sparing Isabel, proceeded to introduce himself. Isabel had just presence of mind left to name her: "Lady Mount Severn."

"I am sorry that Lord Mount Severn should be absent, to whom I have the honor of being known," he said. "I am Mr. Carlyle."

"I have heard of you," replied her ladyship, scanning his good looks, and feeling cross that his homage should be given where she saw it was given, "but I had *not* heard that you and Lady Isabel Vane were on the extraordinary terms of intimacy that—that—"

"Madam," he interrupted as he handed a chair to her ladyship and took another himself, "we have never yet been on terms of extraordinary intimacy. I was begging the Lady Isabel to grant that we may be; I was asking her to become my wife."

The avowal was as a shower of incense to the countess, and her ill humor melted into sunshine. It was a solution to her great difficulty, a loophole by which she might get rid of her *bete noire*, the hated Isabel. A flush of gratification lighted her face, and she became full of graciousness to Mr. Carlyle.

"How very grateful Isabel must feel to you," quoth she. "I speak openly, Mr. Carlyle, because I know that you were cognizant of the unprotected state in which she was left by the earl's improvidence, putting marriage for her, at any rate, a high marriage, nearly out of the question. East Lynne is a beautiful place, I have heard."

"For its size; it is not large," replied Mr. Carlyle, as he rose for Isabel had also risen and was coming forward.

"And pray what is Lady Isabel's answer?" quickly asked the countess, turning to her.

Not to her did Isabel condescend to give an answer, but she approached Mr. Carlyle, and spoke in a low tone.

"Will you give me a few hours for consideration?"

"I am only too happy that you should accord it consideration, for it speaks to me of hope," was his reply, as he opened the door for her to pass out. "I will be here again this afternoon."

It was a perplexing debate that Lady Isabel held with herself in the solitude of her chamber, whilst Mr. Carlyle touched upon ways and means to Lady Mount Severn. Isabel was little more than a child, and as a child she reasoned, looking neither far nor deep: the shallow palpable aspect of affairs alone presenting itself to her view. That Mr. Carlyle was not of rank equal to her own, she scarcely remembered; East Lynne seemed a very fair settlement in life, and in point of size, beauty and importance, it was far superior to the house she was now in. She forgot that her position in East Lynne as Mr. Carlyle's wife would not be what it had been as Lord Mount Severn's daughter; she forgot that she would be tied to a quiet house, shut out from the great world, the pomps and vanities to which she was born. She liked Mr. Carlyle much; she experienced pleasure in conversing with him; she liked to be with him; in short, but for that other ill-omened fancy which had crept over her, there would have been danger of her falling in love with Mr. Carlyle. And oh! to be removed forever from the bitter dependence on Lady Mount Severn—East Lynne would in truth, after that, seem what she had called it: Eden.

"So far it looks favorable," mentally exclaimed poor Isabel, "but there is the other side of the question. It is not only that I do not love Mr. Carlyle, but I fear I do love, or very nearly love, Francis Levison. I wish *he* would ask me to be his wife!—or that I had never seen him."

Isabel's soliloquy was interrupted by the entrance of Mrs. Levison and the countess. What the latter had said to the old lady to win her to the cause, was best known to herself, but she was eloquent in it. They both used every possible argument to induce her to accept Mr. Carlyle: the old lady declaring that she had never been introduced to any one she was so much taken with, and Mrs.

Levison was incapable of asserting what was not true; that he was worth a dozen empty-headed men of the great world.

Isabel listened, now swayed one way, now the other, and when afternoon came, her head was aching with perplexity. The stumbling block that she could not get over was Francis Levison. She saw Mr. Carlyle approach from her window, and went down to the drawing-room, not in the least knowing what her answer was to be; a shadowy idea was presenting itself, that she would ask him for longer time, and write her answer.

In the drawing-room was Francis Levison, and her heart beat wildly; which said beating might have convinced her that she ought not to marry another.

“Where have you been hiding yourself?” cried he. “Did you hear of our mishap with the pony carriage?”

“No,” was her answer.

“I was driving Emma into town. The pony took fright, kicked, plunged and went down upon his knees; she took fright in turn, got out, and walked back. So I gave the brute some chastisement and a race, and brought him to the stables, getting home in time to be introduced to Mr. Carlyle. He seems an out-and-out good fellow, Isabel, and I congratulate you.”

“What!” she uttered.

“Don’t start. We are all in the family, and my lady told; I won’t betray it abroad. She says East Lynne is a place to be coveted; I wish you happiness, Isabel.”

“Thank you,” she returned in a sarcastic tone, though her throat beat and her lips quivered. “You are premature in your congratulations, Captain Levison.”

“Am I? Keep my good wishes, then, till the right man comes. I am beyond the pale myself, and dare not think of entering the happy state,” he added, in a pointed tone. “I have indulged dreams of it, like others, but I cannot afford to indulge them seriously; a poor man, with uncertain prospects can only play the butterfly, perhaps to his life’s end.”

He quitted the room as he spoke. It was impossible for Isabel to misunderstand him, but a feeling shot across her mind, for the first time, that he was false and heartless. One of the servants appeared, showing in Mr. Carlyle; nothing false or heartless about *him*. He closed the door, and approached her, but she did not speak, and her lips were white and trembling. Mr. Carlyle waited.

“Well,” he said at length, in a gentle tone, “have you decided to grant my prayer?”

“Yes. But—” She could not go on. What with one agitation and another, she had difficulty in conquering her emotion. “But—I was going to tell you—”

“Presently,” he whispered, leading her to a sofa, “we can both afford to wait now. Oh, Isabel, you have made me very happy!”

“I ought to tell you, I must tell you,” she began again, in the midst of hysterical tears. “Though I have said ‘yes’ to your proposal, I do not—yet—It has come upon me by surprise,” she stammered. “I like you very much; I esteem and respect you; but I do not love you.”

“I should wonder if you did. But you will let me earn your love, Isabel?”

“Oh, yes,” she earnestly answered. “I hope so.”

He drew her closer to him, bent his face, and took from her lips his first kiss. Isabel was passive; she supposed he had gained the right to do so. “My dearest! It is all I ask.”

CHAPTER XIII

A MOONLIGHT WALK

The sensations of Mr. Carlyle, when he returned to West Lynne, were much like those of an Eton boy, who knows he has been in mischief, and dreads detection. Always open as to his own affairs—for he had nothing to conceal—he yet deemed it expedient to dissemble now. He felt that his sister would be bitter at the prospect of his marrying; instinct had taught him that, years past; and he believed that, of all women, the most objectionable to her would be Lady Isabel, for Miss Carlyle looked to the useful, and had neither sympathy nor admiration for the beautiful. He was not sure but she might be capable of endeavoring to frustrate the marriage should news of it reach her ears, and her indomitable will had caused many strange things in her life; therefore, you will not blame Mr. Carlyle for observing entire reticence as to his future plans.

