

**HENRY WOOD**

THE SHADOW

OF

ASHLYDYAT

Henry Wood

**The Shadow of Ashlydyat**

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# **Mrs. Henry Wood**

## **The Shadow of Ashlydyat**

### **PART THE FIRST**

*“Over him rushed, like a wind that is keen and cold and  
relentless,  
Thoughts of what might have been, and the weight and  
woe of his errand,  
All the dreams that had faded, and all the hopes that  
had vanished,  
All his life henceforth a dreary and tenantless mansion,  
Haunted by vain regrets, and pallid, sorrowful faces.”*

*Longfellow.*

## CHAPTER I. THE MEET OF THE HOUNDS

It was a bright day in autumn: the scene one of those fair ones rarely witnessed except in England. The sun, warm and glowing, almost as that of a summer's day, shone on the stubble of the cornfields, whence the golden grain had recently been gathered; gilded the tops of the trees—so soon to pass into the “sere and yellow leaf;” illumined the blue hills in the distance, and brought out the nearer features of the landscape in all their light and shade. A fine landscape, comprising hill and dale, water and green pastures, woods and open plains. Amidst them rose the signs of busy life; mansions, cottages, hamlets, railways, and churches, whose steeples ascended high, pointing the way to a better Land.

The town of Prior's Ash, lying in a valley, was alive that gay morning with excitement. It was the day appointed for the first meet of the hounds; the P. A. hounds, of some importance in the county; and people from far and near were flocking to see them throw off. Old and young, gentle and simple, lords of the soil and tradesmen, all were wending their way to the meet. The master, Colonel Max, was wont on this, the first morning of the season, to assemble at his house for breakfast as many as his large dining-room could by any species of crowding contain; and it was a fine sight, drawing forth its numerous spectators to watch them come out in procession, to the meet. As many carriages-and-four, with their fair occupants, would come to that first meet, as you could have seen in the old days on a country race-course. This show was an old-fashioned local custom; Colonel Max was pleased to keep it up, and he lacked not supporters. The opening this year was unusually early.

The gay crowd was arriving, some from the breakfast, some from their homes. The rendezvous was a wide, open common, with no space wanting. The restrained hounds snarled away at a short distance, and their attendants, attired for the hunt, clacked their whips among them.

Riding a noble horse, and advancing from the opposite direction to that of Colonel Max and his guests, came a tall, stately man, getting in years now. His features were regular as though they had been chiselled from marble: his fine blue eyes could sparkle yet; and his snow-white hair, wavy as of yore, was worn rather long behind, giving him somewhat the appearance of a patriarch. But the healthy bloom, once characteristic of his face, had left it now: the paleness of ill-health sat there, and he bent his body, as if too weak to bear up on his horse. His approach was discerned; and many started forward, as with one impulse, to greet him. None stood higher in the estimation of his fellow-men than did Sir George Godolphin; no other name was more respected in the county.

“This is good indeed, Sir George! To see you out again!”

“I thought I might venture,” said Sir George, essaying to meet a dozen hands at once. “It has been a long confinement; a tedious illness. Six months, and never out of the house; and, for the last fortnight, out only in a garden-chair. My lady wanted to box me up in the carriage this morning; if I must come, she said. But I would not have it: had I been unable to sit my horse, I would have remained at home.”

“You feel weak still?” remarked one, after most of the greeters had had their say, and were moving away.

“Ay. Strength, for me, has finally departed, I fear.”

“You must not think that, Sir George. Now that you have so far recovered as to go out, you will improve daily.”

“And get well all one way, Godolphin,” joined in the hearty voice of Colonel Max. “Never lose heart, man.”

Sir George turned his eyes upon Colonel Max with a cheerful glance. “Who told you I was losing heart?”



“Yourself. When a man begins to talk of his strength having finally departed, what’s that, but a proof of his losing heart? Low spirits never cured any one yet: but they have killed thousands.”

“I shall be sixty-six years old to-morrow, colonel: and if, at that age, I can ‘lose heart’ at the prospect of the great change, my life has served me to little purpose. The young may faint at the near approach of death; the old should not.”

“Sixty-six, old!” ejaculated Colonel Max. “I have never kept count of my own age, but I know I am that if I am a day; and I am young yet. I may live these thirty years to come: and shall try for it, too.”

“I hope you will, colonel,” was the warm answer of Sir George Godolphin. “Prior’s Ash could ill spare you.”

“I don’t know about that,” laughed the colonel. “But I do know that I could ill spare life. I wish you could take the run with us this morning!”

“I wish I could. But that you might accuse me of—what was it?—losing heart, I would say that my last run with the hounds has been taken. It has cost me an effort to come so far as this, walking my horse at a snail’s pace. Do you see Lady Godolphin? She ought to be here.”

Colonel Max, who was a short man, raised himself in his stirrups, and gazed from point to point of the gradually increasing crowd. “In her carriage, I suppose?”

“In her carriage, of course,” answered Sir George. “She is no amazon.” But he did not avow his reason for inquiring after his wife’s carriage—that he felt a giddiness stealing over him, and thought he might be glad of its support. Neither did he explain that he was unable to look round for it himself just then, under fear of falling from his horse.

“I don’t think she has come yet,” said Colonel Max. “I do not see the livery. As to the ladies, they all look so like one another now, with their furbelows and feathers, that I’ll be shot if I should know my own wife—if I had one—at a dozen paces’ distance. Here is some one else, however.”

Riding up quietly, and reining in at the side of Sir George, was a gentleman of middle height, with dark hair, dark grey eyes, and a quiet, pale countenance. In age he may have wanted some three or four years of forty, and a casual observer might have pronounced him “insignificant,” and never have cast on him a second glance. But there was a certain attraction in his face which won its way to hearts; and his voice sounded wonderfully sweet and kind as he grasped the hand of Sir George.

“My dear father! I am so glad to see you here!”

“And surprised too, I conclude, Thomas,” returned Sir George, smiling on his son. “Come closer to me, will you, and let me rest my arm upon your shoulder for a minute. I feel somewhat giddy.”

“Should you have ventured out on horseback?” inquired Thomas Godolphin, as he hastened to place himself in proximity with his father.

“The air will do me good; and the exertion also. It is nothing to feel a little weak after a confinement such as mine has been. You don’t follow the hounds to-day, I see, Thomas,” continued Sir George, noting his son’s plain costume.

A smile crossed Thomas Godolphin’s lips. “No, sir. I rarely do follow them. I leave amusement to George.”

“Is he here, that graceless George?” demanded the knight, searching into the crowd with fond and admiring eyes. But the admiring eyes did not see the object they thought to rest on.

“He is sure to be here, sir. I have not seen him.”

“And your sisters? Are they here?”

“No. They did not care to come.”

“Speak for Janet and Cecil, if you please, Thomas,” interrupted a young lady’s voice at this juncture. The knight looked down; his son looked down also: there stood the second daughter of the family, Bessy Godolphin. She was a dark, quick, active little woman of thirty, with an ever-ready tongue, and deep grey eyes.

“Bessy!” uttered Sir George, in astonishment. “Have you come here on foot?”

“Yes, papa. Thomas asked us whether we wished to attend the meet; and Janet—who must always be master and mistress, you know—answered that we did not. Cecil dutifully agreed with her. I did care to attend it; so I came alone.”

“But, Bessy, why did you not say so?” remonstrated Mr. Godolphin. “You should have ordered the carriage; you should not have come on foot. What will people think?”

“Think!” she echoed, holding up her pleasant face to her brother, in its saucy independence. “They can think anything they please; I am Bessy Godolphin. I wonder how many scores have come on foot?”

“None, Bessy, of your degree, who have carriages to sit in or horses to ride,” said Sir George.

“Papa, I like to use my legs better than to have them cramped under a habit or in a carriage; and you know I never could bend to form and fashion,” she said, laughing. “Dear papa, I am delighted to see you! I was so thankful when I heard you were here! Janet will be ready to eat her own head now, for not coming.”

“Who told you I was here, Bessy?”

“Old Jekyl. He was leaning on his palings as I came by, and called out the information to me almost before I could hear him. ‘The master’s gone to it, Miss Bessy! he is out once again! But he had not on his scarlet,’ the old fellow added; and his face lost its gladness. Papa, the whole world is delighted that you should have recovered, and be once more amongst them.”

“Not quite recovered yet, Bessy. Getting better, though; getting better. Thank you, Thomas; the faintness has passed.”

“Is not Lady Godolphin here, papa?”

“She must be here by this time. I wish I could see her carriage: you must get into it.”

“I did not come for that, papa,” returned Bessy, with a touch of her warm temper.

“My dear, I *wish* you to join her. I do not like to see you here on foot.”

“I shall set the fashion, papa,” laughed Bessy, again. “At the great meet next year, you will see half the pretenders of the county toiling here on foot. I say I am Bessy Godolphin.”

The knight ranged his eyes over the motley group, but he could not discern his wife. Sturdy, bluff old fox-hunters were there in plenty, and well-got-up young gentlemen, all on horseback, their white cords and scarlet coats gleaming in the sun. Ladies were chiefly in carriages; a few were mounted, who would ride quietly home again when the hounds had thrown off; a very few—they might be counted by units—would follow the field. Prior’s Ash and its neighbourhood was supplied in a very limited degree with what they were pleased to call masculine women: for the term “fast” had not then come in. Many a pretty woman, many a pretty girl was present, and the sportsmen lingered, and were well pleased to linger, in the sunshine of their charms, ere the business, for which they had come out, began, and they should throw themselves, heart and energy, into it.

On the outskirts of the crowd, sitting her horse well, was a handsome girl of right regal features and flashing black eyes. Above the ordinary height of woman, she was finely formed, her waist slender, her shoulders beautifully modelled. She wore a peculiar dress, and, from that cause alone, many eyes were on her. A well-fitting habit of bright grass-green, the corsage ornamented with buttons of silver-gilt; similar buttons were also at the wrists, but they were partially hidden by her white gauntlets. A cap, of the same bright green, rested on the upper part of her forehead, a green-and-gold feather on its left side glittering as the sun’s rays played upon it. It was a style of dress which had not yet been seen at Prior’s Ash, and was regarded with some doubt. But, as you are aware, it is not a dress in itself which is condemned or approved: it depends upon who wears it: and as the young lady wearing this was just now the fashion at Prior’s Ash, feather and habit were taken into favour forthwith. She could have worn none more adapted to her peculiar style of beauty.

Bending to his very saddle-bow, as he talked to her—for, though she was tall, he was taller still—was a gentleman of courtly mien. In his fine upright figure, his fair complexion and wavy hair, his chiselled features and dark blue eyes, might be traced a strong resemblance to Sir George Godolphin.



But the lips had a more ready smile upon them than Sir George's had ever worn, for his had always been somewhat of the sternest; the blue eyes twinkled with a gayer light when gazing into other eyes, than could ever have been charged upon Sir George. But the bright complexion had been Sir George's once; giving to his face, as it now did to his son's, a delicate beauty, almost as that of woman. "Graceless George," old Sir George was fond of calling him; but it was an appellation given in love, in pride, in admiration. He bent to his saddle-bow, and his gay blue eyes flashed with unmistakable admiration into those black ones as he talked to the lady: and the black eyes most certainly flashed admiration back again. Dangerous eyes were those of Charlotte Pain's! And not altogether lovable.

"Do you always keep your promises as you kept that one yesterday?" she was asking him.

"I did not make a promise yesterday—that I remember. Had I made one to you, I should have kept it."

"Fickle and faithless," she cried. "Men's promises are as words traced upon the sand. When you met me yesterday in the carriage with Mrs. Verrall, and she asked you to take compassion on two forlorn dames, and come to Ashlydyat in the evening and dissipate our ennui, what was your answer?"

"That I would do so, if it were possible."

"Was nothing more explicit implied?"

George Godolphin laughed. Perhaps his conscience told him that he *had* implied more, in a certain pressure he remembered giving to that fair hand, which was resting now, gauntleted, upon her reins. Gay George had meant to dissipate Ashlydyat's ennui, if nothing more tempting offered. But something more tempting did offer: and he had spent the evening in the company of one who was more to him than was Charlotte Pain.

"An unavoidable engagement arose, Miss Pain. Otherwise you may rely upon it I should have been at Ashlydyat."

"Unavoidable!" she replied, her eyes gleaming with something very like anger into those which smiled on her. "I know what your engagement was. You were at Lady Godolphin's Folly."

"Right. Commanded to it by my father."

"Oh!"

"Solicited, if not absolutely commanded," he continued. "And a wish from Sir George now bears its weight: we may not have him very long with us."

A smile of mockery, pretty and fascinating to look upon, played upon her rich red lips. "It is edifying to hear these filial sentiments expressed by Mr. George Godolphin! Take you care, sir, to act up to them."

"Do you think I need the injunction? How shall I make my peace with you?"

"By coming to Ashlydyat some other evening while the present moon lasts. I mean, while it illumines the early part of the evening."

She dropped her voice to a low key, and her tone had changed to seriousness. George Godolphin looked at her in surprise.

"What is the superstition," she continued to whisper, "that attaches to Ashlydyat?"

"Why do you ask me this?" he hastily said.

"Because, yesterday evening, when I was sitting on that seat under the ash-trees, watching the road from Lady Godolphin's Folly—well, watching for you, if you like it better: but I can assure you there is nothing in the avowal that need excite your vanity, as I see it is doing. When a gentleman makes a promise, I expect him to keep it; and, looking upon your coming as a matter of course, I did watch for you; as I might watch for one of Mrs. Verrall's servants, had I sent him on an errand and expected his return."

"Thank you," said George Godolphin, with a laugh. "But suffer my vanity to rest in abeyance for a while, will you, and go on with what you were saying?"

"Are you a convert to the superstition?" she inquired, disregarding the request.

“N—o,” replied George Godolphin. But his voice sounded strangely indecisive. “Pray continue, Charlotte.”

It was the first time he had ever called her by her Christian name: and though she saw that it was done in the unconscious excitement of the moment, her cheeks flushed to a deeper crimson.

“Did you ever see the Shadow?” she breathed.

He bowed his head.

“What form does it take?”

George Godolphin did not answer. He appeared lost in thought, as he scored his horse’s neck with his hunting-whip.

“The form of a bier, on which rests something covered with a pall, that may be supposed to be a coffin; with a mourner at the head and one at the foot?” she whispered.

He bowed his head again: very gravely.

“Then I saw it last night. I did indeed. I was sitting under the ash-trees, and I saw a strange shadow in the moonlight that I had never seen before—”

“Where?” he interrupted.

“In that wild-looking part of the grounds as you look across from the ash-trees. Just in front of the archway, where the ground is bare. It was there. Mr. Verrall says he wonders Sir George does not have those gorse-bushes cleared away, and the ground converted into civilized land, like the rest of it.”

“It has been done, but the bushes grow again.”

“Well, I was sitting there, and I saw this unusual shadow. It arrested my eye at once. Where did it come from, I wondered: what cast it? I never thought of the Ashlydyat superstition; never for a moment. I only thought what a strange appearance the shadow wore. I thought of a lying-in-state; I thought of a state funeral, where the coffin rests on a bier, and a mourner sits at the head and a mourner at the foot. Shall I tell you,” she suddenly broke off, “what the scene altogether looked like?”

“Do so.”

“Like a graveyard. They may well call it the Dark Plain! The shadow might be taken for a huge tomb with two images weeping over it, and the bushes around assumed the form of lesser ones. Some, square; some, long; some, high; some, low; but all looking not unlike graves in the moonlight.”

“Moonlight shadows are apt to bear fanciful forms to a vivid imagination, Miss Pain,” he lightly observed.

“Have not others indulged the same fancy before me? I remember to have heard so.”

“As they have said. They never took the form to my sight,” he returned, with a half-smile of ridicule. “When I know bushes to be bushes, I cannot by any stretch of imagination magnify them into graves. You must have had this Ashlydyat nonsense in your head.”

“I have assured you that I had not,” she rejoined in a firm tone. “It was only after I had been regarding it for some time—and the longer I looked, the plainer the shadow seemed to grow—that I thought of the Ashlydyat tale. All in an instant the truth flashed upon me—that it must be the apparition—”

“The *what*, Miss Pain?”

“Does the word offend you? It *is* a foolish one. The Shadow, then. I remembered that the Shadow, so dreaded by the Godolphins, did take the form of a bier, with mourners weeping at its—”

“Was said to take it,” he interposed, in a tone of quiet reproof; “that would be the better phrase. And, in speaking of the Shadow being dreaded by the Godolphins, you allude, I presume, to the Godolphins of the past ages. I know of none in the present who dread it: except my superstitious sister, Janet.”

“How touchy you are upon the point!” she cried, with a light laugh. “Do you know, George Godolphin, that that very touchiness betrays the fact that you, for one, are not exempt from the dread. And,” she added, changing her tone again to one of serious sympathy, “did not the dread help to kill Mrs. Godolphin?”

“No,” he gravely answered. “If you give ear to all the stories that the old wives of the neighbourhood love to indulge in, you will collect a valuable stock of fable-lore.”

“Let it pass. If I repeated the fable, it was because I had heard it. But now you will understand why I felt vexed last night when you did not come. It was not for your sweet company I was pining, as your vanity has been assuming, but that I wanted you to see the Shadow.—How that girl is fixing her eyes upon us!”

George Godolphin turned at the last sentence, which was uttered abruptly. An open barouche had drawn up, and its occupants, two ladies, were both looking towards them. The one was a young girl with a pale gentle face and dark eyes, as remarkable for their refined sweetness, as Miss Pain’s were for their brilliancy. The other was a little lady of middle age, dressed youthfully, and whose naturally fair complexion was so excessively soft and clear, as to give a suspicion that nature had less hand in it than art. It was Lady Godolphin. She held her eye-glass to her eye, and turned it on the crowd.

“Maria, whatever is that on horseback?” she asked. “It looks green.”

“It is Charlotte Pain in a bright-green riding-habit,” was the young lady’s answer.

“A bright-green riding-habit! And her head seems to glitter! Has she anything in her cap?”

“It appears to be a gold feather.”

“She must look beautiful! Very handsome, does she not?”

“For those who admire her style—very,” replied Maria Hastings.

Which was certainly not the style of Maria Hastings. Quiet, retiring, gentle, she could only wonder at those who dressed in bright-coloured habits with gold buttons and feathers, and followed the hounds over gates and ditches. Miss Hastings wore a pretty white silk bonnet, and grey cashmere mantle. Nothing could be plainer; but then, she was a clergyman’s daughter.

“It is on these occasions that I regret my deficient sight,” said Lady Godolphin. “Who is that, in scarlet, talking to her? It resembles the figure of George Godolphin.”

“It is he,” said Maria. “He is coming towards us.”

He was piloting his horse through the throng, returning greetings from every one. A universal favourite was George Godolphin. Charlotte Pain’s fine eyes were following him with somewhat dimmed brilliancy: he was not so entirely hers as she could wish to see him.

“How are you this morning, Lady Godolphin?” But it was on the hand of Maria Hastings that his own lingered; and her cheeks took the hue of Charlotte Pain’s, as he bent low to whisper words that were all too dear.

“George, do you know that your father is here?” said Lady Godolphin.

George, in his surprise, drew himself upright on his horse. “My father here! Is he, indeed?”

“Yes; and on horseback. Very unwise of him; but he would not be persuaded out of it. It was a sudden resolution that he appeared to take. I suppose the beauty of the morning tempted him. Miss Maria Hastings, what nonsense has George been saying to you? Your face is as red as his coat.”

“That is what I was saying to her,” laughed George Godolphin. “Asking her where her cheeks had borrowed their roses from.”

A parting of the crowd brought Sir George Godolphin within view, and the family drew together in a group. Up went Lady Godolphin’s glass again.

“Is that Bessy? My dear, with whom did you come?”

“I came by myself, Lady Godolphin. I walked.”

“Oh dear!” uttered Lady Godolphin. “You do do the wildest things, Bessy! And Sir George allows you to do them!”

“Sir George does not,” spoke the knight. “Sir George has already desired her to take her place in the carriage. Open the door, James.”

Bessy laughed as she stepped into it. She cheerfully obeyed her father; but anything like ceremony, or, as the world may call it, etiquette, she waged war with.

“I expected to meet your sisters here, Bessy,” said Lady Godolphin. “I want you all to dine with me to-day. We must celebrate the first reappearance of your father. You will bear the invitation to them.”

“Certainly,” said Bessy. “We shall be happy to come. I know Janet has no engagement.”

“An early dinner, mind: five o’clock. Sir George cannot wait.”

“To dine at supper-time,” chimed in unfashionable Bessy. “George, do you hear? Lady Godolphin’s at five.”

A movement; a rush; a whirl. The hounds were preparing to throw off, and the field was gathering. George Godolphin hastily left the side of Miss Hastings, though he found time for a stolen whisper.

“Fare you well, my dearest.”

And when she next saw him, after the noise and confusion had cleared away, he was galloping in the wake of the baying pack, side by side with Charlotte Pain.

## CHAPTER II. LADY GODOLPHIN'S FOLLY

Prior's Ash was not a large town, though of some importance in county estimation. In the days of the monks, when all good people were Roman Catholics, or professed to be, it had been but a handful of houses, which various necessities had caused to spring up round the priory: a flourishing and crowded establishment of religious men then; a place marked but by a few ruins now. In process of time the handful of houses had increased to several handfuls, the handfuls to a village, and the village to a borough town; still retaining the name bestowed on it by the monks—"Prior's Ash."

In the heart of the town was situated the banking-house of Godolphin, Crosse, and Godolphin. It was an old-established and most respected firm, sound and wealthy. The third partner and second Godolphin, mentioned in it, was Thomas Godolphin, Sir George Godolphin's eldest son. Until he joined it, it had been Godolphin and Crosse. It was a matter of arrangement, understood by Mr. Crosse, that when anything happened to Sir George, Thomas would step into his father's place, as head of the firm, and George, whose name at present did not appear, though he had been long in the bank, would represent the last name; so that it would still remain Godolphin, Crosse, and Godolphin. Mr. Crosse, who, like Sir George, was getting in years, was remarkable for nothing but a close attention to business. He was a widower, without children, and Prior's Ash wondered who would be the better for the filling of his garner.

The Godolphins could trace back to the ages of the monks. But of no very high ancestry boasted they; no titles, places, or honours; they ranked among the landed gentry as owners of Ashlydyat, and that was all. It was quite enough for them: to be lords of Ashlydyat was an honour they would not have bartered for a dukedom. They held by Ashlydyat. It was their pride, their stronghold, their boast. Had feudal times been in fashion now, they would have dug a moat around it, and fenced it in with fortifications, and called it their castle. Why did they so love it? It was but a poor place at best; nothing to look at; and, in the matter of space inside, was somewhat straitened. Oak-panelled rooms, dark as mahogany and garnished with cross beams, low ceilings, and mullioned windows, are not the most consonant to modern taste. People thought that the Godolphins loved it from its associations and traditions; from the very fact that certain superstitions attached to it. Foolish superstitions, you will be inclined to call them, as contrasted with the enlightenment of these matter-of-fact days—I had almost said these days of materialism.

Ashlydyat was not entailed. There was a clause in the old deeds of tenure which prevented it. A wicked Godolphin (by which complimentary appellation his descendants distinguished him) had cut off the entail, and gambled the estate away; and though the Godolphins recovered it again in the course of one or two lives, the entail was not renewed. It was now bequeathed from father to son, and was always the residence of the reigning Godolphin. Thomas Godolphin knew that it would become his on the death of his father, as surely as if he were the heir by entail. The late Mr. Godolphin, Sir George's father, had lived and died in it. Sir George succeeded, and then *he* lived in it—with his wife and children. But he was not Sir George then: therefore, for a few minutes, while speaking of this part of his life; we will call him what he was—Mr. Godolphin. A pensive, thoughtful woman was Mrs. Godolphin, never too strong in health. She was Scotch by birth. Of her children, Thomas and Janet most resembled her; Bessy was like no one but herself: George and Cecilia inherited the beauty of their father. There was considerable difference in the ages of the children, for they had numbered thirteen. Thomas was the eldest, Cecilia the youngest; Janet, Bessy, and George were between them; and the rest, who had also been between them, had died, most of them in infancy. But, a moment yet, to give a word to the description of Ashlydyat, before speaking of the death of Mrs. Godolphin.

Passing out of Prior's Ash towards the west, a turning to the left of the high-road took you to Ashlydyat. Built of greystone, and lying somewhat in a hollow, it wore altogether a gloomy

appearance. And it was intensely ugly. A low building of two storeys, irregularly built, with gables and nooks and ins-and-outs of corners, and a square turret in the middle, which was good for nothing but the birds to build on. It wore a time-honoured look, though, with all its ugliness, and the moss grew, green and picturesque, on its walls. Perhaps on the principle, or, let us say, by the subtle instinct of nature, that a mother loves a deformed child with a deeper affection than she feels for her other children, who are fair and sound of limb, did the Godolphins feel pride in their inheritance because it was ugly. But the grounds around it were beautiful, and the landscape, so much of it as could be seen from that unelevated spot, was most grand to look upon. A full view might be obtained from the turret, though it was somewhat of a mount to get to it. Dark groves, and bright undulating lawns, shady spots where the water rippled, pleasant to bask in on a summer's day, sunny parterres of gay flowers scenting the air; charming, indeed, were the environs of Ashlydyat. All, except one spot: and that had charms also for some minds—sombre ones.

In one part of the grounds there grew a great quantity of ash-trees—and it was supposed, though not known, that these trees may originally have suggested the name, Ashlydyat: as they most certainly had that of Prior's Ash, given to the village by the monks. A few people wrote it in accordance with its pronunciation, Ash-*lid*-yat, but the old way of spelling it was retained by the family. As the village had swollen into a town, the ash-trees, growing there, were cleared away as necessity required; but the town was surrounded with them still.