A family of the name of Carew had been about taking East Lynne; they wished to rent it, furnished, for three years. Upon some of the minor arrangements they and Mr. Carlyle were opposed, but the latter declined to give way. During his absence at Castle Marling, news had arrived from them—they had acceded to all his terms, and would enter upon East Lynne as soon as it was convenient. Miss Carlyle was full of congratulations; it was off their hands, she said; but the first letter Mr. Carlyle wrote was—to decline them. He did not tell this to Miss Carlyle. The final touches to the house were given, preparatory to the reception of its inhabitants, and three maids and two men servants hired and sent there, upon board wages, until the family should arrive.

One evening three weeks subsequent to Mr. Carlyle's visit to Castle Marling, Barbara Hare called at Miss Carlyle's, and found them going to tea much earlier than usual.

"We dined earlier," said Miss Corny, "and I ordered tea as soon as the dinner went away. Otherwise, Archibald would have taken none."

"I am as well without tea. And I have a mass of business to get through yet."

"You are not as well without it," cried Miss Corny, "and I don't choose you should go without it. Take off your bonnet, Barbara. He does things like nobody else; he is off to Castle Marling tomorrow, and never could open his lips till just now that he was going."

"Is that invalid—Brewster, or whatever his name is—laid up at Castle Marling, still?" exclaimed Barbara.

"He is still there," said Mr. Carlyle.

Barbara sprang up the moment tea was over.

"Dill is waiting for me in the office, and I have some hours' work before me. However, I suppose you won't care to put up with Peter's attendance, so make haste with your bonnet, Barbara."

She took his arm, and they walked on, Mr. Carlyle striking the hedge and the grass with her parasol. Another minute, and the handle was in two.

"I thought you would do it," said Barbara, while he was regarding the parasol with ludicrous dismay. "Never mind, it is an old one."

"I will bring you another to replace it. What is the color? Brown. I won't forget. Hold the relics a minute, Barbara."

He put the pieces in her hand, and taking out a note case, made a note in pencil.

"What's that for?" she inquired.

He held it close to her eyes, that she might discern what he had written: "Brown parasol. B. H."

"A reminder for me, Barbara, in case I forget."

Barbara's eyes detected another item or two already entered in the note case: "piano," "plate."

"I jot down the things as they occur to me, that I must get in London," he explained. "Otherwise I should forget half."

“In London? I thought you were going in an opposite direction—to Castle Marling?”

It was a slip of the tongue, but Mr. Carlyle repaired it.

“I may probably have to visit London as well as Castle Marling. How bright the moon looks rising there, Barbara!”

“So bright—that or the sky—that I saw your secret,” answered she. “Piano! Plate! What can you want with either, Archibald?”

“They are for East Lynne,” he quietly replied.

“Oh, for the Carews.” And Barbara’s interest in the item was gone.

They turned into the road just below the grove, and reached it. Mr. Carlyle held the gate open for Barbara.

“You will come in and say good-night to mamma. She was saying to-day what a stranger you have made of yourself lately.”

“I have been busy; and I really have not the time to-night. You must remember me to her instead.” And cordially shaking her by the hand, he closed the gate.

It was two or three mornings after the departure of Mr. Carlyle that Mr. Dill appeared before Miss Carlyle, bearing a letter. She was busy regarding the effect of some new muslin curtains, just put up, and did not pay attention to him.

“Will you please take the letter, Miss Cornelia? The postman left it in the office with ours. It is from Mr. Archibald.”

“Why, what has he got to write to me about?” retorted Miss Corny. “Does he say when he is coming home?”

“You had better see, Miss Cornelia. Mine does not.”

“CASTLE MARLING, May 1st.

“MY DEAR CORNELIA—I was married this morning to Lady Isabel Vane, and hasten briefly to acquaint you with the fact. I will write you more fully to-morrow or the next day, and explain all things.

“Your ever affectionate brother,

“ARCHIBALD CARLYLE.”

“It is a hoax,” was the first guttural sound that escaped from Miss Carlyle’s throat when speech came to her.

Mr. Dill only stood like a stone image.

“It is a hoax, I say,” raved Miss Carlyle. “What are you standing there for, like a gander on one leg?” she reiterated, venting her anger upon the unoffending man. “*Is it a hoax or not?*”

“I am overdone with amazement, Miss Corny. It is not a hoax; I have had a letter, too.”

“It can’t be true—it *can’t* be true. He had no more thought of being married when he left here, three days ago, than I have.”

“How can we tell that, Miss Corny? How are we to know he did not go to be married? I fancy he did.”

“Go to be married!” shrieked Miss Corny, in a passion. “He would not be such a fool. And to that fine lady-child! No—no.”

“He has sent this to be put in the county journals,” said Mr. Dill, holding forth a scrap of paper. “They are married, safe enough.”

Miss Carlyle took it and held it before her: her hand was cold as ice, and shook as if with palsy.

“MARRIED.—On the 1st inst., at Castle Marling, by the chaplain to the Earl of Mount Severn, Archibald Carlyle, Esquire, of East Lynne, to the Lady Isabel Mary Vane, only child of William, late Earl of Mount Severn.”

Miss Carlyle tore the paper to atoms and scattered it. Mr. Dill afterward made copies from memory, and sent them to the journal offices. But let that pass.

“I will never forgive him,” she deliberately uttered, “and I will never forgive or tolerate her.”

CHAPTER XIV

THE EARL'S ASTONISHMENT

The announcement of the marriage in the newspapers was the first intimation of it Lord Mount Severn received. He was little less thunderstruck than Miss Corny, and came steaming to England the same day, thereby missing his wife's letter, which gave *her* version of the affair. He met Mr. Carlyle and Lady Isabel in London, where they were staying at one of the west-end hotels—only for a day or two, however, for they were going further. Isabel was alone when the earl was announced.

"What is the meaning of this, Isabel?" began he, without the circumlocution of greeting. "You are married?"

"Yes," she answered, with her pretty, innocent blush. "Some time ago."

"And to Carlyle, the lawyer! How did it come about?"

Isabel began to think how it did come about, sufficiently to give a clear answer. "He asked me," she said, "and I accepted him. He came to Castle Marling at Easter, and asked me then. I was very much surprised."

The earl looked at her attentively. "Why was I kept in ignorance of this, Isabel?"

"I did not know you were kept in ignorance of it. Mr. Carlyle wrote to you, as did Lady Mount Severn."

Lord Mount Severn was a man in the dark, and looked like it. "I suppose this comes," soliloquized he, aloud, "of your father's having allowed the gentleman to dance daily attendance at East Lynne. And so you fell in love with him."

"Indeed, no!" answered she, in an amused tone. "I never thought of such a thing as falling in love with Mr. Carlyle."

"Then don't you love him?" abruptly asked the earl.

"No!" she whispered, timidly; "but I like him much—oh, very much! And he is so good to me!"

The earl stroked his chin and mused. Isabel had destroyed the only reasonable conclusion he had been able to come to as to the motives for the hasty marriage. "If you do not love Mr. Carlyle, how comes it that you are so wise in the distinction between 'liking' and 'love?' It cannot be that you love anybody else?"

The question turned home, and Isabel turned crimson. "I shall love my husband in time," was all she answered, as she bent her head, and played nervously with her watch chain.

"My poor child!" involuntarily exclaimed the earl. But he was one who liked to fathom the depth of everything. "Who has been staying at Castle Marling since I left?" he asked sharply.

"Mrs. Levison came down."

"I alluded to gentlemen—young men."

"Only Francis Levison," she replied.

"Francis Levison! You have never been so foolish as to fall in love with *him*?"

The question was so pointed, so abrupt, and Isabel's self-consciousness, moreover, so great, that she betrayed lamentable confusion, and the earl had no further need to ask. Pity stole into his hard eyes as they fixed themselves on her downcast, glowing face.

"Isabel," he gravely began, "Captain Levison is not a good man; if ever you were inclined to think him one, dispossess your mind of the idea, and hold him at arm's distance. Drop his acquaintance—encourage no intimacy with him."

"I have already dropped it," said Isabel, "and I shall not take it up again. But Lady Mount Severn must think well of him, or she would not have him there."

"She thinks none too well of him; none can of Francis Levison," returned the earl significantly.

Before Isabel could reply, Mr. Carlyle entered. He held out his hand to the earl; the earl did not appear to see it.

“Isabel,” said he, “I am sorry to turn you out, but I suppose you have but this one sitting-room. I wish to say a few words to Mr. Carlyle.”

She quitted them, and the earl wheeled round and faced Mr. Carlyle, speaking in a stern, haughty tone.

“How came this marriage about, sir? Do you possess so little honor, that, taking advantage of my absence, you must intrude yourself into my family, and clandestinely espouse Lady Isabel Vane?”

Mr. Carlyle stood confounded, and confused. He drew himself up to his full height, looking every whit as fearless and far more noble than the peer. “My lord, I do not understand you.”

“Yet I speak plainly. What is it but a clandestine procedure to take advantage of a guardian’s absence and beguile a young girl into a marriage beneath her?”

“There has been nothing clandestine in my conduct toward Lady Isabel Vane; there shall be nothing but honor in my conduct toward Lady Isabel Carlyle. Your lordship has been misinformed.”

“I have not been informed at all,” retorted the earl. “I was allowed to learn this from the public papers—I, the only relative of Lady Isabel.”

“When I proposed for Lady Isabel—”

“But a month ago,” sarcastically interrupted the earl.

“But a month ago,” calmly repeated Mr. Carlyle, “my first action, after Isabel accepted me, was to write to you. But that I imagine you may not have received the letter, by stating you first heard of our marriage through the papers, I should say, the want of courtesy lay on your lordship’s side for having vouchsafed me no reply to it.”

“What were the contents of the letter?”

“I stated what had occurred, mentioning what I was able to do in the way of settlements, and also that both Isabel and myself wished the ceremony to take place as soon as might be.”

“And pray where did you address the letter?”

“Lady Mount Severn could not give me the address. She said if I would intrust the letter to her, she would forward it with the rest she wrote, for she expected daily to hear from you. I did give her the letter, and I heard no more of the matter, except that her ladyship sent me a message when Isabel was writing to me, that as you had returned no reply, you of course approved.”

“Is this the fact?” cried the earl.

“My lord,” coldly replied Mr. Carlyle, “whatever may be my defects in your eyes, I am at least a man of truth. Until this moment, the suspicion that you were in ignorance of the contemplated marriage never occurred to me.”

“So far, then, I beg your pardon, Mr. Carlyle. But how came the marriage about at all—how came it to be hurried over in this unseemly fashion? You made the offer at Easter, Isabel tells me, and you married her three weeks after it.”

“And I would have married her and brought her away with me the day I did make it, had it been practicable,” returned Mr. Carlyle. “I have acted throughout for her comfort and happiness.”

“Oh, indeed!” exclaimed the earl, returning to his disagreeable tone. “Perhaps you will put me in possession of the facts, and of your motives.”

“I warn you that the facts to you will not bear a pleasant sound, Lord Mount Severn.”

“Allow me to be the judge of that,” said the earl.

“Business took me to Castle Marling on Good Friday. On the following day I called at your house; after your own and Isabel’s invitation, it was natural I should; in fact, it would have been a breach of good feeling not to do so, I found Isabel ill-treated and miserable; far from enjoying a happy home in your house—”

“What, sir?” interrupted the earl. “Ill-treated and miserable?”

“Ill-treated even to blows, my lord.”

The earl stood as one petrified, staring at Mr. Carlyle.

“I learnt it, I must premise, through the chattering revelations of your little son; Isabel, of course, would not have mentioned it to me; but when the child had spoken, she did not deny it. In short she was too broken-hearted, too completely bowed in spirit to deny it. It aroused all my feelings of indignation—it excited in me an irresistible desire to emancipate her from this cruel life, and take her where she would find affection, and I hope happiness. There was only one way which I could do this, and I risked it. I asked her to become my wife, and to return to her home at East Lynne.”

The earl was slowly recovering from his petrification. “Then, am I to understand, that when you called that day at my house, you carried no intention with you of proposing to Isabel?”

“Not any. It was an impromptu step, the circumstances under which I found her calling it forth.”

The earl paced the room, perplexed still, and evidently disturbed. “May I inquire if you love her?” he abruptly said.

Mr. Carlyle paused ere he spoke, and a red flush dyed his face. “Those sort of feelings man rarely acknowledges to man, Lord Mount Severn, but I will answer you. I do love her, passionately and sincerely; I learnt to love her at East Lynne; but I could have carried my love silently within me to the end of my life and never betrayed it; and probably should have done so, but for the unexpected visit to Castle Marling. If the idea of making her my wife had never previously occurred to me as practicable, it was that I deemed her rank incompatible with my own.”

“As it was,” said the earl.

“Country solicitors have married peers’ daughters before now,” remarked Mr. Carlyle. “I only add another to the list.”

“But you cannot keep her as a peer’s daughter, I presume?”

“East Lynne will be her home. Our establishment will be small and quiet, as compared with her father’s. I explained to Isabel how quiet at the first, and she might have retracted had she wished. I explained also in full to Lady Mount Severn. East Lynne will descend to our eldest son, should we have children. My profession is most lucrative, my income good; were I to die to-morrow, Isabel would enjoy East Lynne and about three thousand pounds per annum. I gave these details in the letter, which appears to have miscarried.”

The earl made no immediate reply; he was absorbed in thought.