Opposite to the ash-trees on the estate of Ashlydyat there extended a waste plain, totally out of keeping with the high cultivation around. It looked like a piece of rude common. Bushes of furze, broom, and other stunted shrubs grew upon it, none of them rising above the height of a two-year-old child. The description given by Charlotte Pain to George Godolphin was not an inapt one—that the place, with these stunted bushes on it, looked in the moonlight not unlike a graveyard. At the extremity, opposite to the ash-trees, there arose a high archway, a bridge built of greystone. It appeared to have formed part of an ancient fortification, but there was no trace of water having run beneath it. Beyond the archway was a low round building, looking like an isolated windmill without sails. It was built of greystone also, and was called the belfry: though there was as little sign of bells ever having been in it, as there was of water beneath the bridge. The archway had been kept from decay; the belfry had not, but was open in places to the heavens.

Strange to say, the appellation of this waste piece of land, with its wild bushes, was the “Dark Plain.” Why? The plain was not dark: it was not shaded: it stood out, broad and open, in the full glare of sunlight. That certain dark tales had been handed down with the appellation, is true: and these may have given rise to the name. Immediately before the archway, for some considerable space, the ground was entirely bare. Not a blade of grass, not a shrub grew on it. Or, as the story went, *would* grow. It was on this spot that the appearance, the Shadow, as mentioned by Charlotte Pain, would be sometimes seen. Whence the Shadow came, whether it was ghostly or earthly, whether those learned in science and philosophy could account for it by Nature's laws, whether it was cast by any gaseous vapour arising in the moonbeams, I am unable to say. If you ask me to explain it, I cannot. If you ask, why then do I write about it, I can only answer, because I have seen it. I have seen it with my own unprejudiced eyes; I have sat and watched it, in its strange stillness; I have looked about and around it, low down, high up, for some substance, ever so infinitesimal, that might cast its shade and enable me to account for it: and I have looked in vain. Had the moon been behind the archway, instead of behind *me*, that might have furnished a loophole of explanation: a very poor and inefficient loophole; a curious one also: for how can an archway in the substance be a bier and two mourners in its shadow? but, still, better than none.

No; there was nothing whatever, so far as human eyes—and I can tell you that keen ones and sceptical ones have looked at it—to cast the shade, or to account for it. There, as you sat and watched, stretched out the plain in the moonlight, with its low, tomb-like bushes, its clear space of bare land, the archway rising behind it. But, on the spot of bare land, before the archway, would rise the Shadow;

not looking as if it were a shadow cast on the ground, but a palpable fact: as if a bier, with its two bending mourners, actually stood there in the substance. I say that I cannot explain it, or attempt to explain it; but I do say that there it was to be seen. Not often: sometimes not for years together. It was called the Shadow of Ashlydyat: and superstition told that its appearance foreshadowed the approach of calamity, whether of death or other evil, to the Godolphins. The greater the evil that was coming upon them, the plainer and more distinct would be the appearance of the Shadow—the longer the space of time that it would be observed. Rumour went, that once, on the approach of some terrible misfortune, it had been seen for months and months before, whenever the moon was sufficiently bright. The Godolphins did not care to have the subject mentioned to them: in their scepticism, they (some of them, at least) treated it with ridicule, or else with silence. But, like disbelievers of a different sort, the scepticism was more in profession than in heart. The Godolphins, in their inmost soul, would cower at the appearance of that shadowed bier; as those others have been known to cower, in their anguish, at the approach of the shadow of death.

This was not all the superstition attaching to Ashlydyat: but you will probably deem this quite enough for the present. And we have to return to Mrs. Godolphin.

Five years before the present time, when pretty Cecilia was in her fifteenth year, and most needed the guidance of a mother, Mrs. Godolphin died. Her illness had been of a lingering nature; little hope in it, from the first. It was towards the latter period of her illness that what had been regarded by four-fifths of Prior's Ash as an absurd child's tale, a superstition unworthy the notice of the present-day men and women, grew to be talked of in whispers, as something "strange." For three months antecedent to the death of Mrs. Godolphin, the Shadow of Ashlydyat was to be seen every light night, and all Prior's Ash flocked up to look at it. That they went, is of no consequence: they had their walk and their gaze for their pains: but that Mrs. Godolphin should have been told of it, was. She was in the grounds alone one balmy moonlight night, later than she ought to have been, and she discerned people walking in them, making for the ash-trees.

"What can those people be doing here?" she exclaimed to one of her servants, who was returning to Ashlydyat from executing an errand in the town.

"It is to see the Shadow, ma'am," whispered the girl, in answer, with more direct truth than prudence.

Mrs. Godolphin paused. "The *Shadow*!" she uttered. "Is the Shadow to be seen?"

"It has been there ever since last moon, ma'am. It never was so plain, they say."

Mrs. Godolphin waited her opportunity, and, when the intruders had dispersed, proceeded to the ash-trees. It is as well to observe that these ash-trees, and also the Dark Plain, though very near to the house, were not in the more private portion of the grounds.

Mrs. Godolphin proceeded to the ash-trees. An hour afterwards, her absence from the house was discovered, and they went out to search. It was her husband who found her. She pointed to the shadow, and spoke.

"You will believe that my death is coming on quickly now, George." But Mr. Godolphin turned it off with an attempt at joke, and told her she was old enough to know better.

Mrs. Godolphin died. Two years after, Mr. Godolphin came into contact with a wealthy young widow; young, as compared with himself: Mrs. Campbell. He met her in Scotland, at the residence of his first wife's friends. She was English born, but her husband had been Scotch. Mr. Godolphin married her, and brought her to Ashlydyat. The step did not give pleasure to his children. When sons and daughters are of the age that the Godolphins were, a new wife, brought home to rule, rarely does give pleasure to the first family. Things did not go on very comfortably: there were faults on each side; on that of Mrs. Godolphin, and on that of her step-daughters. After a while, a change was made. Thomas Godolphin and his sisters went to reside in the house attached to the bank, a handsome modern residence hitherto occupied by Mr. Crosse. "You had better come here," that gentleman had said to them: he was no stranger to the unpleasantness at Ashlydyat. "I will take up my abode in the



country,” he continued. “I would prefer to do so. I am getting to feel older than I did twenty years ago, and country air may renovate me.”

The arrangement was carried out. Thomas Godolphin and his three sisters entered upon their residence in Prior’s Ash, Janet acting as mistress of the house, and as chaperon to her sisters. She was then past thirty: a sad, thoughtful woman, who lived much in the inward life.

Just about the time of this change, certain doings of local and public importance were enacted in the neighbourhood, in which Mr. Godolphin took a prominent share. There ensued a proposal to knight him. He started from it with aversion. His family started also: they and he alike despised these mushroom honours. Not so Mrs. Godolphin. From the moment that the first word of the suggestion was breathed to her, she determined that it should be carried out; for the appellation, my lady, was as incense in her ears. In vain Mr. Godolphin strove to argue with her: her influence was in the ascendant, and he lay under the spell. At length he yielded; and, though hot war raged in his heart, he bent his haughty knee at the court of St. James’s, and rose, up Sir George.

“After a storm comes a calm.” A proverb pleasant to remember in some of the sharp storms of life. Mrs. Godolphin had carried her point in being too many for her step-daughters; she had triumphed over opposition and become my lady; and now she settled down in calmness at Ashlydyat. But she grew dissatisfied. She was a woman who had no resources within herself, who lived only in excitement, and Ashlydyat’s quietness overwhelmed her with ennui. She did not join in the love of the Godolphins for Ashlydyat. Mr. Godolphin, ere he had brought her home to it, a bride, had spoken so warmly of the place, in his attachment to it, that she had believed she was about to step into some modern paradise: instead of which, she found, as she expressed it, a “cranky old house, full of nothing but passages.” The dislike she formed for it in that early moment never was overcome.

She would beguile her husband to her own pretty place in Berwickshire; and, just at first, he was willing to be beguiled. But after he became Sir George (not that the title had anything to do with it) public local business grew upon him, and he found it inconvenient to quit Ashlydyat. He explained this to Lady Godolphin: and said their sojourn in Scotland must be confined to an autumn visit. So she perforce dragged out her days at Ashlydyat, idle and listless.

We warn our children that idleness is the root of all evil; that it will infallibly lead into mischief those who indulge in it. It so led Lady Godolphin. One day, as she was looking from her drawing-room windows, wishing all sorts of things. That she lived in her pleasant home in Berwickshire; that she could live amidst the gaieties of London; that Ashlydyat was not such a horrid old place; that it was more modern and less ugly; that its reception-rooms were lofty, and garnished with gilding and glitter, instead of being low, gloomy, and grim; and that it was situated on an eminence, instead of on a flat, so that a better view of the lovely scenery around might be obtained. On that gentle rise, opposite, for instance—what would be more enchanting than to enjoy a constant view from thence? If Ashlydyat could be transported there, as they carry out wooden houses to set up abroad; or, if only that one room, she then stood in, could, with its windows—

Lady Godolphin’s thoughts arrested themselves here. An idea had flashed upon her. Why should she not build a pretty summer-house on that hill; a pavilion? The Countess of Cavemore, in this very county, had done such a thing: had built a pavilion on a hill within view of the windows of Cavemore House, and had called it “Lady Cavemore’s Folly.” Only the week before, she, Lady Godolphin, in driving past it, had thought what a pretty place it looked; what a charming prospect must be obtained from it. Why should she not do the same?

The idea grew into shape and form. It would not leave her again. She had plenty of money of her own, and she would work out her “Folly” to the very top of its bent.

To the top of its bent, indeed! None can tell what a thing will grow into when it is first begun. Lady Godolphin made known her project to Sir George, who, though he saw no particular need for the work, did not object to it. If Lady Godolphin chose to spend money in that way, she might do so. So it was put in hand. Architects, builders, decorators were called together; and the Folly was

planned out and begun. Lady Godolphin had done with ennui now; she found employment for her days, in watching the progress of the pavilion.

It is said that the consummation of our schemes generally brings with it a share of disappointment. It did so in this instance to Lady Godolphin. The Folly turned out to be a really pretty place; the views from its windows magnificent; and Lady Godolphin was as enchanted as a child with a new toy. The disappointment arose from the fact that she could not make the Folly her home. After spending a morning in it, or an evening, she must leave it to return to that grey Ashlydyat—the only eyesore to be seen, when gazing from the Folly’s windows. If a day turned out wet, she could not walk to the Folly; if she was expecting visitors she must stay at home to receive them; if Sir George felt ill—and his health was then beginning to suffer—she could not leave him for her darling Folly. It was darling because it was new: in six months’ time, Lady Godolphin would have grown tired of it; have rarely entered it: but in her present mood, it was all-in-all to her.

Slowly she formed the resolution to enlarge the Folly—slowly for her, for she deliberated upon it for two whole days. She would add “a reception-room or two,” “a bedroom or two,” “a kitchen,” so that she might be enabled, when she chose to do so, to take up her abode in it for a week. And these additions were begun.

But they did not end; did not end as she had intended. As the Folly grew, so grew the ideas of Lady Godolphin: there must be a suite of reception-rooms, there must be several bedrooms, there must be domestic offices in proportion. Sir George told her that she would spend a fortune upon it; my lady answered that, at any rate, she should have something to show for the outlay.

At length it was completed: and Lady Godolphin’s Folly—for it retained its appellation—stood out to the view of Prior’s Ash, which it overlooked; to the view of Ashlydyat; to the view of the country generally, as a fair, moderate-sized, attractive residence, built in the villa style, its white walls dazzling the eye when the sun shone upon them.

“We will reside there, and let Ashlydyat,” said Lady Godolphin to her husband.

“Reside at the Folly! Leave Ashlydyat!” he repeated, in consternation. “It could not be.”

“It will be,” she added, with a half self-willed, half-caressing laugh. “Why could it not be?”

Sir George fell into a reverie. He admired the modern conveniences of the Folly, greatly admired the lovely scenery, that, look from which room of it he would, charmed his eye. But for one thing, he had been content to do as she wished, and go to live there. That one thing—what was it? Hear the low-breathed, reluctant words he is beginning to say to Lady Godolphin.

“There is an old tradition in our family—a superstition I suppose you will call it—that if the Godolphins leave Ashlydyat, their ruin is at hand.”

Lady Godolphin stared at him in amazement. Nothing had surprised her on her arrival at Ashlydyat, like the stories of marvel which she had been obliged to hear. Sir George had cast ridicule on them, if alluded to in his presence; therefore, when the above words dropped from him, she could only wonder. You might search a town through and not find one less prone to superstition than was Lady Godolphin: in all that belonged to it, she was a very heathen. Sir George hastened to explain away his words.

“The tradition is nothing, and I regard it as nothing. That such a one has been handed down is certain, and it may have given rise to the reluctance, which the early Godolphins entertained, to quit Ashlydyat. But that is not our reason: in remaining in it, we only obey a father’s behest. You are aware that Ashlydyat is not entailed. It is bequeathed by will from father to son; and to the bequest in each will, so far as I have cognizance of the past wills, there has always been appended a clause—a request—I should best say an injunction—never to quit Ashlydyat. ‘When once you shall have come into possession of Ashlydyat, guard it as your stronghold: resign it neither to your heir nor to a stranger: remain in it until death shall take you.’ It was inserted in my father’s will, by which Ashlydyat became mine: it is inserted in mine, which devises the estate to Thomas.”

"If ever I heard so absurd a story!" uttered Lady Godolphin in her pretty childish manner. "Do I understand you to say that, if you left Ashlydyat to take up your abode elsewhere, it would be no longer yours?"

"Not that, not that," returned Sir George. "Ashlydyat is mine until my death, and no power can take it from me. But a reluctance to leave Ashlydyat has always clung to the Godolphins: in fact, we have looked upon it as a step impossible to be taken."

"What a state of thralldom to live in!"

"Pardon me. We love Ashlydyat. To remain in it is pleasant; to leave it would be pain. I speak of the Godolphins in general; of those who have preceded me."

"I understand now," said Lady Godolphin resentfully. "You hold a superstition that if you were to leave Ashlydyat for the Folly, some dreadful doom would overtake you. Sir George, I thought we lived in the nineteenth century."

A passing flush rose to the face of Sir George Godolphin. To be suspected of leaning to these superstitions chafed his mind unbearably; he had almost rather be accused of dishonour: not to his own heart would he admit that they might have weight with him. "Ashlydyat is our homestead," he said, "and when a man has a homestead, he likes to live and die in it."

"You cannot think Ashlydyat so desirable a residence as the Folly. We *must* remove to the Folly, Sir George; I have set my heart upon it. Let Thomas and his sisters come back to Ashlydyat."

"They would not come."

"Not come! They were inwardly rebellious enough at having to leave it."

"I am sure that Thomas would not take up his residence here, as the master of Ashlydyat, during my lifetime. Another thing: we should not be justified in keeping up two expensive establishments outside the town, leaving the house at the bank to lie idle. People might lose confidence in us, if they saw us launching forth into extravagance."

"Oh, indeed! What did they think of the expense launched upon the Folly?" mockingly smiled my lady.

"They know it is your money which has built that: not mine."

"If Thomas and the rest came to Ashlydyat you might let the house attached to the bank."

"It would take a great deal more money to keep up Ashlydyat than it does the house at the bank. The public might lose confidence in us, I say. Besides, no one but a partner could be allowed to live at the bank."

"You seem to find an answer to all my propositions," said Lady Godolphin, in her softest and sweetest, and least true tone; "but I warn you, Sir George, that I shall win you over to my way of thinking before the paper shall be dry on the Folly's walls. If Thomas cannot, or will not, live at Ashlydyat, you must let it."

In every tittle did Lady Godolphin carry out her words. Almost before the Folly's embellishments were matured to receive them, Sir George was won over to live at it: and Ashlydyat was advertised to be let. Thomas Godolphin would not have become its master in his father's lifetime had Sir George filled its rooms with gold as a bribe. His mother had contrived to imbue him with some of the Ashlydyat superstition—to which *she* had lived a slave—and Thomas, though he did not bow down to it, would not brave it. If ruin was to come—as some religiously believed—when a reigning Godolphin voluntarily abandoned Ashlydyat, Thomas, at least, would not help it on by taking part in the step. So Ashlydyat, to the intense astonishment of Prior's Ash, was put up in the market for hire.

It was taken by a Mr. Verrall; a gentleman from London. Prior's Ash knew nothing of him, except that he was fond of field sports, and appeared to be a man of money: but, the fact of his establishing himself at Ashlydyat, stamped him, in their estimation, as one worthy to be courted. His wife was a pretty, fascinating woman; her sister, Miss Pain, was beautiful; their entertainments were good, their style was dashing, and they became the fashion in the neighbourhood.

But, from the very first day that the step was mooted of Sir George Godolphin's taking up his residence at the Folly, until that of his removal thither, the Shadow had hovered over the Dark Plain at Ashlydyat.

## CHAPTER III. THE DARK PLAIN IN THE MOONLIGHT

The beams of the setting sun streamed into the dining-room at Lady Godolphin's Folly. A room of fine proportions; not dull and heavy, as it is much the custom for dining-rooms to be, but light and graceful as could be wished.

Sir George Godolphin, with his fine old beauty, sat at one end of the table; Lady Godolphin, good-looking also in her peculiar style, was opposite to him. She wore a white dress, its make remarkably young, and her hair fell in ringlets, young also. On her right hand sat Thomas Godolphin, courteous and calm, as he ever was; on her left hand was Bessy, whom you have already seen. On the right of Sir George sat Maria Hastings, singularly attractive in her quiet loveliness, in her white spotted muslin dress with its white ribbons. On his left sat his eldest daughter, Janet. Quiet in manner, plain in features, as was Thomas, her eyes were yet wonderful to behold. Not altogether for their beauty, but for the power they appeared to contain of seeing all things. Large, reflective, strangely-deep eyes, grey, with a circlet of darker grey round them. When they were cast upon you, it was not at you they looked, but at what was within you—at your mind, your thoughts; at least, such was the impression they conveyed. She and Bessy were dressed alike, in grey watered silk. Cecil sat between Janet and Thomas, a charming girl, with blue ribbons in her hair. George sat between his sister Bessy and Maria Hastings. Thomas was attired much as he had been in the morning: George had exchanged his hunting clothes for dinner dress.

Lady Godolphin was speaking of her visit to Scotland. Sir George's illness had caused it to be put off, or they would have gone in August: it was proposed to proceed thither now. "I have written finally to say that we shall be there on Tuesday," she observed.

"Will papa be able to make the journey in one day?" asked Bessy.

"He says he is quite strong enough to do so now," replied Lady Godolphin. "But I could not think of his running any risk, so we shall stay a night upon the road. Janet, will you believe that I had a battle with Mr. Hastings to-day?"

Janet turned her strange eyes on Lady Godolphin. "Had you, madam?"

"I consider Mr. Hastings the most unreasonable, changeable man I ever met with," complained Lady Godolphin. "But clergymen are apt to be so. So obstinate, if they take up a thing! When Maria was invited to accompany us in August, Mr. Hastings made not a single demur neither he nor Mrs. Hastings: they bought her—oh, all sorts of new things for the visit. New dresses and bonnets; and—a new cloak, was it not, Maria?"

Maria smiled. "Yes, Lady Godolphin."

"People who have never been in Scotland acquire the notion that in temperature it may be matched with the North Pole, so a warm cloak was provided for Maria for an August visit! I called at the Rectory to-day with Maria, after the hounds had thrown off, to tell them that we should depart next week, and Mr. Hastings wanted to withdraw his consent to her going. "Too late in the season," he urged, or some such plea. I told him she should not be frozen; we should be back before the cold weather set in."

Maria lifted her sweet face, an earnest look upon it. "It was not the cold papa thought of, Lady Godolphin: he knows I am too hardy to fear that. But, as winter approaches, there is so much more to do, both at home and abroad. Mamma has to be out a great deal: and this will be a heavy winter with the poor, after all the sickness."

"The sickness has passed," exclaimed Lady Godolphin, in a tone so sharp, so eager, as to give rise to a suspicion that she might fear, or had feared, the sickness for herself.

"Nearly so," assented Miss Godolphin. "There have been no fresh cases since—"

“Janet, if you talk of ‘fresh cases’ at my table, I shall retire from it,” interrupted Lady Godolphin in agitation. “Is fever a pleasant or fitting topic of conversation, pray?”

Janet Godolphin bowed her head. “I did not forget your fears, madam. I supposed, however, that, now that the sickness is subsiding, your objection to hearing it spoken of might have subsided also.”

“And how did the controversy with Mr. Hastings end?” interposed Bessy, to turn the topic. “Is Maria to go?”

“Of course she is to go,” said Lady Godolphin, with a quiet little laugh of power, as she recovered her good-humour. “When I wish a thing, I generally carry my point. I would not stir from his room until he gave his consent, and he had his sermon on the table, and was no doubt wishing me at the antipodes. He thought Maria had already paid me a visit long enough for Sir George to have grown tired of her, he said. I told him that it was not his business: and that whether Sir George or any one else was tired of her, I should take her to Scotland. So he yielded.”

Maria Hastings glanced timidly at Sir George. He saw the look. “Not tired of you yet, are we, Miss Hastings?” he said, with, Maria fancied, more gallantry than warmth. But fancy, with Maria, sometimes went a great way.

“It would have been a disappointment to Maria,” pursued Lady Godolphin. “Would it not, my dear?”

“Yes,” she answered, her face flushing.

“And so very dull for Charlotte Pain. I expressly told her when I invited her that Maria Hastings would be of the party.”

“Charlotte Pain!” echoed Bessy Godolphin, in her quick way; “is she going with you? What in the world is that for?”

“I invited her, I say,” said Lady Godolphin, with a hard look on her bloom-tinted face: a look that it always wore when her wishes were questioned, her actions reflected on. None brooked interference less than Lady Godolphin.

Sir George bent his head slightly towards his wife. “My dear, I considered that Charlotte Pain invited herself. She fished pretty strongly for the invitation, and you fell into the snare.”

“Snare! It is an honour and a pleasure that she should come with us. What do you mean, Sir George?”

“An honour, if you like to call it so; I am sure it will be a pleasure,” replied Sir George. “A most attractive young woman is Charlotte Pain: though she did angle for the invitation. George, take care how you play your cards.”

“What cards, sir?”

“Look at that graceless George! at his conscious vanity!” exclaimed Sir George to the table generally. “He knows who it is that makes the attraction here to Charlotte Pain. Wear her if you can win her, my boy.”

“Would Charlotte Pain be one worthy to be won by George Godolphin?” quietly spoke Janet.

“Rumour says she has thirty thousand charms,” nodded Sir George.

“I never would marry for money, if I were George,” cried Cecil indignantly. “And, papa, I do not see so much beauty in Charlotte Pain. I do not like her style.”

“Cecil, did you ever know one pretty girl like the ‘style’ of another?” asked George.

“Nonsense! But you can’t call Charlotte Pain much of a girl, George. She is as old as you, I know. She’s six and twenty, if she’s a day.”

“Possibly,” carelessly replied George Godolphin.

“Did she ride well to-day, George?” inquired his father.

“She always rides well, sir,” replied George.

“I wish I had invited her to dinner!” said Lady Godolphin.

“I wish you had,” assented Sir George.

Nothing more was said upon the subject; the conversation fell into other channels. But, when the ladies had withdrawn, and Sir George was alone with his sons, he renewed it.

"Mind, George, I was not in jest when speaking of Charlotte Pain. It is getting time that you married."

"Need a man think of marriage on this side thirty, sir?"

"Some men need not think of it on this side forty or on this side fifty, unless they choose to do so: your brother Thomas is one," returned Sir George. "But they are those who know how to sow their wild oats without it."

"I shall sow mine in good time," said George, with a gay, half-conscious smile. "Thomas never had any to sow."

"I wish you would settle the time and keep it, then," was the marked rejoinder. "It might be better for you."

"Settle the time for my marriage, do you mean, sir?"

"You know what I mean. But I suppose you do intend to marry some time, George?"

"I dare say I shall. It is a thing that comes to most of us as a matter of course; as measles or vaccination," spoke irreverent George. "You mentioned Charlotte Pain, sir: I presume you have no urgent wish that my choice should fall upon her?"

"If I had, would you comply with it?"

George raised his blue eyes to his father. "I have never thought of Charlotte Pain as a wife."

"She is a fine girl, a wonderfully fine girl; and if, as is rumoured, she has a fortune, you might go further and fare worse," remarked Sir George. "If you don't like Charlotte Pain, find out some one else that you would like. Only, take care that there's money with her."

"Money is desirable in itself. But it does not invariably bring happiness, sir."

"I never heard that it brought unhappiness, Master George. I cannot have you both marry portionless women. Thomas has chosen one who has nothing: it will not do for you to follow his example. The world is before you; choose wisely."

"If we choose portionless women, we are not portionless ourselves."

"We have a credit to keep up before the public, George. It stands high; it deserves to stand high; I hope it always will do so. But I consider it necessary that one of you should marry a fortune; I should have been glad that both had done so. Take the hint, George; and never expect my consent to your making an undesirable match, for it would not be given."

"But, if my inclination fixed itself upon one who has no money, what then, sir?" asked bold George carelessly.

Sir George pushed from before him a dish of filberts, so hastily as to scatter them on the table. It proved to his sons, who knew him well, that the question had annoyed him.

"Your inclinations are as yet free, George: I say the world is before you, and you may choose wisely. If you do not: if, after this warning, you suffer your choice to rest where it is undesirable that it should rest, you will do it in deliberate defiance of me. In that case I shall disinherit you: partially, if not wholly."

Something appeared to be on the tip of George's tongue, but he checked it, and there ensued a pause.

"Thomas is to be allowed to follow his choice," he presently said.

"I had not warned Thomas with regard to a choice; therefore he has been guilty of no disobedience. It is his having chosen as he has, that reminds me to caution you. Be careful, my boy."

"Well, sir, I have no intention of marrying yet, and I suppose you will not disinherit me for keeping single," concluded George good-humouredly. He rose to leave the room as he spoke, throwing a merry glance towards Thomas as he did so, who had taken no part whatever in the conversation.



The twilight of the evening had passed, but the moon shone bright and clear, rendering the night nearly as light as day. Janet Godolphin stood on the lawn with Miss Hastings, when George stepped out and joined them.

“Moon-gazing, Janet!”

“Yes,” she answered. “I am going on to the ash-trees.”

George paused before he again spoke. “Why are you going thither?”

“Because,” whispered Janet, glancing uneasily around, “they say the Shadow is there again.”

George himself had heard that it was: had heard it, as you know, from Charlotte Pain. But he chose to make mockery of his sister’s words.

“Some say the moon’s made of green cheese,” quoth he. “Who told you that nonsense?”

“It has been told to me,” mysteriously returned Janet. “Margery saw it last night, for one.”

“Margery sees double, sometimes. Do not go, Janet.”

Janet’s only answer was to put the hood of her cloak over her head, and walk away. Bessy Godolphin ran up at this juncture.

“Is Janet going to the ash-trees? She’ll turn into a ghost herself some time, believing all the rubbish Margery chooses to dream. I shall go and tell her so.”

Bessy followed in the wake of her sister. George turned to Miss Hastings.

“Have you a cloak also, Maria? Draw it round you, then, and let us go after them.”

He caught her to him with a fond gesture, and they hastened on, down from the eminence where rose the Folly, to the lower ground nearer Ashlydyat. The Dark Plain lay to the right, and as they struck into a narrow, overhung walk, its gloom contrasted unpleasantly with the late brightness. Maria Hastings drew nearer to her companion with an involuntary shiver.

“Why did you come this dark way, George?”

“It is the most direct way. In the dark or in the light you are safe with me. Did you notice Sir George’s joke about Charlotte Pain?”

The question caused her heart to beat wildly. “Was it a joke?” she breathed.

“Of course it was a joke. But he has been giving me a lecture upon—upon—”

“Upon what?” she inquired, helping out his hesitation.

“Upon the expediency of sowing my wild oats and settling down into a respectable man,” laughed George. “I promised him it should be done some time. I cannot afford it just yet, Maria,” he added, his tone changing to earnestness. “But I did not tell him that.”

Meanwhile, Janet Godolphin had gained the ash-trees. She quietly glided before them beneath their shade to reach the bench. It was placed back, quite amidst them, in what might almost be called a recess formed by the trees. Janet paused ere turning in, her sight thrown over the Dark Plain.

“Heavens and earth! how you startled me. Is it you, Miss Godolphin?”

The exclamation came from Charlotte Pain, who was seated there. Miss Godolphin was startled also; and her tone, as she spoke, betrayed considerable vexation.

“*You* here, Miss Pain! A solitary spot, is it not, for a young lady to be sitting in alone at night?”

“I was watching for that strange appearance which you, in this neighbourhood, call the Shadow,” she explained. “I saw it last evening.”

“Did you?” freezingly replied Janet Godolphin, who had an unconquerable aversion to the supernatural sign being seen or spoken of by strangers.

“Well, pray, and where’s the Shadow?” interrupted Bessy Godolphin, coming up. “*I* see nothing, and my eyes are as good as yours, Janet: better, I hope, than Margery’s.”

“I do not see it to-night,” said Charlotte Pain. “Here are more footsteps! Who else is coming?”

“Did you ever know the Shadow come when it was watched for?” cried Janet to Bessy, in a half-sad, half-resentful tone, as her brother and Maria Hastings approached. “Watch for it, and it does not come. It never yet struck upon the sight of any one, but it did so unexpectedly.”

“As it did upon me last night,” said Charlotte Pain. “It was a strange-looking shadow: but, as to its being supernatural, the very supposition is ridiculous. I beg your pardon, if I offend your prejudices, Miss Godolphin.”

“Child! why did you come?” cried Janet Godolphin to Maria.

“I had no idea you did not wish me to come.”

“Wish! It is not that. But you are little more than a child, and might be spared these sights.”

There appeared to be no particular sight to spare any one. They stood in a group, gazing eagerly. The Dark Plain was stretched out before them, the bare patch of clear ground, the archway behind; all bright in the moonlight. No shadow or shade was to be seen. Charlotte Pain moved to the side of George Godolphin.

“You told me I was fanciful this morning, when I said the Dark Plain put me in mind of a graveyard,” she said to him in a half-whisper. “See it now! Those low bushes scattered about look precisely like grave-mounds.”

“But we know them to be bushes,” returned George.

“That is not the argument. I say they *look* like it. If you brought a stranger here first by moonlight, and asked him what the Plain was, he would say a graveyard.”

“Thus it has ever been!” murmured Janet Godolphin to herself. “At the first coming of the Shadow, it will be here capriciously; visible one night, invisible the next: betokening that the evil has not yet arrived, that it is only hovering! You are sure you saw it, Miss Pain?”

“I am quite sure that I saw a shadow, bearing a strange and distinct form, there, in front of the archway. But I am equally sure it is to be accounted for by natural causes. But that my eyes tell me there is no building, or sign of building above the Dark Plain, I should say it was cast from thence. Some fairies, possibly, may be holding up a sheet there,” she carelessly added, “playing at magic lantern in the moonlight.”

“Standing in the air,” sarcastically returned Miss Godolphin. “Archimedes offered to move the world with his lever, if the world would only find him a place, apart from itself, to stand on.”

“Are you convinced, Janet?” asked George.

“Of what?”

He pointed over the Plain. “That there is nothing uncanny to be seen to-night. I’ll send Margery here when I return.”

“I am convinced of one thing—that it is getting uncommonly damp,” said practical Bessy. “I never stood under these ash-trees in an evening yet, let the atmosphere be ever so cold and clear, but a dampness might be felt. I wonder if it is the nature of ash-trees to exhale it? Maria, the Rector would not thank us for bringing you here.”

“Is Miss Hastings so susceptible to cold?” asked Charlotte Pain.

“Not more so than other people are,” was Maria’s answer.

“It is her child-like, delicate appearance, I suppose, that makes us fancy it,” said Bessy Godolphin. “Come, let us depart. If Lady Godolphin could see us here, she would go crazy: she says, you know, that damp brings fever.”

They made a simultaneous movement. Their road lay to the right; Charlotte Pain’s to the left. “I envy you four,” she said, after wishing them good night. “You are a formidable body, numerous enough to do battle with any assailants you may meet in your way, fairies, or shadows, or fever, or what not. I must encounter them alone.”

“Scarcely,” replied George Godolphin, as he drew her arm within his, and turned with her in the direction of Ashlydyat.

Arrived at Lady Godolphin’s Folly, the Miss Godolphins passed indoors; Maria Hastings lingered a moment behind them. She leaned against a white pillar of the terrace, looking forth on the lovely night. Not altogether was that peaceful scene in accordance with her heart, for, in that, warred

passionate jealousy. Who was Charlotte Pain, she asked herself, that she should come between them with her beauty; with her—

Some one was hastening towards her; crossing the green lawn, springing up the steps of the terrace; and the jealous feeling died away into love.

“Were you waiting for me?” whispered George Godolphin. “We met Verrall, so I resigned mademoiselle to his charge. Maria, how your heart is beating!”

“I was startled when you ran up so quickly; I did not think it could be you,” was the evasive answer. “Let me go, please.”

“My darling, don’t be angry with me: I could not well help myself. You know with whom I would rather have been.”

He spoke in the softest whisper; he gazed tenderly into her face, so fair and gentle in the moonlight; he clasped her to him with an impassioned gesture. And Maria, as she yielded to his tenderness in her pure love, and felt his stolen kisses on her lips, forgot the jealous trouble that was being wrought by Charlotte Pain.

## CHAPTER IV. ALL SOULS' RECTORY

At the eastern end of Prior's Ash was situated the Church and Rectory of All Souls—a valuable living, the Reverend Isaac Hastings its incumbent. The house, enclosed from the high-road by a lofty hedge, was built, like the church, of greystone. It was a commodious residence, but its rooms, excepting one, were small. This one had been added to the house of late years: a long, though somewhat narrow room, its three windows looking on to the flowered lawn. A very pleasant room to sit in on a summer's day; when the grass was green, and the flowers, with their brightness and perfume, gladdened the senses, and the birds were singing, and the bees and butterflies sporting.

Less pleasant to-day. For the skies wore a grey hue; the wind sighed round the house with an ominous sound, telling of the coming winter; and the mossy lawn and the paths were dreary with the yellow leaves, decaying as they lay. Mrs. Hastings, a ladylike woman of middle height and fair complexion, stood at one of these windows, watching the bending of the trees as the wind shook them; watching the falling leaves. She was remarkably susceptible to surrounding influences; seasons and weather held much power over her: but that she was a clergyman's wife, and, as such, obliged to take a very practical part in the duties of life, she might have subsided into a valetudinarian.

A stronger gust sent the leaves rustling up the path, and Mrs. Hastings slightly shivered.

"How I dislike this time of year," she exclaimed. "I wish there were no autumn. I dislike to see the dead leaves."

"I like the autumn: although it heralds in the winter."

The reply came from Mr. Hastings, who was pacing the carpet, thinking over his next day's sermon: for it was Saturday morning. Nature had not intended Mr. Hastings for a parson, and his sermons were the bane of his life. An excellent man; a most efficient pastor of a parish; a gentleman; a scholar, abounding in good practical sense; but *not* a preacher. Sometimes he wrote his sermons, sometimes he tried the extempore plan; but, let him do as he would, there was always a conviction of failure, as to his sermons winning their way to his hearers' hearts. He was under middle height, with keen aquiline features, his dark hair already sprinkled with grey.

"I am glad the wind has changed," remarked the Rector. "We shall say good-bye to the fever. While that warm weather lasted, I always had my fears of its breaking out again. It was only coquetting with us. I wonder—"

Mr. Hastings stopped, as if lapsing into thought. Mrs. Hastings inquired what his "wonder" might be.

"I was thinking of Sir George Godolphin," he continued. "One thought leads to another and another, until we should find them a strange train, if we traced them back to their origin. Beginning with dead leaves, and ending with—metaphysics."

"What are you talking of, Isaac?" his wife asked in surprise.

A half-smile crossed the thin delicate lips of Mr. Hastings. "You spoke of the dead leaves: that led to the thought of the fever; the fever to the bad drainage; the bad drainage to the declaration of Sir George Godolphin that, if he lived until next year, it should be remedied, even though he had to meet the expense himself. Then the train went on to speculate upon whether Sir George would live; and next upon whether this change of weather may not cause my lady to relinquish her journey; and lastly, to Maria. Cold Scotland, if we are to have a season of bleak winds, cannot be beneficial to Sir George."

"Lady Godolphin has set her mind upon going. She is not likely to relinquish it."

"Mark you, Caroline," said Mr. Hastings, halting in his promenade, and standing opposite his wife; "it is her dread of the fever that is sending her to Scotland. But for that, she would not go, now

that it is so late in the year. And for Maria's sake I wish she would not. I do not now wish Maria to go to Scotland."

"Why?" asked Mrs. Hastings.

Mr. Hastings knitted his brow. "It is an objection more easily felt than explained."

"When the invitation was given in the summer, you were pleased that she should accept it."

"Yes; I acknowledge it: and, had they gone then, I should have felt no repugnance to the visit. But I do feel a repugnance to it now, so far as Maria is concerned; an unaccountable repugnance. If you ask me to explain it, or to tell you what my reason is, I can only answer that I am unable to do so. It is this want of reason, good or bad, which has prevented my entirely withdrawing the consent I gave. I essayed to do so, when Lady Godolphin was here on Thursday; but she pressed me closely, and, having no sound or plausible argument to bring forward against it, my opposition broke down."

Mrs. Hastings wondered. Never was there a man less given to whims and fancies than the Reverend Isaac Hastings. His actions and thoughts were based on the sound principle of plain matter-of-fact sense: he was practical in all things; there was not a grain of ideality in his composition.

At that moment a visitor's knock was heard. Mrs. Hastings glanced across the hall, and saw her second daughter enter. She wore her grey cashmere cloak, soft and fine in texture, delicate in hue; a pretty morning dress, and a straw bonnet trimmed with white. A healthy colour shone on her delicate face, and her eyes were sparkling with inward happiness. Very attractive, very ladylike, was Maria Hastings.

"I was obliged to come this morning, mamma," she said, when greetings had passed. "Some of my things are still here which I wish to take, and I must collect them and send them to the Folly. We start early on Monday morning; everything must be packed to-day."

"One would suppose you were off for a year, Maria," exclaimed Mr. Hastings, "to hear you talk of 'collecting your things.' How many trunk-loads have you already at the Folly?"

"Only two, papa," she replied, laughing, and wondering why Mr. Hastings should speak so sternly. "They are chiefly trifles that I have come for; books, and other things: not clothes."

"Your papa thought it likely that Lady Godolphin would not now go, as the fine weather seems to be leaving us," said Mrs. Hastings.

"Oh yes, she will," replied Maria. "Her mind is fully made up. Did you not know that the orders had already been sent into Berwickshire? And some of the servants went on this morning?"

"Great ladies change their minds sometimes," remarked Mr. Hastings in a cynical tone.

Maria shook her head. She had untied her bonnet-strings, and was unfastening her mantle. "Sir George, who has risen to breakfast since Thursday, asked Lady Godolphin this morning whether it would not be late for Scotland, and she resented the remark. What do you think she said, mamma? That if there was nothing else to take her to Scotland, this absurd rumour, of the Shadow's having come again, would drive her thither."

"What's that, Maria?" demanded the clergyman in a sharp, displeased accent.

"A rumour has arisen, papa, that the Shadow is appearing at Ashlydyat. It was seen on Wednesday night. On Thursday night, some of us went to the ash-trees—"

"*You* went?" interrupted the Rector.

"Yes, papa," she answered, her voice growing timid, for he spoke in a tone of great displeasure. "I, and Miss Godolphin, and Bessy. We were not alone: George Godolphin was with us."

"And what did you see?" eagerly interposed Mrs. Hastings, who possessed more of the organ of marvel in her composition than her husband.

"Mamma, we saw nothing. Only the Dark Plain lying quietly under the moonlight. There appeared to be nothing to see; nothing unusual."

"But that I hear you say this with my own ears, I should not have believed you capable of giving utterance to folly so intense," sternly exclaimed Mr. Hastings to his daughter. "Are you the child of Christian parents? have you received an enlightened education?"

Maria's eyelids fell under the reproof, and the soft colour in her cheeks deepened.

"That a daughter of mine should confess to running after a 'shadow'!" he continued, really with more asperity than the case seemed to need. But the Rector of All Souls' was one who would have deemed it little less heresy to doubt his Bible, than to countenance a tale of superstition. He repudiated such with the greatest contempt: he never, even though proof positive had been brought before his eyes, could accord to it an iota of credence. "An absurd tale of a 'shadow,' worthy only to be told to those who, in their blind credulity, formerly burnt poor creatures as witches; worthy only to amuse the ears of ignorant urchins, whom we put into our fields to frighten away the crows! And *my daughter* has lent herself to it! Can this be the result of your training, madam?"—turning angrily to his wife. "Or of mine?"

"I did not run after it from my own curiosity; I went because the rest went," answered poor Maria in her confusion, all too conscious that the stolen moonlight walk with Mr. George Godolphin had been a far more powerful motive to the expedition than the "Shadow." "Miss Pain saw it on Wednesday night; Margery saw it—"

"Will you cease?" broke forth the Rector. "'Saw it!' If they said they saw it they must have been labouring under a delusion; or else were telling a deliberate untruth. And you do not know better than to repeat such ignorance! What would Sir George think of you?"

"I should not mention it in his presence, papa. Or in Lady Godolphin's."

"Neither shall you in mine. It is not possible"—Mr. Hastings stood before her and fixed his eyes sternly upon hers—"that you can believe in it?"

"I think not, papa," she answered in her strict truth. To truth, at any rate, she had been trained, whether by father or by mother; and she would not violate it even to avoid displeasure. "I think that my feeling upon the point is curiosity; not belief."

"Then that curiosity implies belief," sternly replied the Rector. "If a man came to me and said, 'There's an elephant out there, in the garden,' and I went forth to see, would not that prove my belief in the assertion?"

Maria was no logician; or she had answered, "No, you might go to prove the error of the assertion." "Indeed, papa, if I know anything of myself, I am not a believer in it," she repeated, her cheeks growing hotter and hotter. "If I were once to see the Shadow, why then—"

"Be silent!" he cried, not allowing her to continue. "I shall think next I am talking to that silly dreamer, Janet Godolphin. Is it she who has imbued you with this tone of mind?"

Maria shook her head. There was an undercurrent of consciousness, lying deep in her heart, that if a "tone" upon the point had been insensibly acquired by her, it was caught from one far more precious to her heart, far more essential to her very existence, than was Janet Godolphin. That last Thursday night, in running with George Godolphin after this tale of the Shadow, his arm cast lovingly round her, she had acquired the impression, from a few words he let fall, that he must put faith in it. She was content that his creed should be hers in all things: had she wished to differ from him, it would have been beyond her power to do so. Mr. Hastings appeared to wait for an answer.

"Janet Godolphin does not intrude her superstitious fancies upon the world, papa. Were she to seek to convert me to them, I should not listen to her."

"Dismiss the subject altogether from your thoughts, Maria," commanded the Rector. "If men and women would perform efficiently their allotted part in life, there is enough of hard substance to occupy their minds and their hours, without losing either the one or the other in 'shadows.' Take you note of that."

"Yes, papa," she dutifully answered, scarcely knowing whether she had deserved the lecture or not, but glad that it was at an end. "Mamma, where is Grace?"

"In the study. You can go to her. There's David!" exclaimed Mrs. Hastings, as Maria left the room.

A short, thick-set man had appeared in the garden, giving rise to the concluding remark of Mrs. Hastings. If you have not forgotten the first chapter, you may remember that Bessy Godolphin spoke of a man who had expressed his pleasure at seeing her father out again. She called him "Old Jekyl." Old Jekyl lived in a cottage on the outskirts of Prior's Ash. He had been in his days a working gardener, but rheumatism and age had put him beyond work now. There was a good bit of garden-ground to his cottage, and it was well cultivated. Vegetables and fruit grew in it; and a small board was fastened in front of the laburnum-tree at the gate, with the intimation "Cut flowers sold here." There were also bee-hives. Old Jekyl (Prior's Ash never dignified him by any other title) had no wife: she was dead: but his two sons lived with him, and they followed the occupation that had been his. I could not tell you how many gardens in Prior's Ash and its environs those two men kept in order. Many a family, not going to the expense of keeping a regular gardener, some, perhaps, not able to go to it, entrusted the care of their garden to the Jekyls, paying them a stipulated sum yearly. The plan answered. The gardens were kept in order, and the Jekyls earned a good living; both masters and men were contented.

They had been named Jonathan and David: and were as opposite as men and brothers could well be, both in nature and appearance. Each was worthy in his way. Jonathan stood six feet three if he stood an inch, and was sufficiently slender for a lamp-post: rumour went that he had occasionally been taken for one. An easy-going, obliging, talkative, mild-tempered man, was Jonathan, his opinion agreeing with every one's. Mrs. Hastings was wont to declare that if she were to say to him, "You know, Jonathan, the sun never shone," his answer would be, "Well, ma'am, I don't know as ever it did, over bright like." David had the build of a Dutchman, and was taciturn upon most subjects. In manner he was somewhat surly, and would hold his own opinion, especially if it touched upon his occupation, against the world.

Amongst others who employed them in this way, was the Rector of All Souls'. They were in the habit of coming and going to that or any other garden, as they pleased, at whatever day or time suited their convenience; sometimes one brother, sometimes the other, sometimes one of the two boys they employed, as they might arrange between themselves. Any garden entrusted to their care they were sure to keep in order; therefore their time and manner of doing it was not interfered with. Mrs. Hastings suddenly saw David in the garden. "I will get him to sweep those ugly dead leaves from the paths," she exclaimed, throwing up the window. "David!"

David heard the call, turned and looked. Finding he was wanted, he advanced in a leisurely, independent sort of manner, giving his attention to the beds as he passed them, and stopping to pluck off any dead flower that offended his eye. He gave a nod as he reached Mrs. Hastings, his features not relaxing in the least. The nod was a mark of respect, and *meant* as such; the only demonstration of respect commonly shown by David. His face was not ugly, though too flat and broad; his complexion was fair, and his eyes were blue.

"David, see how the leaves have fallen; how they lie upon the ground!"

David gave a half-glance round, by way of answer, but he did not speak. He knew the leaves were there without looking.

"You must clear them away," continued Mrs. Hastings.

"No," responded David to this. "Twon't be of no use."

"But, David, you know how very much I dislike to see these withered leaves," rejoined Mrs. Hastings in a voice more of pleading than of command. Command answered little with David.

"Can't help seeing 'em," persisted David. "Leaves will wither; and will fall: it's their natur' to do it. If every one of them lying there now was raked up and swept away, there'd be as many down again to-morrow morning. I can't neglect my beds to fad with the leaves—and bring no good to pass, after all."

"David, I do not think any one ever was so self-willed as you!" said Mrs. Hastings, laughing in spite of her vexation.



"I know my business," was David's answer. "If I gave in at my different places to all the missises' whims, how should I get my work done? The masters would be blowing me up, thinking it was idleness. Look at Jonathan! he lets himself be swayed any way; and a nice time he gets of it, among 'em. His day's work's never done."

"You would not suffer the leaves to lie there until the end of the season!" exclaimed Mrs. Hastings. "They would be up to our ankles as we walked."

"May be they would," composedly returned David. "I have cleared 'em off about six times this fall, and I shall clear 'em again, but not as long as this wind lasts."

"Is it going to last, David?" inquired the Rector, appearing at his wife's side, and laughing inwardly at her diplomatic failure.

David nodded his usual salutation as he answered. He would sometimes relax so far as to say "Sir" to Mr. Hastings, an honour paid exclusively to his pastoral capacity. "No, it won't last, sir. We shall have the warm weather back again."

"You think so!" exclaimed the Rector in an accent of disappointment. Experience had taught him that David, in regard to the weather, was an oracle.

"I am sure so," answered David. "The b'rometer's going fast on to heat, too."

"Is it?" said Mr. Hastings. "You have often told me you put no faith in the barometer."

"No more I don't: unless other signs answer to it," said David. "The very best b'rometer going, is old father's rheumatiz. There was a sharp frost last night, sir."

"I know it," replied Mr. Hastings. "A few nights of that and the fever will be driven away."

"We shan't get a few nights of it," said David. "And the fever has broken out again."

"What!" exclaimed Mr. Hastings. "The fever broken out again?"

"Yes," said David.

The news fell upon the clergyman's heart as a knell. He had fully believed the danger to have passed away, though not yet the sickness. "Are you sure it has broken out again, David?" he asked, after a pause.

"I ain't no surer than I was told, sir," returned phlegmatic David. "I met Cox just now, and he said, as he passed, that fever had shown itself in a fresh place."

"Do you know where?" inquired Mr. Hastings.

"He said, I b'lieve, but I didn't catch it. If I stopped to listen to the talk of fevers, and such-like, where would my work be?"

Taking his hat, one of the very clerical shape, with a broad brim, the Rector left his house. He was scarcely without the gates when he saw Mr. Snow, who was the most popular doctor in Prior's Ash, coming along quickly in his gig. Mr. Hastings threw out his hand, and the groom pulled up.

"Is it true?—this fresh rumour of the fever?"

"Too true, I fear," replied Mr. Snow. "I am on my way thither now; just summoned."

"Who is attacked?"

"Sarah Anne Grame."

The name appeared to startle the Rector. "Sarah Anne Grame!" he repeated. "She will never battle through it!" The doctor raised his eyebrows, as if he thought it doubtful himself, and signed to his groom to hasten on.

"Tell Lady Sarah I will call upon her in the course of the day," called out Mr. Hastings, as the gig sped on its way. "I must ask Maria if she has heard news of this," he continued, in soliloquy, as he turned within the Rectory gate.

Maria Hastings had found her way to the study. To dignify a room by the appellation of "study" in a clergyman's house, would at once imply that it must be the private sanctum of its master, consecrated to his sermons and his other clerical studies. Not so, however, in the Rectory of All Souls. The study there was chiefly consecrated to litter, and the master had less to do with it, personally, than with almost any other room in the house. There, the children, boys and girls, played, or learned

lessons, or practised; there, Mrs. Hastings would sit to sew when she had any work in hand too plebeian for the eyes of polite visitors.

Grace, the eldest of the family, was twenty years of age, one year older than Maria. She bore a great resemblance to her father; and, like him, was more practical than imaginative. She was very useful, in the house, and took much care off Mrs. Hastings's hands. It happened that all the children, five of them besides Maria, were this morning at home. It was holiday that day with the boys. Isaac was next to Maria, but nearly three years younger; one had died between them; Reginald was next; Harry last; and then came a little girl, Rose. They ought to have been preparing their lessons; were supposed to be doing so by Mr. and Mrs. Hastings: in point of fact, they were gathering round Grace, who was seated on a low stool solving some amusing puzzles from a new book. They started up when Maria entered, and went dancing round her.