“Your lordship perceives, I hope, that there has been nothing ‘clandestine’ in my conduct to Lady Isabel.”

Lord Mount Severn held out his hand. “I refused my hand when you came in, Mr. Carlyle, as you may have observed, perhaps you will refuse yours now, though I should be proud to shake it. When I find myself in the wrong, I am not above acknowledging the fact; and I must state my opinion that you have behaved most kindly and honorably.”

Mr. Carlyle smiled and put his hand into the earl’s. The latter retained it, while he spoke in a whisper.

“Of course I cannot be ignorant that, in speaking of Isabel’s ill-treatment, you alluded to my wife. Has it transpired beyond yourselves?”

“You may be sure that neither Isabel nor myself would mention it; we shall dismiss it from among our reminiscences. Let it be as though you had never heard it; it is past and done with.”

“Isabel,” said the earl, as he was departing that evening, for he remained to spend the day with them, “I came here this morning almost prepared to strike your husband, and I go away honoring him. Be a good and faithful wife to him, for he deserves it.”

“Of course I shall,” she answered, in surprise.

Lord Mount Severn steamed on to Castle Marling, and there he had a stormy interview with his wife—so stormy that the sounds penetrated to the ears of the domestics. He left again the same day, in anger, and proceeded to Mount Severn.

“He will have time to cool down, before we meet in London,” was the comment of my lady.

CHAPTER XV COMING HOME

Miss Carlyle, having resolved upon her course, quitted her own house, and removed to East Lynne with Peter and her handmaidens. In spite of Mr. Dill's grieved remonstrances, she discharged the servants whom Mr. Carlyle had engaged, all save one man.

On a Friday night, about a month after the wedding, Mr. Carlyle and his wife came home. They were expected, and Miss Carlyle went through the hall to receive them, and stood on the upper steps, between the pillars of the portico. An elegant chariot with four post-horses was drawing up. Miss Carlyle compressed her lips as she scanned it. She was attired in a handsome dark silk dress and a new cap; her anger had had time to cool down in the last month, and her strong common sense told her that the wiser plan would be to make the best of it. Mr. Carlyle came up the steps with Isabel.

"You here, Cornelia! That was kind. How are you? Isabel, this is my sister."

Lady Isabel put forth her hand, and Miss Carlyle condescended to touch the tips of her fingers. "I hope you are well, ma'am," she jerked out.

Mr. Carlyle left them together, and went back to search for some trifles which had been left in the carriage. Miss Carlyle led the way to a sitting-room, where the supper-tray was laid. "You would like to go upstairs and take your things off before upper, ma'am?" she said, in the same jerking tone to Lady Isabel.

"Thank you. I will go to my rooms, but I do not require supper. We have dined."

"Then what would you like to take?" asked Miss Corny.

"Some tea, if you please, I am very thirsty."

"Tea!" ejaculated Miss Corny. "So late as this! I don't know that they have boiling water. You'd never sleep a wink all night, ma'am, if you took tea at eleven o'clock."

"Oh, then, never mind," replied Lady Isabel. "It is of no consequence. Do not let me give trouble."

Miss Carlyle whisked out of the room; upon what errand was best known to herself; and in the hall she and Marvel came to an encounter. No words passed, but each eyed the other grimly. Marvel was very stylish, with five flounces to her dress, a veil, and a parasol. Meanwhile, Lady Isabel sat down and burst into bitter tears and sobs. A chill had come over her; it did not seem like coming to East Lynne. Mr. Carlyle entered and witnessed the grief.

"Isabel!" he uttered in amazement, as he hastened up to her. "My darling, what ails you?"

"I am tired, I think," she gently answered; "and coming into the house again made me think of papa. I should like to go to my rooms, Archibald, but I don't know which they are."

Neither did Mr. Carlyle know, but Miss Carlyle came whisking in again, and said: "The best rooms; those next the library. Should she go up with my lady?"

Mr. Carlyle preferred to go himself, and he held out his arm to Isabel. She drew her veil over her face as she passed Miss Carlyle.

The branches were not lighted, and the room looked cold and comfortless. "Things seem all sixes and sevens in the house," remarked Mr. Carlyle. "I fancy the servants must have misunderstood my letter, and not have expected us until to-morrow night."

On returning to the sitting-room Mr. Carlyle inquired the cause of the servants' negligence.

"I sent them away because they were superfluous encumbrances," hastily replied Miss Carlyle. "We have four in the house, and my lady has brought a fine maid, I see, making five. I have come up here to live."

Mr. Carlyle felt checkmated. He had always bowed to the will of Miss Corny, but he had an idea that he and his wife should be better without her. "And your house?" he exclaimed.

“I have let it furnished; the people enter to-day. So you cannot turn me out of East Lynne into the road, or to furnished lodgings, Archibald. There’ll be enough expense without our keeping on two houses; and most people in your place would jump at the prospect of my living here. Your wife will be mistress. I do not intend to take her honors from her; but I will save her a world of trouble in management—be as useful to her as a housekeeper. She will be glad of that, inexperienced as she is. I dare say she never gave a domestic order in her life.”

This was a view of the case, to Mr. Carlyle, so plausibly put, that he began to think it might be all for the best. He had great reverence for his sister’s judgment; force of habit is strong upon all of us. Still he did not know.

“Did you buy that fine piano which has arrived?” angrily asked Miss Carlyle.

“It was my present to Isabel.”

Miss Corny groaned. “What did it cost?”

“The cost is of no consequence. The old piano here was a bad one, and I bought a better.”

“What did it cost?” repeated Miss Carlyle.

“A hundred and twenty guineas,” he answered. Obedience to her will was yet powerful within him.

Miss Corny threw up her hands and eyes. But at that moment Peter entered with some hot water which his master had rung for. Mr. Carlyle rose and looked on the side-board.

“Where is the wine, Peter?”

The servant put it out, port and sherry. Mr. Carlyle drank a glass, and then proceeded to mix some wine and water. “Shall I mix some for you, Cornelia?” he asked.

“I’ll mix for myself if I want any. Who’s that for?”

“Isabel.”

He quitted the room, carrying the wine and water, and entered his wife’s. She was sitting half buried, it seemed, in the arm-chair, her face muffled up. As she raised it, he saw that it was flushed and agitated; that her eyes were bright, and her frame was trembling.

“What is the matter?” he hastily asked.

“I got nervous after Marvel went,” she whispered, laying hold of him, as if for protection from terror. “I came back to the chair and covered my head over, hoping some one would come up.”

“I have been talking to Cornelia. But what made you nervous?”

“Oh! I was very foolish. I kept thinking of frightful things. They would come into my mind. Do not blame me, Archibald. This is the room papa died in.”

“Blame you, my darling,” he uttered with deep feeling.