Maria danced too; she kissed them all; she sang aloud in her joyousness of heart. What was it that made that heart so glad, her life as a very Eden? The ever-constant presence there of George Godolphin.

"Have you come home to stay, Maria?"

"I have come home to *go*," she answered, with a laugh. "We start for Scotland on Monday, and I want to hunt up oceans of things."

"It is fine to be you, Maria," exclaimed Grace, with a sensation very like envy. "You have all the pleasure, and I have to stop at home and do all the work. It is not fair."

"Gracie dear, it will be your turn next. I did not *ask* Lady Godolphin to invite me, instead of you. I never thought of her inviting me, being the younger of the two."

"But she did invite you," grumbled Grace.

"I say, Maria, you are not to go to Scotland," struck in Isaac.

"Who says so?" cried Maria, her heart standing still, as she halted in one corner of the room with at least half a dozen arms round her.

"Mamma said yesterday she thought you were not: that papa would not have it."

"Is that all?" and Maria's pulses coursed on again. "I am to go: I have just been with papa and mamma. They know that I have come to get my things for the journey."

"Maria, who goes?"

"Sir George and my lady, and I and Charlotte Pain."

"Maria, I want to know why Charlotte Pain goes?" cried Grace.

Maria laughed. "You are like Bessy Godolphin, Grace. She asked the same question, and my lady answered, 'Because she chose to invite her.' I can only repeat to you the same reason."

"Does George Godolphin go?"

"No," replied Maria.

"Oh, doesn't he, though!" exclaimed Reginald. "Tell that to the marines, mademoiselle."

"He does not go with us," said Maria. "Regy, you know you will get into hot water if you use those sea phrases."

"Sea phrases! that is just like a girl," retorted Reginald. "What will you lay me that George Godolphin is not in Scotland within a week after you are all there?"

"I will not lay anything," said Maria, who in her inmost heart hoped and believed that George *would* be there.

"Catch him stopping away if Charlotte Pain goes?" went on Reginald. "Yesterday I was at the pastry-cook's, having a tuck-out with that shilling old Crosse gave me, and Mr. George and Miss Charlotte came in. I heard a little."

"What did you hear?" breathed Maria. She could not help the question: any more than she could help the wild beating of her heart at the boy's words.

"I did not catch it all," said Reginald. "It was about Scotland, though, and what they should do when they were there. Mrs. Verrall's carriage came up then, and he put her into it. An out-and-out flirt is George Godolphin!"

Grace Hastings threw her keen dark eyes upon Maria. "Do not let him flirt with *you*," she said in a marked tone. "You like him; I do not. I never thought George Godolphin worth his salt."

"That's just Grace!" exclaimed Isaac. "Taking her likes and dislikes! and for no cause, or reason, but her own crotchets and prejudices. He is the nicest fellow going, is George Godolphin. Charlotte Pain's is a new face and a beautiful one: let him admire it."

"He admires rather too many," nodded Grace.

"As long as he does not admire yours, you have no right to grumble," rejoined Isaac provokingly: and Grace flung a bundle of work at him, for the laugh turned against her.

"Rose, you naughty child, you have my crayons there!" exclaimed Maria, happening to cast her eyes upon the table, where Rose was seated too quietly to be at anything but mischief.

"Only one or two of your sketching pencils, Maria," said Miss Rose. "I shan't hurt them. I am making a villa with two turrets and some cows."

"I say, Maria, is Charlotte Pain going to take that thoroughbred hunter of hers?" interposed Reginald.

"Of course," scoffed Isaac: "saddled and bridled. She'll have him with her in the railway carriage; put him in the corner seat opposite Sir George. Regy's brains may do for sea—if he ever gets there; but they are not sharp enough for land."

"They are as sharp as yours, at any rate," flashed Reginald. "Why should she not take him?"

"Be quiet, you boys!" said Grace.

She was interrupted by the appearance of Mr. Hastings. He did not open the door at the most opportune moment. Maria, Isaac, and Harry were executing a dance that probably had no name in the dancing calendar; Reginald was standing on his head; Rose had just upset the contents of the table, by inadvertently drawing off its old cloth cover, and Grace was scolding her in a loud tone.

"What do you call this?" demanded Mr. Hastings, when he had leisurely surveyed the scene. "Studying?"

They subsided into quietness and their places; Reginald with his face red and his hair wild, Maria with a pretty blush, Isaac with a smothered laugh. Mr. Hastings addressed his second daughter.

"Have you heard anything about this fresh outbreak of fever?"

"No, papa," was Maria's reply. "Has it broken out again?"

"I hear that it has attacked Sarah Anne Grame."

"Oh, papa!" exclaimed Grace, clasping her hands in sorrowful consternation. "Will she ever live through it?"

Just the same doubt, you see, that had occurred to the Rector.

## CHAPTER V. THOMAS GODOLPHIN'S LOVE

For nearly a mile beyond All Souls' Rectory, as you went out of Prior's Ash, there were scattered houses and cottages. In one of them lived Lady Sarah Grame. We receive our ideas from association; and, in speaking of the residence of Lady Sarah Grame, or Lady Sarah Anyone, imagination might conjure up some fine old mansion with all its appurtenances, grounds, servants, carriages and grandeur: or, at the very least, a "villa with two turrets and some cows," as Rose Hastings expressed it.

Far more like a humble cottage than a mansion was the abode of Lady Sarah Grame. It was a small, pretty, detached white house, containing eight or nine rooms in all; and, they, not very large ones. A plot of ground before it was crowded with flowers: far too crowded for good taste, as David Jekyl would point out to Lady Sarah. But Lady Sarah loved flowers, and would not part with one of them.

The daughter of one soldier, and the wife of another, Lady Sarah had scrambled through life amidst bustle, perplexity, and poverty. Sometimes quartered in barracks, sometimes following the army abroad; out of one place into another; never settled anywhere for long together. It was an existence not to be envied; although it is the lot of many. She was Mrs. Grame then, and her husband, the captain, was not a very good husband to her. He was rather too fond of amusing himself, and threw all care upon her shoulders. She passed her days nursing her sickly children, and endeavouring to make one sovereign go as far as two. One morning, to her unspeakable embarrassment, she found herself converted from plain, private Mrs. Grame into the Lady Sarah. Her father boasted a peer in a very remote relative, and came unexpectedly into the title.

Had he come into money with it, it would have been more welcome; but, of that, there was only a small supply. It was a very poor Scotch peerage, with limited estates; and, they, encumbered. Lady Sarah wished she could drop the honour which had fallen to her share, unless she could live a little more in accordance with it. She had much sorrow. She had lost one child after another, until she had only two left, Sarah Anne and Ethel. Then she lost her husband; and, next, her father. Chance drove her to Prior's Ash, which was near her husband's native place; and she settled there, upon her limited income. All she possessed was her pension as a captain's widow, and the interest of the sum her father had been enabled to leave her; the whole not exceeding five hundred a year. She took the white cottage, then just built, and dignified it with the name of "Grame House;" and the mansions in the neighbourhood of Prior's Ash were content not to laugh, but to pay respect to her as an earl's daughter.

Lady Sarah was a partial woman. She had only these two daughters, and her love for them was as different as light is from darkness. Sarah Anne she loved with an inordinate affection, almost amounting to passion; for Ethel, she did not care. What could be the reason of this? What is the reason why parents (many of them may be found) will love some of their children, and dislike others? They cannot tell you, any more than Lady Sarah could have told. Ask them, and they will be unable to give you an answer. It does not lie in the children: it often happens that those obtaining the least love will be the most worthy of it. Such was the case here. Sarah Anne Grame was a pale, sickly, fretful girl; full of whims, full of complaints, giving trouble to every one about her. Ethel, with her sweet countenance and her merry heart, made the sunshine of the home. She bore with her sister's exacting moods, bore with her mother's want of love. *She* loved them both, and waited on them, and carolled forth her snatches of song as she moved about the house, and was as happy as the day was long. The servants—they kept only two—would tell you that Miss Grame was cross and selfish; but that Miss Ethel was worth her weight in gold. The gold was soon to be appropriated; transplanted to a home where it would be appreciated and cherished: for Ethel was the affianced wife of Thomas Godolphin.

On the morning already mentioned, when you heard it said that fever had broken out again, Sarah Anne Grame awoke, ill. In her fretful, impatient way, she called to Ethel, who slept in an adjoining room. Ethel was asleep: but she was accustomed to be roused at unseasonable hours by Sarah Anne, and she threw on her dressing-gown and hastened to her.

“I want some tea,” began Sarah Anne. “I am as ill and thirsty as I can be.”

Sarah Anne was really of a sickly constitution, and to hear her complain of being ill and thirsty was nothing unusual. Ethel, in her loving nature, her sweet patience, received the information with as much concern as though she had never heard it before. She bent over Sarah Anne, inquiring tenderly where she felt pain.

“I tell you that I am ill and thirsty, and that’s enough,” peevishly answered Sarah Anne. “Go and get me some tea.”

“As soon as I possibly can,” said Ethel soothingly. “There is no fire at present. The maids are not up. I do not think it can be later than six, by the look of the morning.”

“Very well!” sobbed Sarah Anne—sobs of temper, not of pain. “You can’t call the maids, I suppose! and you can’t put yourself the least out of the way to alleviate my suffering! You want to go to bed again and sleep till eight o’clock. When I am dead, you’ll wish you had been more like a sister to me. You possess rude health yourself, and you can feel no compassion for any one who does not.”

An assertion unjust and untrue: as was many another, made by Sarah Anne Grame. Ethel did not possess “rude health,” though she was not, like her sister, always ailing; and she felt far more compassion than Sarah Anne deserved.

“I will see what I can do,” she gently said. “You shall soon have some tea.”

Passing into her own room, Ethel hastily dressed herself. When Sarah Anne was in one of her exacting moods, there could be no more sleep or rest for Ethel. “I wonder,” she thought to herself, “whether I could not light a fire, without calling the servants? They had so hard a day’s work yesterday, for mamma kept them both cleaning from morning till night. Yes: if I can only find some wood, I’ll try to light one.”

She went down to the kitchen, hunted up what was required, laid the fire, and lighted it. It did not burn up well. She thought the wood must be damp, and found the bellows. She was on her knees, blowing away at the wood, and sending the blaze up into the coal, when some one came into the kitchen.

“Miss Ethel!”

It was one of the servants: Elizabeth. She had heard movement in the house, and had risen. Ethel explained that her sister felt ill, and tea was wanted.

“Why did you not call us, Miss Ethel?”

“You went to rest late, Elizabeth. See how I have made the fire burn!”

“It is not ladies’ work, miss.”

“I certainly think ladies should put on gloves when they attempt it,” merrily laughed Ethel. “Look at my black hands.”

The tea ready, Ethel carried a cup of it to her sister, with some dry toast that they had made. Sarah Anne drank the tea, but turned with a shiver from the toast. She seemed to be shivering much.

“Who was so stupid as to make that? You might know I should not eat it. I am too ill.”

Ethel began to think that she did look unusually ill. Her face was flushed, shivering though she was, her lips were dry, her heavy eyes were unnaturally bright. She gently laid her hands, washed now, upon her sister’s brow. It felt burning, and Sarah Anne screamed.

“Do keep your hands away! My head is splitting with pain.”

Involuntarily Ethel thought of the fever; the danger from which they had been reckoning had passed away. It was a low sort of typhus which had prevailed; not very extensively, and chiefly amidst the poor: the great fear had been, lest it should turn to a more malignant type. About half a dozen deaths had taken place altogether.

“Would you like me to bathe your forehead with water, Sarah Anne?” asked Ethel kindly. “Or to get you some eau-de-Cologne?”

“I should like you to wait until things are asked for, and not to worry me,” retorted Sarah Anne.

Ethel sighed. Not for the temper: Sarah Anne was always fractious in illness: but for the suffering she thought she saw, and the half doubt, half dread, which had arisen within her. “I think I had better call mamma,” she deliberated to herself. “Though, if she sees nothing unusually the matter with Sarah Anne, she will only be angry with me.”

Proceeding to her mother’s chamber, Ethel knocked softly. Lady Sarah slept still, but the entrance aroused her.

“Mamma, I do not like to disturb you; I was unwilling to do so: but Sarah Anne is ill.”

“Ill again! And only last week she was in bed three days! Poor dear sufferer! Is it her chest again?”

“Mamma, she seems *unusually* ill. Otherwise I should not have disturbed you. I feared—I thought—you will be angry with me if I say, perhaps?”

“Say what? Don’t stand like a statue, Ethel.”

Ethel dropped her voice. “Dear mamma, suppose it should be the fever?”

For one startling moment, Lady Sarah felt as if a dagger had pierced her: the next, she turned upon Ethel. Fever for Sarah Anne! how dared she prophesy it? A low, common fever, confined to the poor of the town, and which had subsided; or, all but subsided! Was it likely to return again and come up here to attack her darling child? What did Ethel mean by it?

Ethel, the tears in her eyes, said she hoped it would prove to be only an ordinary headache; it was her love for Sarah Anne which awoke her fears. Lady Sarah proceeded to the sick-room; and Ethel followed. Her ladyship was not in the habit of observing caution, and spoke freely of the “fever” before Sarah Anne; apparently for the purpose of casting blame at Ethel.

Sarah Anne did not imbibe the fear; she ridiculed Ethel as her mother had done. For some hours Lady Sarah did not admit it either. She would have summoned medical advice at first, but that Sarah Anne, in her peevishness, protested she would not have a doctor. Later on she grew worse, and Mr. Snow was sent for. You saw him in his gig hastening to the house.

Lady Sarah came forward to receive him; Ethel, full of anxiety, near her. She was a thin woman, with a shrivelled face and a sharp red nose, her grey hair banded plainly under a close white net cap.

She grasped Mr. Snow’s arm. “You must save my child!”

“Higher aid permitting me,” the surgeon answered. “Why do you assume it to be fever? For the last six weeks I have been summoned by timid parents to a score of ‘fever’ cases; and when I have arrived in hot haste, they have turned out to be no fever at all.”

“*This* is the fever,” replied Lady Sarah. “Had I been more willing to admit that it was, you would have been sent for hours ago. It was Ethel’s fault. She suggested at daylight that it might be fever; and it made my darling girl so angry that she forbid my sending for advice. But she is worse now. Come and see her.”

Mr. Snow laid his hand upon Ethel’s head with a fond gesture, ere he turned to Lady Sarah. All Prior’s Ash loved Ethel Grame.

Tossing upon her uneasy bed, her face flushed, her hair floating untidily about it, lay Sarah Anne, shivering still. The doctor gave one glance at her: it was quite enough to satisfy him that Lady Sarah was not mistaken.

“Is it the fever?” impatiently asked Sarah Anne, unclosing her hot eyelids.

“If it is, we must drive it away again,” said the doctor cheerily.

“Why should the fever have come to *me*?” she rejoined, her tone rebellious.

“Why was I thrown from my horse last year, and broke my arm?” returned Mr. Snow. “These things come to all of us.”

“To break an arm is nothing—people always recover from that,” irritably answered Sarah Anne.

“And you will recover from the fever, if you will be quiet and reasonable.”

“I am so hot! My head is so heavy!”

Mr. Snow, who had called for water and a glass, was mixing a white powder which he had produced from his pocket. She took it without opposition, and then he lessened the weight of bed-clothes, and afterwards turned his attention to the chamber. It was close and hot; the sun, which had just burst forth brightly from the grey skies, shone full upon it.

“You have that chimney stuffed up!” he exclaimed.

“Sarah Anne will not allow it to be open,” said Lady Sarah. “She is sensitive to cold, dear child, and feels the slightest draught.”

Mr. Snow walked to the chimney, turned up his coat cuff and wristband, and pulled down a bag filled with shavings. Soot came with it, and covered his hand; but he did not mind that. He was as little given to ceremony as Lady Sarah to caution, and he went leisurely up to the wash-hand-stand to remove it.

“Now, if I catch that bag, or any other bag up there again, obstructing the air, I shall attack the bricks next time, and make a good big hole that the sky can be seen through. Of that I give you notice, my lady.”

He next pulled down the window at the top, behind the blind; but the room, at its best, did not find favour with him. “It is not airy; it is not cool,” he said. “Is there not a better ventilated room in the house? If so, she should be moved into it.”

“My room is cool,” interposed Ethel eagerly. “The sun never shines into it, Mr. Snow.”

It would appear that Ethel’s thus speaking must have reminded Mr. Snow that she was present. In the unceremonious manner that he had laid hands upon the chimney bag, he now laid them upon her shoulders, and marshalled her outside the door.

“You go downstairs, Miss Ethel. And do not come within a mile of this chamber again, until I give you leave to do so.”

“I will not be moved into Ethel’s room!” interposed Sarah Anne, imperiously and fretfully. “It is not furnished with half the comforts of mine. And it has only a bit of bedside carpet! I will not go there, Mr. Snow.”

“Now look you here, Miss Sarah Anne!” said the surgeon firmly. “I am responsible for bringing you well out of this illness; and I shall take my own way to do it. If not; if I am to be contradicted at every suggestion; Lady Sarah may summon some one else to attend you: I will not undertake it.”

“My darling, you shall not be moved to Ethel’s room,” cried my lady coaxingly: “you shall be moved into mine. It is larger than this, you know, Mr. Snow, with a thorough draught through it, if you choose to put the windows and door open.”

“Very well,” said Mr. Snow. “Let me find her in it when I come up again this evening. And if there’s a carpet on the floor, take it up. Carpets were never intended for bedrooms.”

He passed into one of the sitting-rooms with Lady Sarah when he descended. “What do you think of the case?” she eagerly asked.

“There will be some difficulty with it,” was the candid reply. “Lady Sarah, her hair must come off.”

“Her hair come off!” uttered Lady Sarah, aghast. “That it never shall! She has the loveliest hair! What is Ethel’s hair, compared with hers?”

“You heard the determination I expressed, Lady Sarah,” he quietly said.

“But Sarah Anne will never allow it to be done,” she returned, shifting the ground of remonstrance from her own shoulders. “And to do it in opposition to her would be enough to kill her.”

“It will not be done in opposition to her,” he answered. “She will be unconscious before it is attempted.”

Lady Sarah’s heart sank. “You anticipate that she will be dangerously ill?”

"In these cases there is always danger, Lady Sarah. But worse cases than— as I believe—hers will be, have recovered from it."

"If I lose her, I shall die myself!" she passionately uttered. "And, if she is to have it badly, she will die! Remember, Mr. Snow, how weak she has always been!"

"We sometimes find that weak constitutions battle best with an epidemic," he replied. "Many a sound one has it struck down and taken off; many a sickly one has struggled through it, and been the stronger for it afterwards."

"Everything shall be done as you wish," said Lady Sarah, speaking meekly in her great fear.

"Very well. There is one caution I would earnestly impress upon you: that of keeping Ethel from the sick-room."

"But there is no one to whom Sarah Anne is so accustomed, as a nurse," objected Lady Sarah.

"Madam!" burst forth the doctor in his heat, "would you subject Ethel to the risk of taking the infection, in deference to Sarah Anne's selfishness, or to yours? Better lose all your house contains than lose Ethel! She is its greatest treasure."

"I know how remarkably prejudiced you have always been in Ethel's favour!" resentfully spoke Lady Sarah.

"If I disliked her as much as I like her, I should be equally solicitous to guard her from the danger of infection," said Mr. Snow. "If you choose to put Ethel out of consideration, you cannot put Thomas Godolphin. In justice to him, she must be taken care of."

Lady Sarah opened her mouth to reply; but closed it again. Strange words had been hovering upon her lips: "If Thomas Godolphin were not blind, his choice would have fallen upon Sarah Anne; not upon Ethel." In her heart that was a sore topic of resentment: for she was quite alive to the advantages of a union with a Godolphin. Those words were suppressed; to give place to others.

"Ethel is in the house; and therefore must be liable to infection, whether she visits the room or not. I cannot fence her round with a wall, so that not a breath of tainted atmosphere shall touch her. I would if I could; but I cannot."

"I would send her from the house, Lady Sarah. At any rate, I forbid her to go near her sister. I don't want two patients on my hands, instead of one," he added in his quaint fashion, as he took his departure.

He was about to get into his gig, when he saw Mr. Godolphin advancing with a quick step. "Which of them is it who is seized?" inquired the latter, as he came up.

"Not Ethel, thank goodness!" responded the surgeon. "It is Sarah Anne. I have been recommending my lady to send Ethel from home. I should send her, were she a daughter of mine."

"Is Sarah Anne likely to have it dangerously?"

"I think so. Is there any necessity for you going to the house just now, Mr. Godolphin?"

Thomas Godolphin smiled. "There is no necessity for my keeping away. I do not fear the fever any more than you do."

He passed into the garden as he spoke, and Mr. Snow drove away. Ethel saw him, and came out to him.

"Oh, Thomas, do not come in! do not come!"

His only answer was to take her on his arm and enter. He threw open the drawing-room window, that as much air might circulate through the house as possible, and stood there with her, holding her before him.

"Ethel! what am I to do with you?"

"To do with me! What should you do with me, Thomas?"

"Do you know, my darling, that I cannot *afford* to let this danger touch you?"

"I am not afraid," she gently whispered.

He knew that: she had a brave, unselfish heart. But he was afraid for her, for he loved her with a jealous love; jealous of any evil that might come too near her.



“I should like to take you out of the house with me now, Ethel. I should like to take you far from this fever-tainted town. Will you come?”

She looked up at him with a smile, the colour rising to her face. “How could I, Thomas!”

Anxious thoughts were passing through the mind of Thomas Godolphin. We cannot put aside the *convenances* of life; though there are times when they press upon us with an iron weight. He would have given almost his own life to take Ethel from that house: but how was he to do it? No friend would be likely to receive her: not even his own sisters: they would have too much dread of the infection she might bring with her. He would fain have carried her off to some sea-breezed town, and watch over her and guard her there, until the danger should be over. None would have protected her more honourably than Thomas Godolphin. But—those *convenances* that the world has to bow down to! how would the step have agreed with them? Another thought, little less available for common use, passed through his mind.

“Listen, Ethel!” he whispered. “It would be only to procure a license, and half an hour spent at All Souls with Mr. Hastings. It could be all done, and you away with me before nightfall.”

She scarcely understood his meaning. Then, as it dawned upon her, she bent her head and her blushing face, laughing at the wild improbability.

“Oh, Thomas! Thomas! you are only joking. What would people say?”

“Would it make any difference to us what they said?”

“It could *not be*, Thomas,” she whispered seriously; “it is as an impossible vision. Were all other things meet, how could I run away from my sister, on her bed of sickness, to marry you?”

Ethel was right: and Thomas Godolphin felt that she was so. Punctilios must be observed, no matter at what cost. He held her fondly to his heart.

“If aught of ill should arise to you from your remaining here, I shall blame myself as long as life shall last. My love! my love!”

Mr. Godolphin could not linger. He must be at the bank, for Saturday was their most busy day of all the week: it was market-day at Prior’s Ash: though he had stolen a moment to leave it when the imperfect news reached him. George was in the private room alone when he entered. “Shall you be going to Lady Godolphin’s Folly this evening, George?” he inquired.

“The Fates permitting,” replied Mr. George, who was buried five fathoms deep in business; though he would have preferred to be five fathoms deep in pleasure. “Why?”

“You can tell my father that I am sorry not to be able to spend an hour with him, as I had promised. Lady Godolphin will not thank me to be running from Lady Sarah’s house to hers just now.”

“Thomas,” warmly spoke George, in an impulse of kindly feeling: “I do hope it will not extend itself to Ethel!”

“I hope not,” fervently breathed Thomas Godolphin.

## CHAPTER VI. CHARLOTTE PAIN

A fine old door of oak, a heavy door, standing deep within a portico, into which you might almost have driven a coach-and-six, introduced you to Ashlydyat. The hall was dark and small, the only light admitted to it being from mullioned windows of stained glass. Innumerable passages branched off from the hall. One peculiarity of Ashlydyat was, that you could scarcely enter a single room in it, but you must first go down a passage, short or long, to reach it. Had the house been designed by any architect with a head upon his shoulders and a little common sense with it, he might have made it a handsome mansion with large and noble rooms. As it was, the rooms were cramped and narrow, cornered and confined; and space was lost in these worthless passages.

In the least sombre room of the house, one with a large modern window (put into it by Sir George Godolphin to please my lady, just before that whim came into her head to build the Folly), opening upon a gravel walk, were two ladies, on the evening of this same Saturday. Were they sisters? They did not look like it. Charlotte Pain you have seen. She stood underneath the wax-lights of the chandelier, tall, commanding, dark, handsome; scarlet flowers in her hair, a scarlet bouquet in her corsage; her dress a rich cream-coloured silk interwoven with scarlet sprigs. She had in her hand a small black dog of the King Charles species, holding him up to the lights, and laughing at his anger. He was snarling fractiously, whether at the lights or the position might be best known to his mistress; whilst at her feet barked and yelped an ugly Scotch terrier, probably because *he* was not also held up: for dogs, like men, covet what they cannot obtain.

In a dress of pink gauze, with pretty pink cheeks, smooth features, and hazel eyes, her auburn hair interlaced with pearls, her height scarcely reaching to Miss Pain's shoulder, was Mrs. Verrall. She was younger than her sister: for sisters they were: a lady who passed through life with easy indifference, or appeared to do so, and called her husband "Verrall." She stood before the fire, a delicate white Indian screen in her hand, shading her face from the blaze. The room was hot, and the large window had been thrown open. So calm was the night, that not a breath of air came in to stir the wax-lights: the wind, which you heard moaning round the Rectory of All Souls in the morning, whirling the leaves and displeasing Mrs. Hastings, had dropped at sundown to a dead calm.

"Charlotte, I think I shall make Verrall take me to town with him! The thought has just come into my mind."