“I thought of a dreadful story about the bats, that the servants told—I dare say you never heard it; and I kept thinking. ‘Suppose they were at the windows now, behind the blinds.’ And then I was afraid to look at the bed; I fancied I might see—you are laughing!”

Yes, he was smiling; for he knew that these moments of nervous fear are best met jestingly. He made her drink the wine and water, and then he showed her where the bell was, ringing it as he did so. Its position had been changed in some late alterations to the house.

“Your rooms shall be changed to-morrow, Isabel.”

“No, let us remain in these. I shall like to feel that papa was once their occupant. I won’t get nervous again.”

But, even as she spoke, her actions belied her words. Mr. Carlyle had gone to the door and opened it, and she flew close up to him, cowering behind him.

“Shall you be gone very long, Archibald?” she whispered.

“Not more than an hour,” he answered. But he hastily put back one of his hands, and held her tightly in his protecting grasp. Marvel was coming along the corridor in answer to the ring.

“Have the goodness to let Miss Carlyle know that I am not coming down again to-night,” he said.

“Yes, sir.”

Mr. Carlyle shut the door, and then looked at his wife and laughed. "He is very kind to me," thought Isabel.

With the morning began the perplexities of Lady Isabel Carlyle. But, first of all, just fancy the group at breakfast. Miss Carlyle descended in the startling costume the reader has seen, took her seat at the breakfast-table, and there sat bolt upright. Mr. Carlyle came down next; and then Lady Isabel entered, in an elegant half-mourning dress, with flowing black ribbons.

"Good morning, ma'am. I hope you slept well," was Miss Carlyle's salutation.

"Quite well, thank you," she answered, as she took her seat opposite Miss Carlyle. Miss Carlyle pointed to the top of the table.

"That is your place, ma'am; but I will pour out the coffee, and save you the trouble, if you wish it."

"I should be glad if you would," answered Lady Isabel.

So Miss Carlyle proceeded to her duties, very stern and grim. The meal was nearly over, when Peter came in, and said the butcher had come up for orders. Miss Carlyle looked at Lady Isabel, waiting, of course, for her to give them. Isabel was silent with perplexity; she had never given such an order in her life. Totally ignorant was she of the requirements of a household; and did not know whether to suggest a few pounds of meat or a whole cow. It was the presence of that grim Miss Corny which put her out. Alone with her husband she would have said, "What ought I to order, Archibald? Tell me." Peter waited.

"A—Something to roast and boil, if you please," stammered Lady Isabel.

She spoke in a low tone. Embarrassment makes cowards of us; and Mr. Carlyle repeated it after her. He knew no more about housekeeping than she did.

"Something to roast and boil, tell the man, Peter."

Up started Miss Corny; she could not stand that. "Are you aware, Lady Isabel, that an order such as that would only puzzle the butcher? Shall I give the necessary orders for to-day? The fishmonger will be here presently!"

"Oh, I wish you would!" cried the relieved Lady Isabel. "I have not been accustomed to it, but I must learn. I don't think I know anything about housekeeping."

Miss Corny's answer was to stalk from the room. Isabel rose from her chair, like a bird released from its cage, and stood by his side. "Have you finished, Archibald?"

"I think I have, dear. Oh! Here's my coffee. There; I have finished now."

"Let us go around the grounds."

He rose, laid his hands playfully on her slender waist, and looked at her. "You may as well ask me to take a journey to the moon. It is past nine, and I have not been to the office for a month."

The tears rose in her eyes. "I wish you would be always with me! East Lynne will not be East Lynne without you."

"I will be with you as much as ever I can, my dearest," he whispered. "Come and walk with me through the park."

She ran for her bonnet, gloves and parasol. Mr. Carlyle waited for her in the hall, and they went out together.

He thought it a good opportunity to speak about his sister. "She wishes to remain with us," he said. "I do not know what to decide. On the one hand I think she might save you the worry of household management; on the other, I fancy we shall be happier by ourselves."

Isabel's heart sank within her at the idea of that stern Miss Corny, mounted over her as resident guard; but, refined and sensitive, almost painfully considerate of the feelings of others, she raised no word of objection. "As you and Miss Carlyle please," she answered.

"Isabel," he said, "I wish it to be as you please; I wish matters to be arranged as may best please you: and I will have them so arranged. My chief object in life now is your happiness."

He spoke in all the sincerity of truth, and Isabel knew it: and the thought came across her that with him by her side, her loving protector, Miss Carlyle could not mar her life's peace. "Let her stay, Archibald; she will not incommode us."

"At any rate it can be tried for a month or two, and we shall see how it works," he musingly observed.

They reached the park gates. "I wish I could go with you and be your clerk," she cried, unwilling to release his hand. "I should not have all that long way to go back by myself."

He laughed and shook his head, telling her that she wanted to bribe him into taking her back, but it could not be. And away he went, after saying farewell.

CHAPTER XVI

DOMESTIC TROUBLES

Isabel wandered back, and then wandered through the rooms; they looked lonely; not as they had seemed to look in her father's time. In her dressing-room knelt Marvel, unpacking. She rose when Lady Isabel entered.

"Can I speak to you a moment, if you please my lady?"

"What is it?"

Then Marvel poured forth her tale. That she feared so small an establishment would not suit her, and if my lady pleased, she would like to leave at once—that day. Anticipating it, she had not unpacked her things.

"There has been some mistake about the servants, Marvel, but it will be remedied as soon as possible. And I told you before I married that Mr. Carlyle's establishment would be a limited one."

"My lady perhaps I could put up with that; but I never could stop in the house with—" "that female Guy" had been on the tip of Marvel's tongue, but she remembered in time of whom she was speaking—"with Miss Carlyle. I fear, my lady, we have both got tempers that would slash, and might be flying at each other. I could not stop, my lady, for untold gold. And if you please to make me forfeit my running month's salary, why I must do it. So when I have set your ladyship's things to rights, I hope you'll allow me to go."

Lady Isabel would not condescend to ask her to remain, but she wondered how she should manage the inconvenience. She drew her desk toward her. "What is the amount due to you?" she inquired, as she unlocked it.

"Up to the end of the quarter, my lady?" cried Marvel, in a brisk tone.

"No," coldly answered Lady Isabel. "Up to to-day."

"I have not had time to reckon, my lady."

Lady Isabel took a pencil and paper, made out the account, and laid it down in gold and silver on the table. "It is more than you deserve, Marvel," she remarked, "and more than you would get in most places. You ought to have given me proper notice."

Marvel melted into tears, and began a string of excuses. "She should never have wished to leave so kind a lady, but for attendant ill-conveniences, and she hoped my lady would not object to testify to her character."

Lady Isabel quitted the room in the midst of it; and in the course of the day Marvel took her departure, Joyce telling her that she ought to be ashamed of herself.

"I couldn't help myself," retorted Marvel, "and I am sorry to leave her, for she's a pleasant young lady to serve."

"Well, I know I'd have helped myself," was Joyce's remark. "I would not go off in this unhandsome way from a good mistress."

"Perhaps you wouldn't," loftily returned Marvel, "but my inside feelings are delicate and can't bear to be trampled upon. The same house is not going to hold me and that tall female image, who's more fit to be carried about at a foreign carnival than some that they do carry."

So Marvel left. And when Lady Isabel went to her room to dress for dinner, Joyce entered it.

"I am not much accustomed to a lady's maid's duties," began she, "but Miss Carlyle has sent me, my lady, to do what I can for you, if you will allow me."

Isabel thought it was kind of Miss Carlyle.

"And if you please to trust me with the keys of your things, I will take charge of them for you, my lady, until you are suited with a maid," Joyce resumed.

"I don't know anything about the keys," answered Isabel; "I never keep them."

Joyce did her best, and Lady Isabel went down. It was nearly six o'clock, the dinner hour, and she strolled to the park gates, hoping to meet Mr. Carlyle. Taking a few steps out, she looked down the road, but could not see him coming; so she turned in again, and sat down under a shady tree out of view of the road. It was remarkably warm weather for the closing days of May.

Half an hour, and then Mr. Carlyle came pelting up, passed the gates, and turned on to the grass. There he saw his wife. She had fallen asleep, her head leaning against the trunk of a tree. Her bonnet and parasol lay at her feet, her scarf had dropped, and she looked like a lovely child, her lips partly open, her cheeks flushed, and her beautiful hair falling around. It was an exquisite picture, and his heart beat quicker within him as he felt that it was all his own. A smile stole to his lips as he stood looking at her. She opened her eyes, and for a minute could not remember where she was. Then she started up.

“Oh, Archibald! Have I been asleep?”

“Ay; and might have been stolen and carried off. I could not afford that, Isabel.”

“I don't know how it came about. I was listening for you.”

“What have you been doing all day?” he asked, as he drew her arm within his, and they walked on.

“Oh, I hardly know,” she sighed. “Trying the new piano, and looking at my watch, wishing the time would go quicker, that you might come home. The ponies and carriage have arrived, Archibald.”

“I know they have, my dear. Have you been out of doors much?”

“No, I waited for you.” And then she told him about Marvel. He felt vexed, saying she must replace her with all speed. Isabel said she knew of one, a young woman who had left Lady Mount Severn while she, Isabel, was at Castle Marling; her health was delicate, and Lady Mount Severn's place too hard for her. She might suit.

“Write to her,” said Mr. Carlyle.

The carriage came round—a beautiful little equipage—and Isabel was ready. As Mr. Carlyle drove slowly down the dusty road, they came upon Miss Corny, striding along in the sun with a great umbrella over her head. She would not turn to look at them.

Once more, as in the year gone by, St. Jude's Church was in a flutter of expectation. It expected to see a whole paraphernalia of bridal finery, and again it was doomed to disappointment, for Isabel had not put off the mourning for her father. She was in black—a thin gauze dress—and her white bonnet had small black flowers inside and out. For the first time in his life, Mr. Carlyle took possession of the pew belonging to East Lynne, filling the place where the poor earl used to sit. Not so Miss Corny—she sat in her own.

Barbara was there with the Justice and Mrs. Hare. Her face wore a gray, dusky hue, of which she was only too conscious, but could not subdue. Her covetous eyes would wander to that other face, with its singular loveliness and its sweetly earnest eyes, sheltered under the protection of him for whose sheltering protection she had so long yearned. Poor Barbara did not benefit much by the services that day.

Afterward they went across the churchyard to the west corner, where stood the tomb of Lord Mount Severn. Isabel looked at the inscription, her veil shading her face.

“Not here, and now, my darling,” he whispered, pressing her arm to his side, for he felt her silent sobs. “Strive for calmness.”

“It seems but the other day he was at church with me, and now—here!”

Mr. Carlyle suddenly changed their places, so that they stood with their backs to the hedge, and to any staring stragglers who might be lingering on the road.

“There ought to be railings round the tomb,” she presently said, after a successful battle with her emotion.

“I thought so, and I suggested it to Lord Mount Severn but he appeared to think differently. I will have it done.”

“I put you to great expense,” she said, “taking one thing with another.”

Mr. Carlyle glanced quickly at her, a dim fear penetrating his mind that his sister might have been *talking* in her hearing. “An expense I would not be without for the whole world. You know it, Isabel.”

“And I have nothing to repay you with,” she sighed.

He looked expressively amused, and, gazing into her face, the expression of his eyes made her smile. “Here is John with the carriage,” she exclaimed. “Let us go, Archibald.”

Standing outside the gates, talking to the rector’s family, were several ladies, one of them Barbara Hare. She watched Mr. Carlyle place his wife in the carriage; she watched him drive away. Barbara’s lips were white, as she bowed in return to his greeting.

“The heat is so great!” murmured Barbara, when those around noticed her paleness.

“Ah! You ought to have gone in the phaeton, with Mr. and Mrs. Hare as they desired you.”

“I wished to walk,” returned the unhappy Barbara.

“What a pretty girl that is!” uttered Lady Isabel to her husband. “What is her name?”

“Barbara Hare.”

CHAPTER XVII

VISIT OF THE HARE FAMILY

The county carriages began to pour to East Lynne, to pay the wedding visit, as it is called, to Mr. and Lady Isabel Carlyle. Of course they displayed themselves in their most courtly state. Mr. Carlyle, always a popular man, had gained double his former importance by his marriage with the daughter of the late Earl of Mount Severn. Among the earliest visitors went Justice and Mrs. Hare, with Barbara.

Isabel was in her dressing-gown, attended by Joyce, whom she was just asking to take the place of her late maid, if Miss Carlyle would consent to the transfer.

Joyce's face lighted up with pleasure at the proposal. "Oh, my lady, you are very kind! I should so like it! I would serve you faithfully to the best of my ability."

Isabel laughed. "But Miss Carlyle may not be inclined to transfer you."

"I think she would be, my lady. She said a day or two ago, that I appeared to suit you, and you might have me altogether if you wished, provided I could still make her gowns. I make them to please her, you see, my lady."

"Do you make her caps also?" demurely asked Lady Isabel.

Joyce smiled. "Yes, my lady; but I am allowed to make them only according to her own pattern."

"Joyce, if you become my maid, you must wear smarter caps yourself. I do not wish you to be fine like Marvel."

"Oh, my lady! I shall never be fine," shuddered Joyce. And Joyce believed she had cause to shudder at finery.

She was about to speak further, when a knock came to the dressing-room door. Joyce went to open it, and saw one of the housemaids, a girl who had recently been engaged, a native of West Lynne. Isabel heard the colloquy,—

"Is my lady there?"

"Yes."

"Some visitors. Pete ordered me to come and tell you. I say, Joyce, it's the Hares. And *she's* with them. I watched her get out of the carriage."