Charlotte made no answer. Possibly she did not hear the words, for the dogs were barking and she was laughing louder than ever. Mrs. Verrall stamped her foot petulantly, and her voice rang through the room.

"Charlotte, then, do you hear me? Put that horrible little brute down, or I will ring for both to be taken away! One might as well keep a screaming cockatoo! I say I have a great mind to go up to town with Verrall."

"Verrall would not take you," responded Charlotte, putting her King Charles on to the back of the terrier.

"Why do you think that?"

"He goes up for business only."

"It will be so dull for me, all alone!" complained Mrs. Verrall. "You in Scotland, he in London, and I moping myself to death in this gloomy Ashlydyat! I wish we had never taken it!"

Charlotte Pain bent her dark eyes in surprise upon her sister. "Since when have you found out that you do not like Ashlydyat?"

"Oh, I don't know. It is a gloomy place inside, especially if you contrast it with Lady Godolphin's Folly. And they are beginning to whisper of ghostly things being abroad on the Dark Plain!"

"For shame, Kate!" exclaimed Charlotte Pain. "Ghostly things! Oh, I see—you were laughing."

“Is it not enough to make us all laugh—these tales of the Godolphins? But I shall convert it into a pretext for not being left alone here when you and Verrall are away. Why do you go, Charlotte?” Mrs. Verrall added, in a tone which had changed to marked significance. “It is waste of time.”

Charlotte Pain would not notice the innuendo. “I never was in Scotland, and shall like the visit,” she said, picking up the King Charles again. “I enjoy fine scenery: you do not care for it.”

“Oh,” said Mrs. Verrall; “it is scenery that draws you, is it? Take you care, Charlotte.”

“Care of what?”

“Shall I tell you? You must not fly into one of your tempers and pull my hair. You are growing too fond of George Godolphin.”

Charlotte Pain gave no trace of “flying into a temper;” she remained perfectly cool and calm. “Well?” was all she said, her lip curling.

“If it would bring you any good; if it would end in your becoming Mrs. George Godolphin; I should say *well*; go into it with your whole heart and energy. But it will not so end; and your time and plans are being wasted.”

“Has he told you so much?” ironically asked Charlotte.

“Nonsense! There was one in possession of the field before you, Charlotte—if my observation goes for anything. *She* will win the race; you will not even be in at the distance chair. I speak of Maria Hastings.”

“You speak of what you know nothing,” carelessly answered Charlotte Pain, a self-satisfied smile upon her lips.

“Very well. When it is all over, and you find your time *has* been wasted, do not say I never warned you. George Godolphin may be a prize worth entering the lists for; I do not say he is not: but there is no chance of your winning him.”

Charlotte Pain tossed the dog upwards and caught him as he descended, a strange look of triumph on her brow.

“And—Charlotte,” went on Mrs. Verrall in a lower tone, “there is a proverb, you know, about two stools. We *may* fall to the ground if we try to sit upon both at once. How would Dolf like this expedition to Scotland, handsome George making one in it?”

Charlotte’s eyes flashed now. “I care no more for Dolf than I care for—not half so much as I care for this poor little brute. Don’t bring up Dolf to me, Kate!”

“As you please. I would not mix myself up with your private affairs for the world. Only a looker-on sometimes sees more than those engaged in the play.”

Crossing the apartment, Mrs. Verrall traversed the passage that led from it, and opened the door of another room. There sat her husband at the dessert-table, taking his wine alone, and smoking a cigar. He was a slight man, twice the age of his wife, his hair and whiskers yellow, and his eyes set deep in his head: rather a good-looking man on the whole, but a very silent one. “I want to go to London with you,” said Mrs. Verrall.

“You can’t,” he answered.

She advanced to the table, and sat down near him. “There’s Charlotte going one way, and you another—”

“Don’t stop Charlotte,” he interrupted, with a meaning nod.

“And I must be left alone in the house; to the ghosts and dreams and shadows they are inventing about that Dark Plain. I *will* go with you, Verrall.”

“I should not take you with me to save the ghosts running off with you,” was Mr. Verrall’s answer, as he pressed the ashes from his cigar on a pretty shell, set in gold. “I go up *incog*. this time.”

“Then I’ll fill the house with guests,” she petulantly said.

“Fill it, and welcome, if you like, Kate,” he replied. “But, to go to London, you must wait for another opportunity.”

“What a hateful thing business is! I wish it had never been invented!”

“A great many more wish the same. And have more cause to wish it than you,” he drily answered. “Is tea ready?”

Mrs. Verrall returned to the room she had left, to order it in. Charlotte Pain was then standing outside the large window, leaning against its frame, the King Charles lying quietly in her arms, and her own ears on the alert, for she thought she heard advancing footsteps; and they seemed to be stealthy ones. The thought—or, perhaps, the wish—that it might be George Godolphin, stealing up to surprise her, flashed into her mind. She bent her head, and stroked the dog, in the prettiest unconsciousness of the approaching footsteps.

A hand was laid upon her shoulder. “Charlotte!”

She cried out—a sharp, genuine cry of dismay—dropped the King Charles, and bounded into the room. The intruder followed her.

“Why, Dolf!” uttered Mrs. Verrall in much astonishment. “Is it you?”

“It is not my ghost,” replied the gentleman, holding out his hand. He was a little man, with fair hair, this Mr. Rodolf Pain, cousin to the two ladies. “Did I alarm you, Charlotte?”

“Alarm me!” she angrily rejoined. “You must have sprung from the earth.”

“I have sprung from the railway station. Where is Verrall?”

“Why have you come down so unexpectedly?” exclaimed Mrs. Verrall.

“To see Verrall. I return to-morrow.”

“Verrall goes up to-morrow night.”

“I know he does. And that is why I have come down.”

“You might have waited to see him in London,” said Charlotte, her equanimity not yet restored.

“It was necessary for me to see him before he reached London. Where shall I find him, Mrs. Verrall?”

“In the dining-room,” Mrs. Verrall replied. “What can you want with him so hurriedly?”

“Business,” laconically replied Rodolf Pain, as he left the room in search of Mr. Verrall.

It was not the only interruption. Ere two minutes had elapsed, Lady Godolphin was shown in, causing Mrs. Verrall and her sister almost as much surprise as did the last intruder. She had walked over from the Folly, attended by a footman, and some agitation peeped out through her usual courtly suavity of manner, as she asked whether Charlotte Pain could be ready to start for Scotland on the morrow, instead of on Monday.

“To-morrow will be Sunday!” returned Charlotte.

“I do not countenance Sunday travelling, if other days can be made use of,” continued Lady Godolphin. “But there are cases where it is not only necessary, but justifiable; when we are glad to feel the value of those Divine words, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.’ Fever has broken out again, and I shall make use of to-morrow to escape from it. We start in the morning.”

“I shall be ready and willing to go,” replied Charlotte.

“It has appeared at Lady Sarah Grame’s,” added Lady Godolphin, “one of the most unlikely homes it might have been expected to visit. After this, none of us can feel safe. Were that fever to attack Sir George, his life, in his present reduced state, would not be worth an hour’s purchase.”

The dread of fever had been strong upon Lady Godolphin from the first; but never had it been so keen as now. Some are given to this dread in an unwonted degree: whilst an epidemic lasts (of whatever nature it may be) they live in a constant state of fear and pain. It is death they fear: being sent violently to the unknown life to come. I know of only one remedy for this: to be at peace with God: death or life are alike then. Lady Godolphin had not found it.

“Will Mr. Hastings permit his daughter to travel on a Sunday?” exclaimed Mrs. Verrall, the idea suddenly occurring to her, as Lady Godolphin was leaving.

“That is my business,” was my lady’s frigid answer. It has been said that she brooked not interference in the slightest degree.

It certainly could not be called the business of Mr. Hastings. For the travellers were far away from Prior's Ash the next morning before he had received an inkling of the departure.

## CHAPTER VII. BROOMHEAD

The contrast between them was great. You could see it most remarkably as they sat together. Both were beautiful, but of a different type of beauty. There are some people—and they bear a very large proportion to the whole—to whom the human countenance is as a sealed book. There are others for whom that book stands open to its every page. The capacity for reading character—what is it? where does it lie? Phrenologists call it, not inaptly, comparison.

There stands a man before you, a stranger; seen now for the first time. As you glance at him you involuntarily shrink within yourself, and trench imaginary walls around you, and say: That man is a bad man. Your eyes fall upon another—equally a stranger until that moment—and your honest heart flows out to him. You could extend to him the hand of confidence there and then, for that man's countenance is an index to his nature, and you *know* that you may trust him to the death. In what part of the face does this index seat itself? In the eyes? the mouth? the features separately? or in the whole?

Certainly in the whole. To judge of temper alone, the eye and mouth—provided you take them in repose—are sure indications; but, to judge of what a man is, you must look to the whole. You don't know precisely where to look for it—any more than do those know who cannot see it at all. You cannot say that it lies in the forehead, the eyebrows, the eyes, or the chin. You see it, and that is the most you can tell. Beauty and ugliness, in themselves, have nothing to do with it. An ugly countenance may, and often does, bear its own innate goodness, as certainly as that one of beauty sometimes bears its own repulsion. Were there certain unerring signs to judge by, the whole human race might become readers of character: but that will never be, so long as the world shall last.

In like manner, as we cannot tell precisely where nature's marks lie, so are we unable to tell where lies the capacity to read them. Is it a faculty? or an instinct? This I do know: that it is one of the great gifts of God. Where the power exists in an eminent degree, rely upon it its possessor is never deceived in his estimation of character. It is born with him into the world. As a little child he has his likes and dislikes to persons: and sometimes may be whipped for expressing them too strongly. As he grows up, the faculty—instinct—call it what you will—is ever in exercise; at rest when he sleeps; never at any other time.

Those who do not possess the gift (no disparagement to them: they may possess others, equally or more valuable) cavil at it—laugh at it—do not believe in it. Read what people are by their face? Nonsense! *they* know better. Others, who admit the fact, have talked of “reducing it to a science,” whatever that may mean; of teaching it to the world, as we teach the classics to our boys. It may be done, say they. Pos sibly. We all acknowledge the wonders of this most wonderful age. Fishes are made to talk; fleas to comport themselves as gentlemen; monkeys are discovered to be men—or men monkeys—which is it? a shirt is advertised to be made in four minutes by a new sewing machine. We send ourselves in photograph to make morning calls. The opposite ends of the world are brought together by electric telegraph. Chloroform has rendered the surgeon's knife something rather agreeable than otherwise. We are made quite at home with “spirits,” and ghosts are reduced to a theory. Not to mention other discoveries connected with the air, earth, and water, which would require an F.R.S. to descant upon. Wonderful discoveries of a wonderful age! Compare the last fifty years with the previous fifty years; when people made their wills before going to London, and flocked to the fair to see the learned pig point out the identical young woman who had had the quarrel with her sweetheart the previous Sunday afternoon! It is not my province to dispute these wonders: they may, or may not, be facts; but when you attempt to reduce this great gift to a “science,” the result will be failure. Try and do so. Set up a school for it; give lectures; write books; beat it into heads; and then say to your pupils, “Now that you are accomplished, go out into the world and use your eyes and read your fellow-men.” And the pupil will, perhaps, think he does read them; but, the first

deduction he draws, will be the last—a wrong one. Neither art nor science can teach it; neither man nor woman can make it theirs by any amount of labour: where the faculty is not theirs by divine gift, it cannot be made to exist by human skill.

A reader of character would have noted the contrast between those two young ladies as they stood there: he would have trusted the one; he would not have trusted the other. And yet, Charlotte Pain had her good qualities also. She was kind-hearted in the main, liberal by nature, pleasant tempered, of a spirit firm and resolute, fitted to battle with the world and to make good her own way in it. But she was not truthful; she was not high principled; she was not one, whom I—had I been George Godolphin—would have chosen for my wife, or for my bosom friend.

Maria Hastings was eminent in what Charlotte Pain had not. Of rare integrity; highly principled; gentle, and refined; incapable of deceit; and with a loving nature that could be true unto death! But she was a very child in the ways of the world; timid, irresolute, unfitted to battle with its cares; swayed easily by those she loved; and all too passionately fond of George Godolphin.

Look at them both now—Charlotte, with her marked, brilliant features; her pointed chin, telling of self-will; her somewhat full, red lips; the pose of the head upon her tall, firm form: her large eyes, made to dazzle more than to attract; her perfectly self-possessed, not to say free manners!—All told of power; but not of innate refinement. Maria had too much of this refinement—if such a thing may be said of a young and gentle lady. She was finely and sensitively organized; considerate and gentle. It would be impossible for Maria Hastings to hurt wilfully the feelings of a fellow-creature. To the poorest beggar in the street she would have been courteous, considerate, almost humble. Not so much as a word of scorn could she cast to another, even in her inmost heart. The very formation of her hands would betray how sensitive and refined was her nature. And that is another thing which bears its own character—the hand; if you know how to read it. Her hands were of exceeding beauty; long, slender, taper fingers, of delicate aspect from a physical point of view. Every motion of those hands—and they were ever restless—was a word; every unconscious, nervous movement of the frail, weak-looking fingers had its peculiar characteristic. Maria Hastings had been accused of being vain of her hands; of displaying them more than was necessary: but the accusation, utterly untrue, was made by those who understood her but little, and her hands less. Such hands are rare: and it is as well that they are so: for they indicate a nature far removed from the common; a timid, intellectual, and painfully sensitive nature, which the rude world can neither understand, nor, perhaps, love. The gold, too much refined, is not fitted for ordinary uses. Charlotte Pain's hands were widely different: firm, plump, white; not small, and never moving unconsciously of themselves.

These pretty hands resting upon her knee, sat Maria Hastings, doing nothing. Maria—I grieve to have it to say of her in this very utilitarian age—was rather addicted to doing nothing. In her home, the Rectory, Maria was reprov'd on that score more than on any other. It is ever so with those who live much in the inward life. Maria would fall into a train of thought—and be idle.

Master Reginald Hastings would have lost his bet—that George Godolphin would be in Scotland a week after they arrived there—had he found any one to take it. Ten or eleven days had elapsed, and no George had come, and no news of his intention of coming. It was not for *this*, to be moped to death in an old Scotch country-house, that Charlotte Pain had accepted the invitation of Lady Godolphin. Careless George—careless as to the import any of his words might bear—had said to her when they were talking of Scotland: “I wish you were to be of the party; to help us while away the dull days.” Mr. George had spoken in gallantry—he was too much inclined so to speak, not only to Charlotte—without ever dreaming that his wish would be fulfilled literally. But, when Lady Godolphin afterwards gave the invitation—Sir George had remarked aloud at the family dinner-table that Miss Pain had fished for it—Charlotte accepted it with undisguised pleasure. In point of fact, Mr. George, had the choice been given him, would have preferred having Maria Hastings to himself there.

But he did not come. Eleven days, and no George Godolphin. Charlotte began to lay mental plans for the arrival of some sudden telegraphic message, demanding her immediate return to Prior's Ash; and Maria could only hope, and look, and long in secret.

It was a gloomy day; not rainy, but enveloped in mist, almost as bad as rain. They had gone out together, after luncheon, these two young ladies, but the weather drove them in again. Charlotte was restless and peevish. She stirred the fire as if she had a spite against it; she dashed off a few bars at the piano, on which instrument she was a skilful player; she cut half the leaves of a new periodical and then flung it from her; she admired herself in the pier-glass; she sat down opposite Maria Hastings and her stillness; and now she jumped up again and violently rang the bell, to order her desk to be brought to her. Maria roused herself from her reverie.

"Charlotte, what is the matter? One would think you had St. Vitus's dance."

"So I have—if to twitch all over with the fidgets is to have it. How you can sit so calm, so unmoved, is a marvel to me. Maria, if I were to be another ten days in this house, I should go mad."

"Why did you come to it?"

"I thought it might be a pleasant change. Ashlydyat grows gloomy sometimes. How was I to know my lady led so quiet a life here? She was always talking of 'Broomhead,' 'Broomhead!' I could not possibly suppose it to be so dull a place as this!"

"It is not dull in itself. The house and grounds are charming."

"Oh dear!" uttered Charlotte. "I wonder what fogs were sent for?"

"So do I," laughed Maria. "I should have finished that sketch, but for this mist."

"No saddle-horses!" went on Charlotte. "I shall forget how to ride. I never heard of such a thing as a country-house without saddle-horses. Where was the use of bringing my new cap and habit? Only to have them crushed!"

Maria seemed to have relapsed into thought. She made no reply. Presently Charlotte began again.

"I wish I had my dogs here! Lady Godolphin would not extend the invitation even to King Charlie. She said she did not like dogs. What a heathen she must be! If I could only see my darling pet, King Charlie! Kate never mentioned him once in her letter this morning!"

The words aroused Maria to animation. "Did you receive a letter this morning from Prior's Ash? You did not tell me."

"Margery brought it to my bedroom. It came last night, I fancy, and lay in the letter-box. I do not think Sir George ought to keep that letter-box entirely under his own control," continued Charlotte. "He grows forgetful. Some evenings I know it is never looked at."

"I have not observed that Sir George is forgetful," dissented Maria.

"You observe nothing. I say that Sir George declines daily: both bodily and mentally. I see a great difference in him, even in the short time that we have been here. He is not the man he was."

"He has his business letters regularly; and answers them."

"Quite a farce to send them," mocked handsome Charlotte. "Thomas Godolphin is ultra-filial."

"What news does Mrs. Verrall give you?" inquired Maria.

"Not much. Sarah Anne Grame is out of immediate danger, and the fever has attacked two or three others."

"In Lady Sarah's house?"

"Nonsense! No. That sickly girl, Sarah Anne, took it because I suppose she could not help it: but there's not much fear of its spreading to the rest of the house. If they had been going to have it, it would have shown itself ere this. It has crept on to those pests of cottages by the Pollards. The Bonds are down with it."

"The worst spot it could have got to!" exclaimed Maria. "Those cottages are unhealthy at the best of times."

"They had a dinner-party on Saturday," continued Charlotte.



“At the cottages!”

Charlotte laughed. “At Ashlydyat. The Godolphins were there. At least, she mentioned Bessy, and your chosen cavalier, Mr. George.”

Maria’s cheek flushed crimson. Charlotte Pain was rather fond of this kind of satire. Had she believed there was anything serious between George Godolphin and Maria, she would have bitten her tongue out rather than allude to it. It was not Charlotte’s intention to spare him to Maria Hastings.

Charlotte Pain at length settled herself to her desk. Maria drew nearer to the fire, and sat looking into it, her cheek leaning on her hand: sat there until the dusk of the winter’s afternoon fell upon the room. She turned to her companion.

“Can you see, Charlotte?”

“Scarcely. I have just finished.”

A few minutes, and Charlotte folded her letters. Two. The one was directed to Mrs. Verrall; the other to Rodolf Pain, Esquire.

“I shall go up to dress,” she said, locking her desk.

“There’s plenty of time,” returned Maria. “I wonder where Sir George and Lady Godolphin are? They did not intend to stay out so late.”

“Oh, when those ancient codgers get together, talking of their past times and doings, they take no more heed how time goes than we do at a ball,” carelessly spoke Charlotte.

Maria laughed. “Lucky for you, Charlotte, that Lady Godolphin is not within hearing. ‘Ancient codgers!’”

Charlotte left the room, carrying her letters with her. Maria sat on, some time longer—and then it occurred to her to look at her watch. A quarter to five.

A quarter to five! Had she been asleep? No, only dreaming. She started up, threw wide the door, and was passing swiftly into the dark ante-chamber. The house had not been lighted, and the only light came from the fire behind Maria—revealing her clearly enough, but rendering that ante-chamber particularly dark. Little wonder, then, that she gave a scream when she found herself caught in some one’s arms, against whom she had nearly run.

“Is it you, Sir George? I beg your pardon.”

Not Sir George. Sir George would not have held her to him with that impassioned fervour. Sir George would not have taken those fond kisses from her lips. It was another George, just come in from his long day’s journey. He pressed his face, cold from the fresh night air, upon her warm one. “My dearest! I knew you would be the first to welcome me!”

Dark enough around, it was still; but a light as of some sunny Eden, illumined the heart of Maria Hastings. The shock of joy was indeed great. Every vein was throbbing, every pulse tingling, and George Godolphin, had he never before been sure that her deep and entire love was his, must have known it then.

A servant was heard approaching with lights. George Godolphin turned to the fire, and Maria turned and stood near him.

“Did any of you expect me?” he inquired.

“Oh no!” impulsively answered Maria. “I can scarcely now believe that it is you in reality.”

He looked at her and laughed; his gay laugh: as much as to say that he had given her a tolerable proof of his reality. She stood, in her pretty, timid manner, before the fire, her eyelids drooping, and the flame lighting up her fair face.

“Is my father at home?” he asked, taking off his overcoat. He had walked from the railway station, a mile or two distant.

“He went out with Lady Godolphin this morning to pay a visit to some old friends. I thought they would have returned long before this.”

“Is he getting strong, Maria?”

Maria thought of what Charlotte Pain had said, and hesitated. "He appears to me to be better than when we left Prior's Ash. But he is far from strong."

The servant finished lighting the chandelier and retired. George Godolphin watched the door close, and then drew Maria before him, gazing down at her.

"Let me look at you, my darling! Are you glad to see me?"

Glad to see him! The tears nearly welled up with the intensity of her emotion. "I had begun to think you were not coming at all," she said, in a low tone. "Charlotte Pain received a letter from Mrs. Verrall this morning, in which you were mentioned as—"

Charlotte herself interrupted the conclusion of the sentence. She came in, dressed for dinner. George turned to greet her, his manner warm; his hands outstretched.

"Margery said Mr. George was here! I did not believe her!" cried Charlotte, resigning her hands to him. "Did you come on the telegraph-wires?"

"They would not have brought me quickly enough to *your* presence," cried Mr. George.

Charlotte laughed gaily. "I was just prophesying you would not come at all. Mrs. Verrall did not inform me that you were about to start, amidst her other items of intelligence. Besides, I know that you are rather addicted to forgetting your promises."

"What items had Mrs. Verrall to urge against me?" demanded George.

"I forget them now. Nothing I believe. Is Prior's Ash alive still?"

"It was, when I left it."

"And the fever, George?" inquired Maria.

"Fever? Oh, I don't know much about it."

"As if fevers were in his way!" ironically cried Charlotte Pain. "He troubles himself no more about fevers than does Lady Godolphin."

"Than Lady Godolphin would like to do, I suppose you mean, Miss Pain?" he rejoined.

Maria was looking at him wistfully—almost reproachfully. He saw it, and turned to her with a smile. "Has it in truth attacked the cottages down by the Pollards?" she asked.

George nodded. He was not so ignorant as he appeared to be. "Poor Bond had it first; and now two of his children are attacked. I understand Mr. Hastings declares it is a judgment upon the town, for not looking better after the hovels and the drainage."

"Has Bond recovered?" asked Maria.

"No."

"Not recovered?" she exclaimed quickly.

"He is dead, Maria."

She clasped her hands, shocked at the news. "Dead. Leaving that large, helpless family! And Sarah Anne Grame?—is she out of danger?"

"From the violence of the fever. But she is in so dangerously weak a state from its effects, that it will be next to a miracle if she recovers. Lady Sarah is half out of her mind. She had prayers put up for Sarah Anne on Sunday. Pretty Ethel has escaped! to the delight of Prior's Ash in general, and of Thomas in particular. What carriage is that?" suddenly broke off George, as the sound of one approaching was heard.

It proved to be Sir George's, bringing home himself and my lady. George hastened to meet them as they entered the hall, his handsome face glowing, his bright chestnut hair taking a golden tinge in the lamp-light, his hands held out. "My dear father!"

The old knight, with a cry of glad surprise, caught the hands, and pressed them to his heart. My lady advanced with her welcome. She bent her tinted cheek forwards, by way of greeting, and Mr. George touched it with his delicate lips—lightly, as became its softened bloom.

"So you have found your way to us, George! I expected you would have done so before."

"Did you, madam?"

“Did we?” cried the knight, taking up the word. “Listen to that vain George! He pretends to ignore the fact that there was an attraction here. Had a certain young lady remained at Prior’s Ash, I expect you would not have given us much of your company at Broomhead. If Miss Charlotte—”

“Did you call me, Sir George?” interrupted Charlotte, tripping forward from the back of the hall, where she and Maria stood, out of sight, but within hearing.

“No, my dear, I did not call you,” replied Sir George Godolphin.

## CHAPTER VIII. A SNAKE IN THE GRASS

Seated on a camp-stool, amidst a lovely bit of woodland scenery, was Maria Hastings. The day, beautifully bright, was warm as one in September; delightful for the pleasure-seekers at Broomhead, but bad for the fever at Prior's Ash. Maria was putting some finishing touches to a sketch—she had taken many since she came—and Mr. George Godolphin and Charlotte Pain watched her as they pleased, or took sauntering strolls to a distance.

Lady Godolphin was as fond of Broomhead as the Godolphins were of Ashlydyat. Certainly Broomhead was the more attractive home of the two. A fine house of exquisite taste; with modern rooms and modern embellishments; and when she invited the two young ladies to accompany her on a visit to it, she was actuated as much by a sense of exultation at exhibiting the place to them, as by a desire for their companionship, though she did like and desire the companionship. Lady Godolphin, who never read, and never worked; in short, never did anything; was obliged to have friends with her to dissipate her ennui and cheat time. She liked young ladies best; for they did not interfere with her own will, and were rarely exacting visitors.