"Who?" sharply returned Joyce.

"Why, Miss Barbara. Only fancy her coming to pay the wedding visit *here*. My lady had better take care that she don't get a bowl of poison mixed for her. Master's out or else I'd have given a shilling to see the interview between the three."

Joyce sent the girl away, shut the door, and turned to her mistress, quite unconscious that the half-whispered conversation had been audible.

"Some visitors are in the drawing-room, my lady, Susan says. Mr. Justice Hare and Mrs. Hare and Miss Barbara."

Isabel descended, her mind full of the mysterious words spoken by Susan. The justice was in a new flaxen wig, obstinate-looking and pompous; Mrs. Hare, pale, delicate, and lady-like; Barbara beautiful; such was the impression they made upon Isabel.

They paid rather a long visit, Isabel quite falling in love with the gentle and suffering Mrs. Hare, and had risen to leave when Miss Carlyle entered. She wished them to remain longer—had something, she said, to show Barbara. The justice declined; he had a brother justice coming to dine with him at five, and it was then half-past four. Barbara might stop if she liked.

Barbara's face turned crimson; but nevertheless she accepted the invitation, immediately proffered her by Miss Carlyle to remain at East Lynne for the rest of the day.

Dinner time approached, and Isabel went to dress for it. Joyce was waiting, and entered upon the subject of the service.

“My lady, I have spoken to Miss Carlyle, and she is willing that I should be transferred to you, but she says I ought first to acquaint you with certain unpleasant facts in my history, and the same thought had occurred to me. Miss Carlyle is not over pleasant in manner, my lady, but she is very upright and just.”

“What facts?” asked Lady Isabel, sitting down to have her hair brushed.

“My lady, I’ll tell you as shortly as it can. My father was a clerk in Mr. Carlyle’s office—of course I mean the late Mr. Carlyle. My mother died when I was eight years old, and my father afterwards married again, a sister of Mr. Kane’s wife—”

“Mr. Kane, the music master?”

“Yes, my lady. She and Mrs. Kane were quite ladies; had been governesses. People said she lowered herself greatly in marrying my father. However, they did marry, and at the end of the year my little sister Afy was born. We lived in a pretty cottage in the wood and were happy. But in twelve months more my step-mother died, and an aunt of hers adopted Afy. I lived with my father, going to school, then to learn dressmaking, and finally going out to work to ladies’ houses. After many years, Afy came home. Her aunt had died and her income with her, but not the vanity and love of finery that Afy had acquired. She did nothing but dress herself and read novels. My father was angry; he said no good could come of it. She had several admirers, Mr. Richard Hare, Miss Barbara’s own brother,” continued Joyce, lowering her voice, “and she flirted with them all. My father used to go out to shoot on fine evenings after office, or to his duties as secretary to the library, and so Afy was generally all alone until I came home at nine o’clock; and was free to flirt with her beaux.”

“Had she any she favored particularly, was it thought?” asked Lady Isabel.

“The chief one, my lady, was Richard Hare. She got acquainted with somebody else, a stranger, who used to ride over from a distance to see her; but I fancy there was nothing in it—Richard was the one. And it went on till—till—he killed her father.”

“Who?” uttered the startled Isabel.

“Richard Hare, my lady. Father had told Afy that Mr. Richard should not come there any longer, for when gentlemen go in secret after poor girls, it’s well known they have not got marriage in their thoughts; father would have interfered more than he did, but that he judged well of Mr. Richard, and did not think he was one to do Afy real harm,—but he did not know how flighty she was. However, one day he heard people talk about it in West Lynne, coupling her name and Mr. Richard’s offensively together, and at night he told Afy, before me, that it should not go on any longer, and she must not encourage him. My lady, the next night Richard Hare shot my father.”

“How very dreadful!”

“Whether it was done on purpose, or that they had a scuffle, and the gun went off accidentally and killed my father, no one can tell. Afy said she had been in the woods at the back of the house, and when she came in, father lay dead, and Mr. Locksley was standing over him. He said he had heard the shot, and come up just in time to see Richard fly from the house, his shoes covered with blood. He has never been heard of since; but there is a judgment of murder out against him; and the fear and shame is killing his mother by inches.”

“And Afy?”

“The worst is to come my lady. Afy followed him directly after the inquest, and nothing has been known since of either of them. I was taken ill, after all these shocks, with nervous fever, and Miss Carlyle took care of me, and I have remained with her ever since. This was what I had to tell you, my lady, before you decided to take me into service; it is not every lady who would like to engage one whose sister has turned out so badly.”

Lady Isabel did not see that it could make any difference, or that it ought to. She said so; and then leaned back in her chair and mused.

“What dress, my lady?”

“Joyce, what was that I heard you and Susan gossiping over at the door?” Lady Isabel suddenly asked. “About Miss Hare giving me a bowl of poison. Something in the dramatic line that would be. You should tell Susan not to make her whispers so loud.”

“It was only a bit of nonsense, my lady. These ignorant servants will talk; and every one at West Lynne knew Miss Barbara was in love with Mr. Carlyle. But I don’t fancy she would have been the one to make him happy with all her love.”

A hot flush passed over the brow of Lady Isabel; a sensation very like jealousy flew to her heart. No woman likes to hear of another’s being, or having been attached to her husband: a doubt always arises whether the feeling may not have been reciprocated.

Lady Isabel descended. She wore a costly black lace dress, its low body and sleeves trimmed with as costly white; and ornaments of jet. She looked inexpressibly beautiful, and Barbara turned from her with a feeling of sinking jealousy, from her beauty, from her attire, even from the fine, soft handkerchief, which displayed the badge of her rank—the coronet of an earl’s daughter. Barbara looked well, too; she was in a light blue silk robe, and her pretty cheeks were damask with her mind’s excitement. On her neck she wore the gold chain given her by Mr. Carlyle—strange that she had not discarded that.

They stood together at the window, looking at Mr. Carlyle as he came up the avenue. He saw them, and nodded. Lady Isabel watched the damask cheeks turn to crimson at sight of him.

“How do you do, Barbara?” he cried, as he shook hands. “Come to pay us a visit at last? You have been rather tardy over it. And how are you, my darling?” he whispered over his wife; but she missed his kiss of greeting. Well, would she have had him give it her in public? No; but she was in the mood to notice the omission.

Dinner over, Miss Carlyle beguiled Barbara out of doors. Barbara would far rather have remained in *his* presence. Of course they discussed Lady Isabel.

“How do you like her?” abruptly asked Barbara, alluding to Lady Isabel.

“Better than I thought I should,” acknowledged Miss Carlyle. “I had expected airs and graces and pretence, and I must say she is free from them. She seems quite wrapped up in Archibald and watches for his coming home like a cat watches for a mouse. She is dull without him.”