But she required less of this companionship at Broomhead. There she knew every one, and every one knew her. She was sufficiently familiar with the smallest and poorest cottage to take an interest in its ill-doings and its short-comings; at least, as much interest as it was possible to the nature of Lady Godolphin to take. Old acquaintances dropped in without ceremony and remained the morning with her, gossiping of times past and present: or she dropped into their houses, and remained with them. Of gaiety there was none: Sir George's state of health forbade it: and in this quiet social intercourse—which Charlotte Pain held in especial contempt—the young visitors were not wanted. Altogether they were much at liberty, and went roaming where they would, under the protection of Mr. George Godolphin.

He had now been a week at Broomhead: flirting with Charlotte, giving stolen minutes to Maria. A looker-on might have decided that Miss Pain was the gentleman's chief attraction: for, in public, his attentions were principally given to her. *She* may be pardoned for estimating them at more than they were worth: but she could very well have welcomed any friendly wind that would have wafted away Maria, and have kept her away. They knew, those two girls, that their mutual intercourse was of a hollow nature; their paraded friendship, their politeness, rotten at the core. Each was jealous of the other; and the one subject which filled their minds was never alluded to in conversation. Either might have affirmed to the other, "You are aware that I watch you and George: my jealous eyes are upon your every movement, my jealous ears are ever open." But these avowals are not made in social life, and Charlotte and Maria observed studied courtesy, making believe to be mutually unconscious: knowing all the time that the consciousness existed in a remarkable degree. It was an artificial state of things.

"How dark you are putting in those trees!" exclaimed Charlotte Pain.

Maria paused, pencil in hand; glanced at the trees opposite, and at the trees on paper. "Not too dark," she said. "The grove is a heavy one."

"What's that queer-looking thing in the corner? It is like a half-moon, coming down to pay us a visit."

Maria held out her sketch at arm's distance, laughing merrily. "You do not understand perspective, Charlotte. Look at it now."

"Not I," said Charlotte. "I understand nothing of the work. They tried to teach me when I was a child, but I never could make a straight line without the ruler. After all, where's the use of it? The best-made sketch cannot rival its model—nature."

“But sketches serve to remind us of familiar places, when we are beyond their reach,” was Maria’s answer. “I love drawing.”

“Maria draws well,” observed George Godolphin, from his swinging perch on the branch of a neighbouring tree.

She looked up at him, almost gratefully. “This will be one of the best sketches I have taken here,” she said. “It is so thoroughly picturesque: and that farm-house, under the hill, gives life to the picture.”

Charlotte Pain cast her eyes upon the house in the distance over the green field, to which she had not before vouchsafed a glance. A shade of contempt crossed her face.

“Call *that* a farm-house! I should say it was a tumble-down old cottage.”

“It is large for a cottage; and has a barn and a shed round it,” returned Maria. “I conclude that it was a farm some time.”

“It is not inhabited,” said Charlotte.

“Oh, yes it is. There is a woman standing at the door. I have put her into my sketch.”

“And her pipe also?” cried George.

“Her pipe!”

George took his own cigar from his mouth, as he answered. “She is smoking, that woman. A short pipe.”

Maria shaded her eyes with her hand, and gazed attentively. “I—really—do—think—she—is!” she exclaimed slowly. “What a strange thing!”

“A Welshwoman married to a Scotch husband, possibly,” suggested Charlotte. “The Welsh smoke.”

“I’ll make her a Welshwoman,” said Maria gaily, “with a man’s coat, and a man’s hat. But, there’s—there’s another now. George, it is Margery!”

“Yes,” said Mr. George composedly. “I saw her go in half an hour ago. How smart she is! She must be paying morning calls.”

They laughed at this, and watched Margery. A staid woman of middle age, who had been maid to the late Mrs. Godolphin. Margery dressed plainly, but she certainly looked smart to-day, as the sun’s rays fell upon her. The sun was unusually bright, and Charlotte Pain remarked it, saying it made her eyes ache.

“Suspiciously bright,” observed George Godolphin.

“Suspiciously?”

He flirited the ashes from his cigar with his finger. “Suspicious of a storm,” he said. “We shall have it, ere long. See those clouds. They look small and inoffensive; but they mean mischief.”

Charlotte Pain strolled away over the meadows towards the side path on which Margery was advancing. George Godolphin leaped from his seat, apparently with the intention of following her. But first of all he approached Maria, and bent to look at her progress.

“Make the farm—as you call it—very conspicuous, Maria, if you are going to keep the sketch as a memento,” said he.

“Is it not a farm?”

“It was, once; until idleness suffered it to drop through.”

“Why should I make it particularly conspicuous?” she continued.

There was no reply, and she looked quickly up. A peculiar expression, one which she did not understand, sat upon his face.

“If we had a mind to cheat the world, Maria, we might do so, by paying a visit to that house.”

“In what way?”

“I might take you in Maria Hastings, and bring you out Mrs. George Godolphin.”

“What do you mean?” she inquired, completely puzzled.

Mr. George laughed. "The man who lives there, Sandy Bray, has made more couples one than a rustic parson. Some people call him a public nuisance; others say he is a convenience, as it is three miles to the nearest kirk. He goes by the nickname of Minister Bray. Many a lad and lassie have stolen in there, under cover of the twilight, and in five minutes have come forth again, married, the world being none the wiser."

"Is it the place they call Gretna Green?" inquired Maria in much astonishment.

"No, it is not Gretna Green. Only a place of the same description, and equally serviceable."

"But such marriages cannot be binding!"

"Indeed they are. You have surely heard of the Scotch laws?"

"I have been told that any one can marry people in Scotland. I have heard that the simple declaration of saying you take each other for man and wife constitutes a marriage."

"Yes; if said before a witness. Would you like to try it, Maria?"

The colour mantled to her face as she bent over her drawing. She smiled at the joke, simply shaking her head by way of answer. And Mr. George Godolphin went off laughing, lighting another cigar as he talked. Overtaking Charlotte Pain just as Margery came up, he accosted the latter.

"How grand you are, Margery! What's agate?"

"Grand!" returned Margery. "Who says it? What is there grand about me?"

"That shawl displays as many colours as a kaleidoscope. We thought it was a rainbow coming along. Did it arrive in an express parcel last night from Paisley?"

"It isn't me that has money to spend upon parcels!" retorted Margery. "I have too many claims dragging my purse at both ends, for that."

A faithful servant was Margery, in spite of her hard features, and her stern speech. Scant of ceremony she had always been, and scant of ceremony she would remain. In fact, she was given to treating the younger branches of the Godolphins, Mr. George included, very much as she had treated them when they were children. They knew her sterling worth, and did not quarrel with her severe manners.

"When you have half a dozen kin pulling at you, 'I want this!' from one, and 'I want that!' from another, and the same cry running through all, it isn't much money you can keep to spend on shawls," resumed Margery. "I was a fool to come here; that's what I was! When the master said to me, 'You had better come with us, Margery,' I ought to have answered, 'No, Sir George, I'm better away.'"

"Well, what is the grievance, Margery?" George asked, while Charlotte Pain turned from one to the other in curiosity.

"Why, they are on at me for money, that's what it is, Mr. George. My lady sent for me this morning to say she intended to call and see Selina to-day. Of course I knew what it meant—that I was to go and give them a hint to have things tidy—for, if there's one thing my lady won't do, it is to put her foot into a pigsty. So I threw on my shawl, that you are laughing at, and went. There was nothing the matter with the place, for a wonder; but there was with them. Selina, she's in bed, ill—and if she frets as she's fretting now, she won't get out of it in a hurry. Why did she marry the fellow? It does make me so vexed!"

"What has she to fret about?" continued George.

"What does she always have to fret about?" retorted Margery. "His laziness, and the children's ill-doings. They go roaming about the country, here, there, and everywhere, after work, as they say, after places; and then they get into trouble and untold worry, and come home or send home for money to help them out of it! One of them, Nick—and a good name for him, say I!—must be off into Wales to those relations of Bray's; and he has been at some mischief there, and is in prison for it, and is now committed for trial. And the old woman has walked all the way here to get funds from them, to pay for his defence. The news has half killed Selina."

"I said she was a Welshwoman," interrupted Charlotte Pain. "She was smoking, was she not, Margery?"

“She’s smoking a filthy short pipe,” wrathfully returned Margery. “But for that, I should have said she was a decent body—although it’s next to impossible to understand her tongue. She puts in ten words of Welsh to two of English. Of course they have no money to furnish for it; it wouldn’t be them, if they had; so they are wanting to get it out of me. Fifteen or twenty pounds! My word! They’d like me to end my days in the workhouse.”

“You might turn a deaf ear, Margery,” said George.

“I know I might; and many a hundred times have I vowed I would,” returned Margery. “But there’s she in her bed, poor thing, sobbing and moaning, and asking if Nick is to be quite abandoned. The worse a lad turns out, the more a mother clings to him—as it seems to me. Let me be here, or let me be at Ashlydyat, I have no peace for their wants. By word of mouth or by letter they are on at me for ever.”

“If ‘Nick’ has a father, why can he not supply him?” asked Charlotte.

“It’s a sensible question, Miss Pain,” said the woman. “Nick’s father is one of those stinging-nettles that only encumber the world, doing no good for themselves nor for anybody else. ‘Minister’ Bray, indeed! it ought to be something else, I think. Many a one has had cause to rue the hour that he ‘ministered’ for them!”

“How does he minister?—what do you mean?” wondered Charlotte.

“He marries folks; that’s his ne’er-do-well occupation, Miss Pain. Give him a five-shilling piece, and he’d marry a boy to his grandmother. I’m Scotch by birth—though it’s not much that I have lived in the land—but, I do say, that to suffer such laws to stand good, is a sin and a shame. Two foolish children—and many of those that go to him are no better—stand before him for a half-minute, and he pronounces them to be man and wife! And man and wife they are, and must remain so, till the grave takes one of them: whatever their repentance may be when they wake up from their folly. It’s just one of the blights upon bonny Scotland.”

Margery, with no ceremonious leave-taking, turned at the last words, and continued her way. George Godolphin smiled at the blank expression displayed on Charlotte Pain’s countenance. Had Margery talked in Welsh, as did the old woman with the pipe, she could not have less understood her.

“You require the key, Charlotte,” said he. “Shall I give it to you? Margery was my mother’s maid, as you may have heard. Her sister, Selina, was maid to the present Lady Godolphin: not of late years: long and long before she ever knew my father. It appears the girl, Selina, was a favourite with her mistress; but she left her, in spite of opposition from all quarters, to marry Mr. Sandy Bray. And has, there’s no doubt, been rueing it ever since. There are several children, of an age now to be out in the world; but you heard Margery’s account of them. I fear they do pull unconscionably at poor Margery’s purse-strings.”

“Why does she let them do so?” asked Charlotte.

Mr. George opened his penknife and ran the point of it through his cigar, ere he answered. “Margery has a soft place in her heart. As I believe most of us have—if our friends could but give us credit for it.”

“How strange the two sisters should live, the one with your father’s first wife, the other with his second!” exclaimed Charlotte, when she had given a few moments to thought. “Were they acquainted with each other?—the ladies.”

“Not in the least. They never saw each other. I believe it was through these women being sisters that my father became acquainted with the present Lady Godolphin. He was in Scotland with Janet, visiting my mother’s family; and Margery, who was with them, brought Janet to that very house, there, to see her sister. Mrs. Campbell—as she was, then—happened to have gone there that day: and that’s how the whole thing arose. People say there’s a fatality in all things. One would think it must be so. Until that day, Mrs. Campbell had not been in the house for two or three years, and would not be likely to go into it again for two or three more.”

“Is Bray a *mauvais sujet*?”

George lifted his eyebrows. "I don't know that there's much against him, except his incorrigible laziness: that's bad enough when a man has children to keep. Work he will not. Beyond the odds and ends that he gets by the exercise of what he is pleased to call his trade, the fellow earns nothing. Lady Godolphin is charitable to the wife; and poor Margery, as she says, finds her purse drawn at both ends."

"I wondered why Margery came to Scotland," observed Charlotte, "not being Lady Godolphin's maid. What *is* Margery's capacity in your family? I have never been able to find out."

"It might puzzle herself to tell you what it is, now. After my mother's death, she waited on my sisters: but when they left Ashlydyat, Margery declined to follow them. She would not leave Sir George. She is excessively attached to him, almost as much so as she was to my mother. That quitting Ashlydyat, ourselves first, and then my father, was a blow to Margery," George added in a dreamy tone. "She has never been the same since."

"It was Margery, was it not, who attended upon Sir George in his long illness?"

"I do not know what he would have done without her," spoke George Godolphin in a tone that betrayed its own gratitude. "In sickness she is invaluable: certainly not to be replaced, where she is attached. Lady Godolphin, though in her heart I do not fancy she likes Margery, respects her for her worth."

"I cannot say I like her," said Charlotte Pain. "Her manners are too independent. I have heard her order you about very cavalierly."

"And you will hear her again," said George Godolphin. "She exercised great authority over us when we were children, and she looks upon us as children still. Her years have grown with ours, and there is always the same distance as to age between us. I speak of the younger amongst us: to Thomas and Janet she is ever the respectful servant; in a measure also to Bessy: of myself and Cecil she considers herself partial mistress."

"If they are so poor as to drain Margery of her money, how is it they can live in that house and pay its rent?" inquired Charlotte, looking towards the building.

"It is Bray's own. The land, belonging to it, has been mortgaged three deep long ago. He might have been in a tolerably good position, had he chosen to make the most of his chances: he was not born a peasant."

"Who is this?" exclaimed Charlotte.

A tall, slouching man, with red hair and heavy shoulders, was advancing towards them from the house. George turned to look.

"That is Bray himself. Look at the lazy fellow! You may tell his temperament from his gait."

George Godolphin was right. The man was not walking along, but sauntering; turning to either side and bending his head as if flowers lay in his path and he wished to look at them: his hands in his pockets, his appearance anything but fresh and neat. They watched him come up. He touched his hat then, and accosted Mr. George Godolphin.

"My service to ye, sir. I didna know you were in these parts."

"So you are still in the land of the living, Bray!" was Mr. George's response. "How is business?"

"Dull as a dyke," returned Bray. "Times are bad. I've hardly took a crown in the last three months, sir. I shall have to emigrate, if this is to go on."

"I fear you would scarcely find another country so tolerant to your peculiar calling, Bray," said George, some mockery in his tone. "And what would the neighbourhood do without you? It must resign itself to single blessedness."

"The neighbourhood dunna come to me. Folk go over to the kirk now: that has come into fashion; and I'm going down. 'Twas different in past times. A man would give a ten-pun note then to have things done neatly and quietly. But there's fresh notions and fresh havers; and, for all the good they have done me, I might as well be out of the world. Is this Miss Cecil?"



The last question was put abruptly, the man turning himself full upon Charlotte Pain, and scanning her face. George Godolphin was surprised out of an answer: had he taken a moment for reflection, he might have deemed the question an impertinence, and passed it by.

“Miss Cecilia is not in Scotland.”

“I thought it might be her,” said the man; “for Miss Cecil’s looks are a country’s talk, and I have heard much of them. I see now; there’s nought of the Godolphin *there*. But it’s a bonny face, young lady: and I dare say there’s those that are finding it so.”

He shambled on, with a gesture of the hand by way of salutation. Charlotte Pain did not dislike the implied compliment. “How can this man marry people?” she exclaimed. “He is no priest.”

“He can, and he does marry them; and is not interfered with, or forbidden,” said George Godolphin. “At least, he did do so. By his own account, his patronage seems to be on the decline.”

“Did he marry them openly?”

“Well—no; I conclude not. If people found it convenient to marry openly, they would not go to him. And why they should go to him at all, puzzles me, and always has: for, the sort of marriage that he performs can be performed by any one wearing a coat, in Scotland, or by the couple themselves. But he has acquired a name, ‘Minister Bray;’ and a great deal lies in a name for ladies’ ears.”

“Ladies!” cried Charlotte scornfully. “Only the peasants went to him, I am sure.”

“Others have gone as well as peasants. Bray boasts yet of a fifty-pound note, once put into his hand for pronouncing the benediction. It is a ceremony that we are given to be lavish upon,” added George, laughing. “I have heard of money being grudged for a funeral, but I never did for a wedding.”

“Were I compelled to be a resident of this place, I should get married myself, out of sheer ennui, or do something else as desperate,” she exclaimed.

“You find it dull?”

“It has been more tolerable since you came,” she frankly avowed.

George raised his hat, and his blue eyes shot a glance into hers. “Thank you, Charlotte.”

“Why were you so long in coming? Do you know what I had done? I had written a letter to desire Mrs. Verrall to recall me. Another week of it would have turned me melancholy. Your advent was better than nobody’s.”

“Thank you again, mademoiselle. When I promise—”

“Promise,” she warmly interrupted. “I have learnt what your promises are worth. Oh, but, George, tell me—What was it that you and Lady Godolphin were saying yesterday? It was about Ethel Grame. I only caught a word here and there.”

“Thomas wishes Lady Godolphin would invite Ethel here for the remainder of their stay. He thinks Ethel would be all the better for a change, after being mured up in that fever-tainted house. But, don’t talk of it. It was only a little private negotiation that Thomas was endeavouring to carry out upon his own account. He wrote to me, and he wrote to my lady. Ethel knows nothing of it.”

“And what does Lady Godolphin say?”

George drew in his lips. “She says No. As I expected. And I believe she is for once sorry to say it, for pretty Ethel is a favourite of hers. But she retains her dread of the fever. Her argument is, that, although Ethel has escaped it in her own person, she might possibly bring it here in her boxes.”

“Stuff!” cried Charlotte Pain. “Sarah Anne might do so; but I do not see how Ethel could. I wonder Thomas does not marry, and have done with it! He is old enough.”

“And Ethel young enough. It will not be delayed long now. The vexatious question, concerning residence, must be settled in some way.”

“What residence? What is vexatious about it?” quickly asked Charlotte, curiously.

“There is some vexation about it, in some way or other,” returned George with indifference, not choosing to speak more openly. “It is not my affair; it lies between Thomas and Sir George. When Thomas comes here next week—”

“Is Thomas coming next week?” she interrupted.

“That is the present plan. And I return.”

She threw her flashing eyes at him. They said—well, they said a good deal: perhaps Mr. George could read it. “You had better get another letter of recall written, Charlotte,” he resumed in a tone which might be taken for jest or earnest, “and give me the honour of your escort.”

“How you talk!” returned she peevishly. “As if Lady Godolphin would allow me to go all that way under *your* escort! As if I would go myself!”

“You might have a less safe one, Charlotte mia,” cried Mr. George somewhat saucily. “No lion should come near you, to eat you up.”

“George,” resumed Charlotte, after a pause, “I wish you would tell me whether Mrs. Verrall—Good Heavens! what’s that?”

Sounds of distress were sounding in their ears. They turned hastily. Maria Hastings, her camp-stool overturned, her sketching materials scattered on the ground, was flying towards them, calling upon George Godolphin to save her. There was no mistaking that she was in a state of intense terror.

Charlotte Pain wondered if she had gone mad. She could see nothing to alarm her. George Godolphin cast his rapid glance to the spot where she had sat, and could see nothing, either. He hastened to meet her, and caught her in his arms, into which she literally threw herself.

Entwined round her left wrist was a small snake, or reptile of the species, more than a foot long. It looked like an eel, writhing there. Maria had never come into personal contact with anything of the sort: but she remembered what had been said of the deadly bite of a serpent; and terror completely overmastered her.

He seized it and flung it from her; he laid her poor terrified face upon his breast, that she might there sob out her fear; he cast a greedy glance at her wrist, where the thing had been: and his own face had turned white with emotion.

“My darling, there is no injury,” he soothingly whispered. “Be calm! be calm!” And, utterly regardless of the presence of Charlotte Pain, he laid his cheek against hers, as if to reassure her, and kept it there.

Less regardless, possibly, had he seen Charlotte Pain’s countenance. It was dark as night. The scales were rudely torn from her eyes: and she saw, in that moment, how fallacious had been her own hopes touching George Godolphin.

## CHAPTER IX.

### MR. SANDY'S "TRADE."

"What ever is the matter?"

The interruption came from Lady Godolphin. Charlotte Pain had perceived her approach, but had ungraciously refrained from intimating it to her companions. My lady, a coquettish white bonnet shading her delicate face, and her little person enveloped in a purple velvet mantle trimmed with ermine, was on her way to pay a visit to her ex-maid, Selina. She surveyed the group with intense astonishment. Maria Hastings, white, sobbing, clinging to George Godolphin in unmistakable terror; Mr. George soothing her in rather a marked manner; and Charlotte Pain, erect, haughty, her arms folded, her head drawn up, giving no assistance, her countenance about as pleasant as a demon's my lady had once the pleasure of seeing at the play. She called out the above words before she was well up with them.

George Godolphin did not release Maria; he simply lifted his head. "She has been very much terrified, Lady Godolphin; but no harm is done. A reptile of the snake species fastened itself on her wrist. I have flung it off."

He glanced towards the spot where stood Lady Godolphin, as much as to imply that he had flung the offender *there*. My lady shrieked, caught up her petticoats, we won't say how high, and leaped away nimbly.

"I never heard of such a thing!" she exclaimed. "A snake! What should bring snakes about, here?"

"Say a serpent!" broke from the pale lips of Charlotte Pain.

Lady Godolphin did not detect the irony, and felt really alarmed. Maria, growing calmer, and perhaps feeling half ashamed of the emotion which fear had caused her to display, drew away from George Godolphin. He would not suffer that, and made her take his arm. "I am sorry to have alarmed you all so much," she said. "Indeed, I could not help it, Lady Godolphin."

"A serpent in the grass!" repeated her ladyship, unable to get over the surprise. "How did it come to you, Maria? Were you lying down?"

"I was sitting on the camp-stool, there; busy with my drawing," she answered. "My left hand was hanging down, touching, I believe, the grass. I began to feel something cold at my wrist, but at first did not notice it. Then I lifted it and saw that dreadful thing wound round it. I could not shake it off. Oh, Lady Godolphin! I felt—I hardly know how I felt—almost as if I should have died, had there been no one near to run to."

Lady Godolphin, her skirts still lifted, the tips of her toes touching the path gingerly, to which they had now hastened, and her eyes alert, lest the serpent should come trailing forth from any unexpected direction, remarked that it was a mercy Maria had escaped with only fright. "You seem to experience enough of that," she said. "Don't faint, child."

Maria's lips parted with a sickly smile, which she meant should be a brave one. She was both timid and excitable; and, if terror did attack her, she felt it in no common degree. What would have been but a passing fear to another, forgotten almost as soon as felt, was to her agony. Remarkably susceptible, was she, to the extreme of pleasure and the extreme of pain. "There is no fear of my fainting," she answered to Lady Godolphin. "I never fainted in my life."

"I am on my road to see an old servant who lives in that house," said Lady Godolphin, pointing to the tenement, little thinking how far it had formed their theme of discourse. "You shall come with me and rest, and have some water."

"Yes, that is the best thing to be done," said George Godolphin. "I'll take you there, Maria, and then I'll have a hunt after the beast. I ought to have killed him at the time."

Lady Godolphin walked on, Charlotte Pain at her side. Charlotte's lip was curling.

The house door, to which they were bound, stood open. Across its lower portion, as if to prevent the exit of children, was a board, formerly placed there for that express purpose. The children were grown now and scattered, but the board remained; the inmates stepping over it at their will. Sandy Bray, who must have skulked back to his home by some unseen circuit, made a rush to the board at sight of Lady Godolphin, and pulled it out of its grooves, leaving the entrance clear. But for his intense idleness, he, knowing she was coming, would have removed it earlier.

They entered upon a large room, half sitting-room, half kitchen, its boarded floor very clean. The old Welshwoman, a cleanly, well-mannered, honest-faced old woman, was busy knitting then, and came forward, curtsying: no vestige of pipe to be seen or smelt. "Selina was in bed," Bray said, standing humbly before Lady Godolphin. "Selina had heard bad news of one of the brats, and had worried herself sick over it, as my lady knew it was in the stupid nature of Selina to do. Would my lady be pleased to step up to see her?"

Yes; my lady would be pleased to do so by-and-by. But at present she directed a glass of water to be brought to Miss Hastings. Bray brought the water in a cracked yellow cup.

"Eh, but there is some of them things about here," he said, when the cause of alarm was mentioned. "I think there must be a nest of 'em. They are harmless, so far as I know."

"Why don't you find the nest?" asked Mr. George Godolphin.

"And what good, if I did find 'em, sir?" said he.

"Kill the lot," responded George.

He strode out of the house, Bray following in his wake, to look for the reptile which had caused the alarm. Bray was sure nothing would come of it: the thing had had time to get clear away.

In point of fact, nothing did come of it. George Godolphin could not decide upon the precise spot where they had stood when he threw away the reptile; and, to beat over the whole field, which was extensive, would have been endless work. He examined carefully the spot where Maria had sat, both he and Bray, but could see no trace of anything alarming. Gathering up her treasures, including the camp-stool, he set off with them. Bray made a feeble show of offering to bear the stool. "No," said George, "I'll carry it myself: it would be too much trouble for you."

Charlotte Pain stood at the door, watching as they approached, her rich cheek glowing, her eye flashing. Never had she looked more beautiful, and she bent her sweetest smile upon Mr. George, who had the camp-stool swinging on his back. Lady Godolphin had gone up to the invalid. Maria, quite herself again, came forward.

"No luck," said George. "I meant to have secured the fellow and put him under a glass case as a memento: but he has been too cunning. Here's your sketch, Maria; undamaged. And here are the other rattletraps."

She bent over the drawing quite fondly. "I am glad I had finished it," she said. "I can do the filling-in later. I should not have had courage to sit in that place again."

"Well, old lady," cried George in his free-and-easy manner, as he stood by the Welshwoman, and looked down at her nimble fingers, "so you have come all the way from Wales on foot, I hear! You put some of us to shame."