Barbara compelled her manner to indifference. “I suppose it is natural.”

“I suppose it is absurd,” was the retort of Miss Carlyle. “I give them little of my company, especially in an evening. They go strolling out together, or she sings to him, he hanging over her as if she were of gold: to judge by appearances, she is more precious to him than any gold that was ever coined into money. I’ll tell you what I saw last night. Archibald had what he is not often subject to, a severe headache, and he went into the next room after dinner, and lay on the sofa. She carried a cup of tea to him, and never came back, leaving her own on the table till it was perfectly cold. I pushed open the door to tell her so. There was my lady’s cambric handkerchief, soaked in eau-de-Cologne, lying on his forehead; and there was my lady herself, kneeling down and looking at him, he with his arm thrown around her there. Now I just ask you, Barbara, whether there’s any sense in fadding with a man like that? If ever he did have a headache before he was married, I used to mix him up a good dose of salts and senna, and tell him to go to bed early and sleep the pain off.”

Barbara made no reply, but she turned her face from Miss Carlyle.

On Barbara’s return to the house, she found that Mr. Carlyle and Lady Isabel were in the adjoining room, at the piano, and Barbara had an opportunity of hearing that sweet voice. She did, as Miss Carlyle confessed to have done, pushed open the door between the two rooms, and looked in. It was the twilight hour, almost too dusk to see; but she could distinguish Isabel seated at the piano, and Mr. Carlyle standing behind her. She was singing one of the ballads from the opera of the “Bohemian Girl,” “When other Lips.”

“Why do you like that song so much, Archibald?” she asked when she had finished it.

“I don’t know. I never liked it so much until I heard it from you.”

“I wonder if they are come in. Shall we go into the next room?”

“Just this one first—this translation from the German—’ ‘Twere vain to tell thee all I feel.’ There’s real music in that song.”

“Yes, there is. Do you know, Archibald, your taste is just like papa’s. He liked all these quiet, imaginative songs, and so do you. And so do I,” she laughingly added, “if I must speak the truth.”

She ceased and began the song, singing it exquisitely, in a low, sweet, earnest tone, the chords of the accompaniment, at its conclusion, dying off gradually into silence.

“There, Archibald, I am sure I have sung you ten songs at least,” she said, leaning her head back against him, and looking at him from her upturned face. “You ought to pay me.”

He did pay her: holding the dear face to him, and taking from it some impassioned kisses. Barbara turned to the window, a low moan of pain escaping her, as she pressed her forehead on one of its panes, and looked forth at the dusky night. Isabel came in on her husband’s arm.

“Are you here alone, Miss Hare? I really beg your pardon. I supposed you were with Miss Carlyle.”

“Where is Cornelia, Barbara?”

“I have just come in,” was Barbara’s reply. “I dare say she is following me.”

So she was, for she entered a moment after, her voice raised in anger at the gardener, who had disobeyed her orders, and obeyed the wishes of Lady Isabel.

The evening wore on to ten, and as the time-piece struck the hour, Barbara rose from her chair in amazement.

“I did not think it was so late. Surely some one must have come for me.”

“I will inquire,” was Lady Isabel’s answer, and Mr. Carlyle touched the bell. No one had come for Miss Hare.

“Then I fear I must trouble Peter,” cried Barbara. “Mamma may be gone to rest, tired, and papa must have forgotten me. It would never do for me to get locked out,” she gaily added.

“As you were one night before,” said Mr. Carlyle, significantly.

He alluded to the night when Barbara was in the grove of trees with her unfortunate brother, and Mr. Hare was on the point, unconsciously, of locking her out. She had given Mr. Carlyle the history, but its recollection now called up a smart pain, and a change passed over her face.

“Oh! Don’t, Archibald,” she uttered, in the impulse of the moment; “don’t recall it.”

Isabel wondered.

“Can Peter take me?” continued Barbara.

“I had better take you,” said Mr. Carlyle. “It is late.”

Barbara’s heart beat at the words; beat as she put her things on—as she said good-night to Lady Isabel and Miss Carlyle; it beat to throbbing as she went out with him, and took his arm. All just as it used to be—only now that he was the husband of another. Only!

It was a warm, lovely June night, not moonlight, but bright with its summer twilight. They went down the park into the road, which they crossed, and soon came to a stile. From that stile there led a path through the fields which would pass the back of Justice Hare’s. Barbara stopped at it.

“Would you choose the field way to-night, Barbara? The grass will be damp, and this is the longest way.”

“But we shall escape the dust of the road.”

“Oh, very well, if you prefer it. It will not make three minutes’ difference.”

“He is very anxious to get home to *her!*” mentally exclaimed Barbara. “I shall fly out upon him, presently, or my heart will burst.”

Mr. Carlyle crossed the stile, helped over Barbara, and then gave her his arm again. He had taken her parasol, as he had taken it the last night they had walked together—an elegant little parasol, this, of blue silk and white lace, and he did not switch the hedges with it. That night was present to Barbara now, with all its words and its delusive hopes; terribly present to her was their bitter ending.

There are women of warm, impulsive temperaments who can scarcely help, in certain moments of highly wrought excitement, over-stepping the bounds of nature and decorum, and giving the reins to temper, tongue, and imagination—making a scene, in short. Barbara had been working herself into this state during the whole evening. The affection of Isabel for her husband, her voice, his caresses—seen through the half open doors—had maddened her. She felt it impossible to restrain her excitement.

Mr. Carlyle walked on, utterly unconscious that a storm was brewing. More than that, he was unconscious of having given cause for one, and dashed into an indifferent, common place topic in the most provoking manner.

“When does the justice begin haymaking, Barbara?”

There was no reply. Barbara was swelling and panting, and trying to keep her emotion down. Mr. Carlyle tried again,—

“Barbara, I asked you which day your papa cut his hay.”

Still no reply. Barbara was literally incapable of making one. The steam of excitement was on, nearly to its highest pitch. Her throat was working, the muscles of her mouth began to twitch, and a convulsive sob, or what sounded like it, broke from her. Mr. Carlyle turned his head hastily.

“Barbara! are you ill? What is it?”

On it came, passion, temper, wrongs, and nervousness, all boiling over together. She shrieked, she sobbed, she was in strong hysterics. Mr. Carlyle half-carried, half-dragged her to the second stile, and placed her against it, his arm supporting her; and an old cow and two calves, wondering what the disturbance could mean at that sober time of night, walked up and stared at them.

Barbara struggled with her emotion—struggled manfully—and the sobs and shrieks subsided; not the excitement or the passion. She put away his arm, and stood with her back to the stile, leaning against it. Mr. Carlyle felt inclined to fly to the pond for water, but he had nothing but his hat to get it in.

“Are you better, Barbara? What can have caused it?”

“What can have caused it?” she burst forth, giving full swing to the reins, and forgetting everything. “*You* can ask me that?”

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.