She looked up and smiled pleasantly. She understood English better than she could speak it.

"Not on foot all the way," she managed to explain. "On foot to the great steamer, and then on foot again after the steamer landed her in Scotland. Not less than a hundred miles of land, taking both ways together."

"Oh, I see!" said George, perceiving that Margery had taken up a wrong impression. "But you must have been a good time doing that?"

"She had the time before her," she answered, more by signs than words, "and her legs were used to the roads. In her husband's lifetime she had oftentimes accompanied him on foot to different parts of England, when he went there with his droves of cattle. It was in those journeys that she learnt to talk English."

George laughed at her idea of talking English. "Did you learn the use of the pipe also in the journeys, old lady?"

She certainly had; for she nodded fifty times in answer, and looked delighted at his divination. "But she was obliged to put up with cheap tobacco now," she said: "and had a trouble to get that!"

George pulled out a supply of Turkey from some hidden receptacle of his coat. "Did she like that sort?"

She looked at it with the eye of a connoisseur, touched it, smelt it, and finally tasted it. "Ah, yes! that was good; very good; too good for her."

"Not a bit of it," said George. "It's yours, old lady. There! It will keep your pipe going, on the road home."

When fully convinced that he meant it in earnest, she seized his hand, shook it heartily, and plunged into a Welsh oration. It was cut short in the midst. She caught sight of Bray, coming in at the house door, and smuggled the present out of sight amidst her petticoats. Had Mr. Sandy seen it, she might have derived little benefit from it herself.

Time lagged, while they waited for Lady Godolphin. The conversation fell upon Bray's trade—as the man was wont to call it: though who or what led to the topic none of them could remember. He recounted two or three interesting incidents; one, of a gentleman marrying a young wife and being shot dead the next day by her friends. She was an heiress, and they had run away from Ireland. But that occurred years and years ago, he added. Would the ladies like to see the room?

He opened a door at the back of the kitchen, traversed a passage, and entered a small place, which could only be called a room by courtesy. They followed, wonderingly. The walls were whitewashed, the floor was of brick, and the small skylight, by which it was lighted, was of thick coarse glass, embellished with green nobs. What with the lowering sky, and this lowering window, the room wore an appearance of the gloomiest twilight. No furniture was in it, except a table (or something that served for one) covered with a green baize cloth, on which lay a book. The contrast from the kitchen, bright with its fire, with the appliances of household life, to this strange comfortless place made them shiver. "A fit place for the noose to be tied in!" cried irreverent George, surveying it critically.

Bray took the words literally. "Yes," said he. "It's kept for that purpose alone. It is a bit out of the common, and that pleases the women. If I said the words in my kitchen, it might not be so satisfying to them, ye see. It does not take two minutes to do," he added, taking his stand behind the table and opening the book. "I wish I had as many pieces of gold as I have done it, here, in my time."

Charlotte Pain took up the words defiantly. "It is impossible that such a marriage can stand. It is not a marriage."

"Deed, but it is, young lady."

"It cannot be legal," she haughtily rejoined. "If it stands good for this loose-lawed country, it cannot do so for others."

"Ay, how about that?" interrupted George, still in his light tone of ridicule. "Would it hold good in England?"

Minister Bray craned his long neck towards them, over the table, where they stood in a group. He took the hand of George Godolphin, and that of Charlotte Pain, and put them to together. "Ye have but to say, 'I take you, young lady, to be my lawful wife;' and, 'I take you, sir, to be my husband,' in your right names. I'd then pronounce ye man and wife, and say the blessing on it; and the deed would be done, and hold good all over the world."

Did Mr. Sandy Bray anticipate that he might thus extemporise an impromptu ceremony, which should bring some grist to his empty mill? Not improbably: for he did not release their hands, but kept them joined together, looking at both in silence.

George Godolphin was the first to draw his hand away. Charlotte had only stared with wondering eyes, and she now burst into a laugh of ridicule. "Thank you for your information," said Mr. George. "There's no knowing, Bray, but I may call your services into requisition some time."

"Where are you?" came the soft voice of Lady Godolphin down the passage. "We must all hurry home: it is going to rain. Charlotte, are you there? Where have you all gone to? Charlotte, I say?"

Charlotte hastened out. Lady Godolphin took her arm at once, and walked with a quick step through the kitchen into the open air, nodding adieu to the old Welshwoman. My lady herself, her ermine, her velvets, possibly her delicately-bloomed complexion, all shrank from the violence of a storm. Storms, neither of life nor of weather, had ever come too near Lady Godolphin. She glanced upward at the threatening and angry sky, and urged Charlotte on.

"Can you walk fast? So lovely a morning as it was!"

"Here comes one of the servants," exclaimed Charlotte. "With umbrellas, no doubt. How he runs!"

My lady lifted her eyes. Advancing towards them with fleet foot, as if he were running for a wager, came a man in the Godolphin livery. If umbrellas had been the object of his coming, he must have dropped them on his way, for his arms swung beside him, and his hands were empty.

"My lady," cried the man, almost as much out of breath as Lady Godolphin: "Sir George is taken ill."

My lady stopped then. "Ill!" she repeated. "Ill in what way?"

"Margery has just found him lying on the floor of his room, my lady. We have got him on to the bed, but he appears to be quite insensible. Andrew has gone to the doctor."

"Hasten to the house there, and acquaint Mr. George Godolphin," said my lady, pointing to Bray's.

But Charlotte had already gone on the errand. She left Lady Godolphin's arm and started back with all speed, calling out that she would inform Mr. George Godolphin. My lady, on her part, had sped on in the direction of Broomhead, with a fleeter foot than before.

Leaving the man standing where he was. "Which of the two am I to follow, I wonder?" he soliloquized. "I suppose I had better keep up with my lady."

When Charlotte Pain had left Mr. Sandy Bray's match-making room, at my lady's call, George Godolphin turned with a rapid, impulsive motion to Maria Hastings, caught her hand, and drew her beside him, as he stood before Bray. "Maria, she will fetter me in spite of myself!" he said in a hoarse whisper. "Let me put it out of her power."

Maria looked at him inquiringly. Well she might!

"Be mine now; here," he rapidly continued, bending his face so that she alone might hear. "I swear that I never will presume upon the act, until it can be more legally solemnized. But it will bind us to each other beyond the power of man or woman to set aside."

Maria turned red, pale, any colour that you will, and quietly drew her hand from that of Mr. George Godolphin. "I do not quite know whether you are in earnest or in jest, George. You will allow me to infer the latter."

Quiet as were the words, calm as was the manner, there was that about her which unmistakably showed Mr. George Godolphin that he might not venture further to forget himself; if, indeed, he had not been in jest. Maria, a true gentlewoman at heart, professed to assume that he had been.

"I beg your pardon," he murmured. "Nay, let me make my peace, Maria." And he took her hand again, and held it in his. Minister Bray leaned towards them with an earnest face. Resigning the hope of doing any little stroke of business on his own account, he sought to obtain some information on a different subject.

"Sir, would ye be pleased to tell me a trifle about your criminal laws, over the border? One of my ne'er-do-weels has been getting into trouble there, and they may make him smart for it."

George Godolphin knew that he alluded to the ill-starred Nick. "What are the circumstances?" he asked. "I will tell you what I can."

Sandy entered upon the story. They stood before him, absorbed in it, for Maria also listened with interest, when an exclamation caused them to turn. Maria drew her hand from George Godolphin's with a quick gesture. There stood Charlotte Pain.

Stood with a white face, and a flashing, haughty eye. "We are coming instantly," said George. "We shall catch you up." For he thought she had reappeared to remind them.

"It is well," she answered. "And it may be as well to haste, Mr. George Godolphin, if you would see your father alive."

"What?" he answered. But Charlotte had turned again and was gone like the wind. With all his speed, he could not catch her up until they had left the house some distance behind them.

## CHAPTER X. THE SHADOW

In the heart of the town of Prior's Ash was situated the banking-house of Godolphin, Crosse, and Godolphin. Built at the corner of a street, it faced two ways. The bank and its doors were in High Street, the principal street of the town; the entrance to the dwelling-house was in Crosse Street, a new, short street, not much frequented, which had been called after Mr. Crosse, who, at the time it was made, lived at the bank. There were only six or eight houses in Crosse Street; detached private dwellings; and the street led to the open country, and to a pathway, not a carriage-way, that would, if you liked to follow it, take you to Ashlydyat.

The house attached to the bank was commodious: its rooms were large and handsome, though few in number. A pillared entrance, gained by steps, led into a small hall. On the right of this hall was the room used as a dining-room, a light and spacious apartment, its large window opening on to a covered terrace, where plants were kept; and that again opened to a sloping lawn, surrounded with shrubs and flowers. This room was hung with fine old pictures, brought from Ashlydyat. Lady Godolphin did not care for pictures; she preferred delicately-papered walls; and very few of the Ashlydyat paintings had been removed to the Folly. On the left of the hall were the rooms belonging to the bank. At the back of the hall, beyond the dining-room, a handsome well-staircase led to the apartments above, one of which was a fine drawing-room. From the upper windows at the back of the house a view of Lady Godolphin's Folly might be obtained, rising high and picturesque; also of the turret of Ashlydyat, grey and grim. Not of Ashlydyat itself: its surrounding trees concealed it.

This dining-room, elegant and airy, and fitted up with exquisite taste, was the favourite sitting-room of the Miss Godolphins. The drawing-room above, larger and grander, less comfortable, and looking on to the High Street, was less used by them. In this lower room there sat one evening Thomas Godolphin and his eldest sister. It was about a month subsequent to that day, at the commencement of this history, when you saw the hounds throw off, and a week or ten days since Sir George Godolphin had been found insensible on the floor of his room at Broomhead. The attack had proved to be nothing but a prolonged fainting-fit; but even that told upon Sir George in his shattered health. It had caused plans to be somewhat changed. Thomas Godolphin's visit to Scotland had been postponed, for Sir George was not strong enough for business consultations, which would have been the chief object of his journey; and George Godolphin had not yet returned to Prior's Ash.

Thomas and Miss Godolphin had been dining alone. Bessy was spending the evening at All Souls' Rectory: she and Mr. Hastings were active workers together in parish matters; and Cecil was dining at Ashlydyat. Mrs. Verrall had called in the afternoon and carried her off. Dessert was on the table, but Thomas had turned from it, and was sitting over the fire. Miss Godolphin sat opposite to him, nearer the table, her fingers busy with her knitting, on which fell the rays of the chandelier. They were discussing plans earnestly and gravely.

"No, Thomas, it would not do," she was saying. "We must go. One of the partners always has resided here at the bank. Let business men be at their place of business."

"But look at the trouble, Janet," remonstrated Thomas Godolphin. "Consider the expense. You may be no sooner out than you may have to come back again."

Janet turned her strangely-deep eyes on her brother. "Do not make too sure of that, Thomas."

"How do you mean, Janet? In my father's precarious state we cannot, unhappily, count upon his life."

"Thomas, I am sure—I seem to see—that he will not be with us long. No: and I am contemplating the time when he shall have left us. It would change many things. Your home would then be Ashlydyat."



Thomas Godolphin smiled. As if any power would keep *him* from inhabiting Ashlydyat when he should be master. “Yes,” he answered. “And George would come here.”

“There it is!” said Janet. “Would George live here? I do not feel sure that he would.”

“Of course he would, Janet. He would live here with you, as I do now. That is a perfectly understood thing.”

“Does he so understand it?”

“He understands it, and approves it.”

Janet shook her head. “George likes his liberty; he will not be content to settle down to the ways of a sober household.”

“Nay, Janet, you must remember one thing. When George shall come to this house, he comes, so to say, as its master. He will not, of course, interfere with your arrangements; he will fall in with them readily; but neither will he, nor must he, be under your control. To attempt anything of the sort again would not do.”

Janet knitted on in silence. She had essayed to keep Master George in hand when they first came to the bank to live there: and the result was that he had chosen a separate home, where he could be entirely *en garçon*.

“Eh me!” sighed Janet. “If young men could but see the folly of their ways—as they see them in after-life!”

“Therefore, Janet, I say that it would be exceedingly inadvisable for you to quit the house,” continued Thomas Godolphin, leaving her remark unnoticed. “It might be, that before you were well out of it, you must return to it.”

“I see the inconvenience also; the uncertainty,” she answered. “But there is no help for it.”

“Yes there is. Janet, I wish you would let me settle it.”

“How would you settle it?”

“By bringing Ethel here. On a visit to you.”

Janet laid down her knitting. “What do you mean? That there should be two mistresses in the house, she and I? No, no, Thomas; the daftest old wife in the parish would tell you that does not do.”

“Not two mistresses. You would be sole mistress, as you are now: I and Ethel your guests. Janet, indeed it would be the better plan. By the spring we should see how Sir George went on. If he improved, then the question could be definitively settled: and either you or I would take up our residence elsewhere. If he does not improve, I fear, Janet, that spring will have seen the end.”

Something in the words appeared particularly to excite Janet’s attention. She gazed at Thomas as if she would search him through and through. “By spring!” she repeated. “When, then, do you contemplate marrying Ethel?”

“I should like her to be mine by Christmas,” was the low answer.

“Thomas! And December close upon us!”

“If not, some time in January,” he continued, paying no attention to her surprise. “It is so decided.”

Miss Godolphin drew a long breath. “With whom is it decided?”

“With Ethel.”

“You would marry a wife without a home to bring her to? Had thoughtless George told me that he was going to do such a thing, I could have believed it of him. Not of you, Thomas.”

“Janet, the home shall no longer be a barrier to us. I wish you would receive Ethel here as your guest.”

“It is not likely that she would come. The first thing a married woman looks for is to have a home of her own.”

Thomas smiled. “Not come, Janet? Have you yet to learn how unassuming and meek is the character of Ethel? We have spoken of this plan together, and Ethel’s only fear is, lest she should ‘be in Miss Godolphin’s way.’ Failing to carry out this project, Janet—for I see you are, as I thought

you would be, prejudiced against it—I shall hire a lodging as near to the bank as may be, and there I shall take Ethel.”

“Would it be seemly that the heir of Ashlydyat should go into lodgings on his marriage?” asked Janet, grief and sternness in her tone.

“Things are seemly or unseemly, Janet, according to circumstances. It would be more seemly for the heir of Ashlydyat to take temporary lodgings while waiting for Ashlydyat, than to turn his sisters from their home for a month, or a few months, as the case might be. The pleasantest plan would be for me to bring Ethel here: as your guest. It is what she and I should both like. If you object to this, I shall take her elsewhere. Bessy and Cecil would be delighted with the arrangement: they are fond of Ethel.”

“And when children begin to come, Thomas?” cried Miss Godolphin in her old-fashioned, steady, Scotch manner. She had a great deal of her mother about her.

Thomas’s lips parted with a quaint smile. “Things will be decided, one way or the other, months before children shall have had time to arrive.”

Janet knitted a whole row before she spoke again. “I will take a few hours to reflect upon it, Thomas,” she said then.

“Do so,” he replied, rising and glancing at the timepiece. “Half-past seven! What time will Cecil expect me? I wish to spend half an hour with Ethel. Shall I go for Cecil before, or afterwards?”

“Go for Cecil at once, Thomas. It will be better for her to be home early.”

Thomas Godolphin went to the hall-door and looked out upon the night. He was considering whether he need put on an overcoat. It was a bright moonlight night, warm and genial. So he shut the door, and started. “I wish the cold would come!” he exclaimed, half aloud. He was thinking of the fever, which still clung obstinately to Prior’s Ash, showing itself fitfully and partially in fresh places about every third or fourth day.

He took the foot-path, down Crosse Street: a lonely way, and at night especially unfrequented. In one part of it, as he ascended near Ashlydyat, the pathway was so narrow that two people could scarcely walk abreast without touching the ash-trees growing on either side and meeting overhead. A murder had been committed on this spot a few years before: a sad tale of barbarity, offered to a girl by one who professed to be her lover. She lay buried in All Souls’ churchyard; and he within the walls of the county prison where he had been executed. Of course the rumour went that her ghost “walked” there, the natural sequence to these dark tales; and, what with that, and what with the loneliness of the place, few could be found in it after dark.

Thomas Godolphin went steadily on, his thoughts running upon the subject of his conversation with Janet. It is probable that but for the difficulty touching a residence, Ethel would have been his in the past autumn. When anything should happen to Sir George, Thomas would be in possession of Ashlydyat three months afterwards; such had been the agreement with Mr. Verrall when he took Ashlydyat. Not in his father’s lifetime would Thomas Godolphin (clinging to the fancies and traditions which had descended with the old place) consent to take up his abode as master of Ashlydyat; but no longer than was absolutely necessary would he remain out of it as soon as it was his own. George would then remove to the bank, which would still be his sister’s home, as it was now. In the event of George’s marrying, the Miss Godolphins would finally leave it: but George Godolphin did not, as far as people saw, give indications that he was likely to marry. In the precarious state of Sir George’s health—and it was pretty sure he would soon either get better or worse—these changes might take place any day: therefore it was not desirable that the Miss Godolphins should leave the bank, and that the trouble and expense of setting up and furnishing a house for them should be incurred. Of course *they* could not go into lodgings. Altogether, if Janet could only be brought to see it, Thomas’s plan was the best—that his young bride should be Janet’s guest for a short time.

It was through the upper part of this dark path, which was called the Ash-tree Walk, that George Godolphin had taken Maria Hastings, the night they had left Lady Godolphin’s dinner-table to visit the

Dark Plain. Thomas, in due course, arrived at the end of the walk, and passed through the turnstile. Lady Godolphin's Folly lay on the right, high and white and clear in the moonbeams. Ashlydyat lay to the left, dark and grey, and almost hidden by the trees. Grey as it was, Thomas looked at it fondly: his heart yearned to it: and it was to be the future home of himself and Ethel!

"Holloa! who's this? Oh, I beg your pardon, Mr. Godolphin!"

The speaker was Snow, the surgeon. He had come swiftly upon Thomas Godolphin, turning the corner round the ash-trees from the Dark Plain. That he had been to Ashlydyat was certain, for the road led nowhere else. Thomas did not know that illness was in the house.

"Neither did I," said Mr. Snow in answer to the remark, "until an hour ago, when I was sent for in haste."

A thought crossed Thomas Godolphin. "Not a case of fever, I hope!"

"No. I think that's leaving us. There has been an accident at Ashlydyat to Mrs. Verrall. At least, what might have been an accident, I should rather say," added the surgeon, correcting himself. "The injury is so slight as not to be worth the name of one."

"What has happened?" asked Thomas Godolphin.

"She managed to set her sleeve on fire: a white lace or muslin sleeve, falling below the silk sleeve of her gown. In standing near a candle, the flame caught it. But now, look at that young woman's presence of mind! Instead of wasting moments in screams, or running through the house from top to bottom, as most people would have done, she instantly threw herself down upon the rug, and rolled herself in it. That's the sort of woman to go through life."

"Is she much burnt?"

"Pooh! Many a child gets a worse burn a dozen times in its first dozen years. The arm between the elbow and the wrist is slightly scorched. It's nothing. They need not have sent for me. The application of a little cold water will take out all the fire. Your sister Cecilia was ten times more alarmed than Mrs. Verrall."

"I am truly glad it is no worse!" said Thomas Godolphin. "I feared fever might have found its way there."

"That is taking its departure; as I think. And, the sooner it goes, the better. It has been capricious as the smiles of a coquette. How strange it is, that not a soul, down by those Pollard pigsties, should have had it, except the Bonds!"

"It is equally strange that, in many houses, it should have attacked only one inmate, and spared the rest. What do you think now of Sarah Anne Grame?"

Mr. Snow shook his head, and his voice grew insensibly low. "In my opinion she is sinking fast. I found her worse this afternoon; weaker than she has been at all. Lady Sarah said, 'If she could get her to Ventnor?'—'If she could get her to Hastings?' But the removal would kill her: she'd die on the road. It will be a terrible blow to Lady Sarah, if it does come: and—though it may seem harsh to say it—a retort upon her selfishness. Did you know that they used to make Ethel head nurse, while the fever was upon her?"

"No!" exclaimed Thomas Godolphin.

"They did, then. My lady inadvertently let it out to-day. Dear child! If she had caught it, I should never have forgiven her mother, whatever you may have done. Good night. I have a dozen visits now to pay before bedtime."

"Worse!" soliloquized Thomas Godolphin, as he stepped on. "Poor, peevish Sarah Anne! But—I wonder," he hesitated as the thought struck him, "whether, if the worst should come, as Snow seems to anticipate, it would put off Ethel's marriage? What with one delay and another—"

Thomas Godolphin's voice ceased, and his heart stood still. He had turned the corner, to the front of the ash-tree grove, and stretching out before him was the Dark Plain, with its weird-like bushes, so like graves, and—*its Shadow*, lying cold and still in the white moonlight. Yes! there surely

lay the Shadow of Ashlydyat. The grey archway rose behind it; the flat plain extended out before it, and the Shadow was between them, all too distinctly visible.

The first shock over, Thomas Godolphin's pulses coursed on again. He had seen that Shadow before in his lifetime, but he halted to gaze at it again. It was very palpable. The bier, as it looked in the middle, a mourner at the head, a mourner at the foot, each—as a spectator could fancy—with bowed heads. In spite of the superstition touching this strange Shadow in which Thomas Godolphin had been brought up, he looked round now for some natural explanation of it. He was a man of intellect, a man of the world, a man who played his full share in the practical business of everyday life: and such men are not given to acknowledging superstitious fancies in this age of enlightenment, no matter what bent may have been given to their minds in childhood.

Therefore Thomas Godolphin ranged his eyes round and round in the air, and could see nothing that would solve the mystery. "I wonder whether it be possible that certain states of the atmosphere should give out these shadows?" he soliloquized. "But—if so—why should it invariably appear in that one precise spot; and in no other? Could Snow have seen it, I wonder?"

He walked on towards Ashlydyat, his head always turned, looking at the Shadow. "I am glad Janet does not see it! It would frighten her into a belief that my father's end was near," came his next thought.

Mrs. Verrall, playing the invalid, lay on a sofa, her auburn hair somewhat ruffled, her pretty pink cheeks flushed, her satin slippers peeping out; altogether challenging admiration. The damaged arm, its silk sleeve pinned up, was stretched out on a cushion, a small delicate cambric handkerchief, saturated with water, resting lightly on the burn. A basin of water stood near, with a similar handkerchief lying in it, and Mrs. Verrall's maid was at hand to change the handkerchiefs as might be required. Thomas Godolphin drew a chair near to Mrs. Verrall, and listened to the account of the accident, giving her his full sympathy, for it might have been a bad one.

"You must possess great presence of mind," he observed. "I think your showing it, as you have done in this instance, has won Mr. Snow's heart."

Mrs. Verrall laughed. "I believe I do possess presence of mind. And so does Charlotte. Once we were out with some friends in a barouche, and the horses took fright, ran up a bank, turned the carriage over, and nearly kicked it to pieces. While all those with us were fearfully frightened, Charlotte and I remained calm and cool."

"It is a good thing for you," he observed.

"I suppose it is. Better, at any rate, than to go mad with fear, as some do. Cecil"—turning to her—"has had fright enough to last her for a twelvemonth, she says."

"Were you present, Cecil?" asked her brother.

"I was present, but I did not see it," replied Cecil. "It occurred in Mrs. Verrall's bedroom, and I was standing at the dressing-table, with my back to her. The first thing I knew, or saw, was Mrs. Verrall on the floor with the rug rolled round her."

Tea was brought in, and Mrs. Verrall insisted that they should remain for it. Thomas pleaded an engagement, but she would not listen: they could not have the heart, she said, to leave her alone. So Thomas—the very essence of good feeling and politeness—waived his objection and remained. Not the bowing politeness of a *petit maître*, but the genuine consideration that springs from a noble and unselfish heart.

"I am in ecstasy that Verrall was away," she exclaimed. "He would have magnified it into something formidable, and I should not have been allowed to stir for a month."

"When do you expect him home?" asked Thomas Godolphin.

"I never expect him until he comes," replied Mrs. Verrall. "London seems to possess attractions for him. Once up there, he may stay a day, or he may stay fifty. I never know."

Cecil went upstairs to put her things on when tea was over, the maid attending her. Mrs. Verrall turned to see that the door was closed, and then spoke abruptly.

“Mr. Godolphin, can anything be done to prevent the wind whistling as it does in these passages?”

“Does it whistle?” he replied.

“The last few nights it has whistled—oh, I cannot describe it to you! If I were not a good sleeper, it would have kept me awake all night. I wish it could be stopped.”

“It cannot be done, I believe, without pulling the house down,” he said. “My mother had a great dislike to hear it, and a good deal of expense was incurred in trying to remedy it; but it did little or no good.”

“What puzzles me is, that the wind should have been whistling within the house, when there’s no wind whistling without. The weather has been quite calm. Sometimes when it is actually blowing great guns we cannot hear it at all.”

“Something peculiar in the construction of the passages,” he carelessly remarked. “You hear the whistling or not, according to the quarter from which the wind may happen to be blowing.”

“The servants tell a tale—these old Ashlydyat retainers who remain in the house—that this strangely-sounding wind is connected with the Ashlydyat superstition, and foretells ill to the Godolphins.”

Thomas Godolphin smiled. “I am sure you do not give ear to anything so foolish, Mrs. Verrall.”

“No, that I do not,” she answered. “It would take a great deal to imbue me with faith in the supernatural. Ghosts! Shadows! As if any one with common sense could believe in such impossibilities! They tell another tale about here, do they not? That a shadow of some sort may occasionally be seen in the moonbeams in front of the archway, on the Dark Plain; a shadow cast by no earthly substance. Charlotte once declared she saw it. I only laughed at her!”

His lips parted as he listened, and he lightly echoed the laugh said to have been given by Charlotte. Considering what his eyes had just seen, the laugh must have been a very conscious one.

“When do you expect your brother home?” asked Mrs. Verrall. “He seems to be making a long stay at Broomhead.”

“George is not at Broomhead,” replied Thomas Godolphin. “He left it three or four days ago. He has joined a party of friends in the Highlands. I do not suppose he will return here much before Christmas.”

Cecil appeared. They wished Mrs. Verrall good night, and a speedy cure to her burns; and departed. Thomas took the open roadway this time, which did not bring them near to the ash-trees or the Dark Plain.

## CHAPTER XI. A TELEGRAPHIC DESPATCH

“Cecil,” asked Thomas Godolphin, as they walked along, “how came you to go alone to Ashlydyat, in this unceremonious manner?”

“There was no harm in it,” answered Cecil, who possessed a spice of self-will. “Mrs. Verrall said she was lonely, and it would be a charity if I or Bessy would go home with her. Bessy could not: she was engaged at the Rectory. Where was the harm?”

“My dear, had there been ‘harm,’ I am sure you would not have wished to go. There was none. Only, I do not care that you should become very intimate with the Verralls. A little visiting on either side cannot be avoided: but let it end there.”

“Thomas! you are just like Janet!” impulsively spoke Cecil. “She does not like the Verralls.”

“Neither do I. I do not like him. I do not like Charlotte Pain—”

“Janet again!” struck in Cecil. “She and you must be constituted precisely alike, for you are sure to take up the same likes and dislikes. She would not willingly let me go to-day; only she could not refuse without downright rudeness.”

“I like Mrs. Verrall the best of them, I was going to say,” he continued. “Do not become too intimate with them, Cecil.”

“But you know nothing against Mr. Verrall?”

“Nothing whatever. Except that I cannot make him out.”

“How do you mean—‘make him out?’”

“Well, Cecil, it may be difficult to define my meaning. Verrall is so impassive; so utterly silent with regard to himself. Who is he? Where did he come from? Did he drop from the moon? Where has he previously lived? What are his family? Where does his property lie?—in the funds, or in land, or in securities, or what? Most men, even though they do come as strangers into a neighbourhood, supply indications of some of these things, either accidentally or purposely.”

“They have lived in London,” said Cecil.

“London is a wide term,” answered Thomas Godolphin.

“And I’m sure they have plenty of money.”

“There’s where the chief puzzle is. When people possess so much money as Verrall appears to do, they generally make no secret of whence it is derived. Understand, my dear, I cast no suspicion on him in any way: I only say that we know nothing of him: or of the ladies either—”

“They are very charming ladies,” interrupted Cecil again. “Especially Mrs. Verrall.”

“Beyond the fact that they are very charming ladies,” acquiesced Thomas in a tone that made Cecil think he was laughing at her: “you should let me finish, my dear. But I would prefer that they were rather more open, as to themselves, before they became the too-intimate friends of Miss Cecilia Godolphin.”

Cecil dropped the subject. She did not always agree with what she called Thomas’s prejudices. “How quaint that old doctor of ours is!” she exclaimed. “When he had looked at Mrs. Verrall’s arm, he made a great parade of getting out his spectacles, and putting them on, and looking again. ‘What d’ye call it—a burn?’ he asked her. ‘It is a burn, is it not?’ she answered, looking at him. ‘No,’ said he, ‘it’s nothing but a scorch.’ It made her laugh so. I think she was pleased to have escaped with so little damage.”

“That is just like Snow,” said Thomas Godolphin.

Arrived at home, Miss Godolphin was in the same place, knitting still. It was turned half-past nine. Too late for Thomas to pay his visit to Lady Sarah’s. “Janet, I fear you have waited tea for us!” said Cecil.

“To be sure, child. I expected you home to tea.”

Cecil explained why they did not come, relating the accident to Mrs. Verrall. "Eh! but it's like the young!" said Janet, lifting her hands. "Careless! careless! She might have been burned to death."

"What a loud ring!" exclaimed Cecil, as the hall-bell, pealed with no gentle hand, echoed and re-echoed through the house. "If it is Bessy come home, she thinks she will let us know who's there."

It was not Bessy. A servant entered the room with a telegraphic despatch. "The man is waiting, sir," he said, holding out the paper for signature to his master.

Thomas Godolphin affixed his signature, and took up the despatch. It came from Scotland. Janet laid her hand upon it ere it was open: her face looked ghastly pale. "A moment of preparation!" she said. "Thomas, it may have brought us tidings that we have no longer a father."

"Nay, Janet, do not anticipate evil," he answered, though his memory flew unaccountably to that ugly Shadow, and to what he had deemed would be Janet's conclusions respecting it. "It may not be ill news at all."

He glanced his eye rapidly and privately over it, while Cecil came and stood near him with a stifled sob. Then he held it out to Janet, reading it aloud at the same time.

"Lady Godolphin to Thomas Godolphin, Esquire.

"Come at once to Broomhead. Sir George wishes it. Take the first train."

"He is not dead, at any rate, Janet," said Thomas quietly. "Thank Heaven."

Janet, her extreme fears relieved, took refuge in displeasure. "What does Lady Godolphin mean, by sending so vague a message as that?" she uttered. "Is Sir George worse? Is he ill? Is he in danger? Or has the summons no reference at all to his state of health?"

Thomas had taken it into his hand again, and was studying the words: as we are all apt to do in uncertainty. He could make no more out of them.

"Lady Godolphin should have been more explicit," he resumed.

"Lady Godolphin has no *right* thus to play upon our fears, our suspense," said Janet. "Thomas, I have a great mind to start this very night for Scotland."

"As you please, of course, Janet. It is a long and fatiguing journey for a winter's night."

"And I object to being a guest at Broomhead, unless driven to it, you might add," rejoined Janet. "But our father may be dying."

"I should think not, Janet. Lady Godolphin would certainly have said so. Margery, too, would have taken care that those tidings should be sent to us."

The suggestion reassured Miss Godolphin. She had not thought of it. Margery, devoted to the interests of Sir George and his children (somewhat in contravention to the interests of my lady), would undoubtedly have apprised them were Sir George in danger. "What shall you do?" inquired Janet of her brother.

"I shall do as the despatch desires me—take the first train. That will be at midnight," he added, as he prepared to pay a visit to Lady Sarah's.

Grame House, as you may remember, was situated at the opposite end of the town to Ashlydyat, past All Souls' Church. As Thomas Godolphin walked briskly along, he saw Mr. Hastings leaning over the Rectory gate, the dark trees shading him from the light of the moon.

"You are going this way late," said the Rector.

"It is late for a visit to Lady Sarah's. But I wish particularly to see them."

"I have now come from thence," returned Mr. Hastings.

"Sarah Anne grows weaker, I hear."

"Ay. I have been praying over her."

Thomas Godolphin felt shocked. "Is she so near death as that?" he asked, in a hushed tone.

"So near death as that!" repeated the clergyman in an accent of reproof. "I did not expect to hear a like remark from Mr. Godolphin. My good friend, is it only when death is near that we are to pray?"

"It is chiefly when death is near that prayers are said *over us*," replied Thomas Godolphin.

“True—for those who have not known when and how to pray for themselves. Look at that girl: passing away from amongst us, with all her worldly thoughts, her selfish habits, her evil, peevish temper! But that God’s ways are not as our ways, we might be tempted to question why such as these are removed; such as Ethel left. The one child as near akin to an angel as it is well possible to be, here; the other— In our blind judgment, we may wonder that she, most ripe for heaven, should not be taken to it, and that other one left, to be pruned and dug around; to have, in short, a chance given her of making herself better.”

“Is she so very ill?”

“I think her so; as does Snow. It was what he said that sent me up there. Her frame of mind is not a desirable one: and I have been trying to do my part. I shall be with her again to-morrow.”

“Have you any message for your daughter?” asked Thomas Godolphin. “I start in two hours’ time for Scotland.” And then, he explained why: telling of their uncertainty.

“When shall you be coming back again?” inquired Mr. Hastings.

“Within a week. Unless my father’s state should forbid it. I may be wishing to take a holiday at Christmas time, or thereabouts, so shall not stay away now. George is absent, too.”

“Staying at Broomhead?”

“No; he is not at Broomhead now.”

“Will you take charge of Maria? We want her home.”

“If you wish it, I will. But I should think they would all be returning very shortly. Christmas is intended to be spent here.”

“You may depend upon it, Christmas will not see Lady Godolphin at Prior’s Ash, unless the fever shall have departed to spend its Christmas in some other place,” cried the Rector.

“Well, I shall hear their plans when I get there.”

“Bring back Maria with you, Mr. Godolphin. Tell her it is my wish. Unless you find that there’s a prospect of her speedy return with Lady Godolphin. In that case, you may leave her.”

“Very well,” replied Thomas Godolphin.

He continued his way, and Mr. Hastings looked after him in the bright moonlight, till his form disappeared in the shadows cast by the roadside trees.

It was striking ten as Thomas Godolphin opened the iron gates at Lady Sarah Grame’s: the heavy clock-bell of All Souls’ came sounding upon his ear in the stillness of the night. The house, all except from one window, looked dark: even the hall-lamp was out, and he feared they might all have retired. From that window a dull light shone behind the blind: a stationary light it had been of late, to be seen by any nocturnal wayfarer all night long; for it came from the sick-chamber.

Elizabeth opened the door. “Oh, sir!” she exclaimed in the surprise of seeing him so late, “I think Miss Ethel has gone up to bed.”

Lady Sarah came hastening down the stairs as he stepped into the hall: she also was surprised at the late visit.

“I would not have disturbed you, but that I am about to leave for Broomhead,” he explained. “A telegraphic despatch has arrived from Lady Godolphin, calling me thither. I should like to see Ethel, if not inconvenient to her. I know not how long I may be away.”

“I sent Ethel to bed: her head ached,” said Lady Sarah. “It is not many minutes since she went up. Oh, Mr. Godolphin, this has been such a day of grief! heads and hearts alike aching.”

Thomas Godolphin entered the drawing-room, and Lady Sarah Grame called Ethel down, and then returned to her sick daughter’s room. Ethel came instantly. The fire in the drawing-room was still alight, and Elizabeth had been in to stir it up. Thomas Godolphin stood over it with Ethel, telling her of his coming journey and its cause. The red embers threw a glow upon her face: her brow looked heavy, her eyes swollen.

He saw the signs, and laid his hand fondly upon her head. “What has given you this headache, Ethel?”



The ready tears came into her eyes. "It does ache very much," she answered.

"Has crying caused it?"

"Yes," she replied. "It is of no use to deny it, for you would see it by my swollen eyelids. I have wept to-day until it seems that I can weep no longer, and it has made my eyes ache and my head dull and heavy."

"But, my darling, you should not give way to this grief. It may render you seriously ill."

"Oh, Thomas! how can I help it?" she returned, with emotion, as the tears dropped swiftly over her cheeks. "We begin to see that there is no chance of Sarah Anne's recovery. Mr. Snow told mamma so to-day: and he sent up Mr. Hastings."

"Ethel, will your grieving alter it?"

Ethel wept silently. There was full and entire confidence between her and Thomas Godolphin: she could speak out all her thoughts, her troubles to him, as she could have told them to a mother—if she had had a mother who loved her.

"If she were only a little more prepared to go, the pain would seem less," breathed Ethel. "That is, we might feel more reconciled to losing her. But you know what she is, Thomas. When I have tried to talk a little bit about heaven, or to read a psalm to her, she would not listen: she said it made her dull, it gave her the horrors. How can she, who has never thought of God, be fit to meet Him?"

Ethel's tears were deepening into sobs. Thomas Godolphin involuntarily thought of what Mr. Hastings had just said to him. His hand still rested on Ethel's head.

"*You* are fit to meet Him?" he exclaimed involuntarily. "Ethel, whence can have arisen the difference between you? You are sisters; reared in the same home."

"I do not know," said Ethel simply. "I have always thought a great deal about heaven; I suppose it is that. A lady, whom we knew as children, used to buy us a good many story-books, and mine were always stories of heaven. It was that which first got me into the habit of thinking of it."

"And why not Sarah Anne?"

"Sarah Anne would not read them. She liked stories of gaiety and excitement; balls, and things like that."

Thomas smiled; the words were so simple and natural. "Had the fiat gone forth for you, instead of for her, Ethel, it would have brought you no dismay?"

"Only that I must leave all my dear ones behind me," she answered, looking up at him, a bright smile shining through her tears. "I should know that God would not take me, unless it were for the best. Oh, Thomas! if we could only save her!"

"Child, you contradict yourself. If what God does must be for the best—and it *is*—that thought should reconcile you to parting with Sarah Anne."

"Y—es," hesitated Ethel. "Only I fear she has never thought of it herself, or in any way prepared for it."

"Do you know that I have to find fault with you?" resumed Thomas Godolphin, after a pause. "You have not been true to me, Ethel."

She turned her eyes upon him in surprise.

"Did you not promise me—did you not promise Mr. Snow, not to enter your sister's chamber while the fever was upon her? I hear that you were in it often: her head nurse."

A hot colour flushed into Ethel's face. "Forgive me, Thomas," she whispered; "I could not help myself. Sarah Anne—it was on the third morning of her illness, when I was getting up—suddenly began to cry out for me very much, and mamma came to my bedroom and desired me to go to her. I said that Mr. Snow had forbidden me, and that I had promised you. It made mamma angry. She asked if I could be so selfish as to regard a promise before Sarah Anne's life; that she might die if I thwarted her: and she took me by the arm and pulled me in. I would have told you, Thomas, that I had broken my word; I wished to tell you; but mamma forbade me to do so."

Thomas Godolphin stood looking at her. There was nothing to answer: he had *known*, in his deep and trusting love, that the fault had not lain with Ethel. She mistook his silence, thinking he was vexed.

"You know, Thomas, so long as I am here in mamma's home, her child, it is to her that I owe obedience," she gently pleaded. "As soon as I shall be your wife, I shall owe it and give it implicitly to you."

"You are right, my darling."

"And it has produced no ill consequences," she resumed. "I did not catch the fever. Had I found myself growing in the least ill, I should have sent for you and told you the truth."

"Ethel?" he impulsively cried—very impulsively for calm Thomas Godolphin; "had you caught the fever, I should never have forgiven those who led you into danger. I *could* not lose you."

"Hark!" said Ethel. "Mamma is calling."

Lady Sarah had been calling to Mr. Godolphin. Thinking she was not heard, she now came downstairs and entered the room, wringing her hands; her eyes were overflowing, her sharp thin nose was redder than usual. "Oh dear! I don't know what we shall do with her!" she uttered. "She is so ill, and it makes her so fretful. Mr. Godolphin, nothing will satisfy her now but she must see you."

"See me!" repeated he.

"She will, she says. I told her you were departing for Scotland, and she burst out crying, and said if she were to die she should never see you again. Do you mind going in? You are not afraid?"

"No, I am not afraid," said Thomas Godolphin. "Infection cannot have remained all this time. And if it had, I should not fear it."

Lady Sarah Grame led the way upstairs. Thomas followed her. Ethel stole in afterwards. Sarah Anne lay in bed, her thin face, drawn and white, raised upon the pillow; her hollow eyes were strained forward with a fixed look. Ill as he had been led to suppose her, he was scarcely prepared to see her like this; and it shocked him. A cadaverous face, looking ripe for the tomb.

"Why have you never come to see me?" she asked in her hollow voice, as he approached and leaned over her. "You'd never have come till I died. You only care for Ethel."

"I would have come to see you had I known you wished it," he answered. "But you do not look strong enough to receive visitors."

"They might cure me, if they would," she continued, panting for breath. "I want to go away somewhere, and that Snow won't let me. If it were Ethel, he would take care to cure *her*."

"He will let you go as soon as you are equal to it, I am sure," said Thomas Godolphin.

"Why should the fever have come to me at all?—Why couldn't it have gone to Ethel instead? She's strong. She would have got well in no time. It's not fair—"

"My dear child, my dear, dear child, you must not excite yourself," implored Lady Sarah, abruptly interrupting her.

"I shall speak," cried Sarah Anne, with a touch, feeble though it was, of her old peevish vehemence. "Nobody's thought of but Ethel. If you had had your way," looking hard at Mr. Godolphin, "she wouldn't have been allowed to come near me; no, not if I had died."

Her mood changed to tears. Lady Sarah whispered to him to leave the room: it would not do, this excitement. Thomas wondered why he had been brought to it. "I will come and see you again when you are better," he soothingly whispered.

"No you won't," sobbed Sarah Anne. "You are going to Scotland, and I shall be dead when you come back. I don't want to die. Why do they frighten me with their prayers? Good-bye, Thomas Godolphin."

The last words were called after him; when he had taken his leave of her and was quitting the room. Lady Sarah attended him to the threshold: her eyes full, her hands lifted. "You may see that there's no hope of her!" she wailed.

Thomas did not think there was the slightest hope. To his eye—though it was not so practised an eye in sickness as Mr. Snow's, or even as that of the Rector of All Souls'—it appeared that in a very few days, perhaps hours, hope for Sarah Anne Grame would be over for ever.

Ethel waited for him in the hall, and was leading the way back to the drawing-room; but he told her he could not stay longer, and opened the front door. She ran past him into the garden, putting her hand into his as he came out.

"I wish you were not going away," she sadly said, her spirits, that night very unequal, causing her to see things with a gloomy eye.

"I wish you were going with me!" replied Thomas Godolphin. "Do not weep, Ethel. I shall soon be back again."

"Everything seems to make me weep to-night. You may not be back until—until the worst is over. Oh! if she might but be saved!"

He held her face close to him, gazing down at it in the moonlight. And then he took from it his farewell kiss. "God bless you, my darling, for ever and for ever!"

"May He bless you, Thomas!" she answered, with streaming eyes: and, for the first time in her life, his kiss was returned. Then they parted. He watched Ethel indoors, and went back to Prior's Ash.

## CHAPTER XII.

### DEAD

“Thomas, my son, I must go home. I don’t want to die away from Ashlydyat!”

A dull pain shot across Thomas Godolphin’s heart at the words. Did he think of the old superstitious tradition—that evil was to fall upon the Godolphins when their chief should die, and not at Ashlydyat? At Ashlydyat his father could not die; he had put that out of his power when he let it to strangers: in its neighbourhood, he might.

“The better plan, sir, will be for you to return to the Folly, as you seem to wish it,” said Thomas. “You will soon be strong enough to undertake the journey.”

The decaying knight was sitting on a sofa in his bedroom. His second fainting-fit had lasted some hours—if that, indeed, was the right name to give to it—and he had recovered, only to be more and more weak. He had grown pretty well after the first attack—when Margery had found him in his chamber on the floor, the day Lady Godolphin had gone to pay her visit to Selina. The next time, he was on the lawn before the house, talking to Charlotte Pain, when he suddenly fell to the ground. He did not recover his consciousness until evening; and nearly the first wish he expressed was a desire to see his son Thomas. “Telegraph for him,” he said to Lady Godolphin.

“But you are not seriously ill, Sir George,” she had answered.

“No; but I should like him here. Telegraph to him to start by first train.”

And Lady Godolphin did so, accordingly, sending the message that angered Miss Godolphin. But, in this case, Lady Godolphin did not deserve so much blame as Janet cast on her: for she did debate the point with herself whether she should say Sir George was ill, or not. Believing that these two fainting-fits had proceeded from want of strength only, that they were but the effect of his long previous illness, and would lead to no bad result, she determined not to speak of it. Hence the imperfect message.

Neither did Thomas Godolphin see much cause for fear when he arrived at Broomhead. Sir George did not look better than when he had left Prior’s Ash, but neither did he look much worse. On this, the second day, he had been well enough to converse with Thomas upon business affairs: and, that over, he suddenly broke out with the above wish. Thomas mentioned it when he joined Lady Godolphin afterwards. It did not meet with her approbation.

“You should have opposed it,” said she to him in a firm, hard tone.

“But why so, madam?” asked Thomas. “If my father’s wish is to return to Prior’s Ash, he should return.”

“Not while the fever lingers there. Were he to take it—and die—you would never forgive yourself.”

Thomas had no fear of the fever on his own score, and did not fear it for his father. He intimated as much. “It is not the fever that will hurt him, Lady Godolphin.”

“You have no right to say that. Lady Sarah Grame, a month ago, might have said she did not fear it for Sarah Anne. And now Sarah Anne is dying!”

“Or dead,” put in Charlotte Pain, who was leaning listlessly against the window frame devoured with ennui.

“Shall you be afraid to go back to Prior’s Ash?” he asked of Maria Hastings.

“Not at all,” replied Maria. “I should not mind if I were going to-day, as far as the fever is concerned.”

“That is well,” he said. “Because I have orders to convey you back with me.”

Charlotte Pain lifted her head with a start. The news aroused her. Maria, on the contrary, thought he was speaking in jest.

“No, indeed I am not,” said Thomas Godolphin. “Mr. Hastings made a request to me, madam, that I should take charge of his daughter when I returned,” continued he to Lady Godolphin. “He wants her at home, he says.”

“Mr. Hastings is very polite!” ironically replied my lady. “Maria will go back when I choose to spare her.”

“I hope you will allow her to return with me—unless you shall soon be returning yourself,” said Thomas Godolphin.

“It is not I that shall be returning to Prior’s Ash yet,” said my lady. “The sickly old place must give proof of renewed health first. You will not see either me or Sir George there on this side Christmas.”

“Then I think, Lady Godolphin, you must offer no objection to my taking charge of Maria,” said Thomas courteously, but firmly, leaving the discussion of Sir George’s return to another opportunity. “I passed my word to Mr. Hastings.”

Charlotte Pain, all animation now, approached Lady Godolphin. She was thoroughly sick and tired of Broomhead: since George Godolphin’s departure, she had been projecting how she could get away from it. Here was a solution to her difficulty.

“Dear Lady Godolphin, you must allow me to depart with Mr. Godolphin—whatever you may do with Maria Hastings,” she exclaimed. “I said nothing to you—for I really did not see how I was to get back, knowing you would not permit me to travel so far alone—but Mrs. Verrall is very urgent for my return. And now that she is suffering from this burn, as Mr. Godolphin has brought us news, it is the more incumbent upon me to be at home.”

Which was a nice little fib of Miss Charlotte’s. Her sister had never once hinted that she wished her home again; but a fib or two more or less was nothing to Charlotte.

“You are tired of Broomhead,” said Lady Godolphin.

Charlotte’s colour never varied, her eye never drooped, as she protested that she should not tire of Broomhead were she its inmate for a twelvemonth; that it was quite a paradise upon earth. Maria kept her head bent while Charlotte said it, half afraid lest unscrupulous Charlotte should call upon her to bear testimony to her truth. Only that very morning she had protested to Maria that the ennui of the place was killing her.

“I don’t know,” said Lady Godolphin shrewdly. “Unless I am wrong, Charlotte, you have been anxious to leave. What was it that Mr. George hinted at—about escorting you young ladies home—and I stopped him ere it was half spoken? Prior’s Ash *would* talk if I sent you home under his convoy.”

“Mr. Godolphin is not George,” rejoined Charlotte.

“No, he is not,” replied my lady significantly.

The subject of departure was settled amicably; both the young ladies were to return to Prior’s Ash under the charge of Mr. Godolphin. There are some men, single men though they be, and not men in years, whom society is content to recognize as entirely fit escorts. Thomas Godolphin was one of them. Had my lady despatched the young ladies home under Mr. George’s wing, she might never have heard the last of it from Prior’s Ash: but the most inveterate scandalmonger in it would not have questioned the trustworthiness of his elder brother. My lady was also brought to give her consent to her own departure for it by Christmas, provided Mr. Snow would assure her that the place was “safe.”

In a day or two Thomas Godolphin spoke to his father of his marriage arrangements. He had received a letter from Janet, written the morning after his departure, in which she agreed to the proposal that Ethel should be her temporary guest. This removed all barrier to the immediate union.

“Then you marry directly, if Sarah Anne lives?”

“Directly. In January, at the latest.”

“God bless you both!” cried the old knight. “She’ll be a wife in a thousand, Thomas.”

Thomas thought she would. He did not say it.

"It's the best plan; it's the best plan," continued Sir George in a dreamy tone, gazing into the fire. "No use to turn the girls out of their home. It will not be for long; not for long. Thomas"—turning his haggard, but still fine blue eye upon his son—"I wish I had never left Ashlydyat!"

Thomas was silent. None had more bitterly regretted the departure from it than he.

"I wish I could go back to it to die!"

"My dear father, I hope that you will yet live many years to bless us. If you can get through this winter—and I see no reason whatever why you should not, with care—you may regain your strength and be as well again as any of us."

Sir George shook his head. "It will not be, Thomas; I shall not long keep you out of Ashlydyat. Mind!" he added, turning upon Thomas with surprising energy, "I *will* go back before Christmas to Prior's Ash. The last Christmas that I see shall be spent with my children."

"Yes, indeed, I think you should come back to us," warmly acquiesced Thomas.

"Therefore, if you find, when Christmas is close upon us, that I am not amongst you, that you hear no tidings of my coming amongst you, you come off at once and fetch me. Do you hear, Thomas? I enjoin it upon you now with a father's authority; do not forget it, or disobey it. My lady fears the fever, and would keep me here: but I must be at Prior's Ash."

"I will certainly obey you, my father," replied Thomas Godolphin.

Telegraphic despatches seemed to be the order of the day with Thomas Godolphin. They were all sitting together that evening, Sir George having come downstairs, when a servant called Thomas out of the room. A telegraphic message had arrived for him at the station, and a man had brought it over. A conviction of what it contained flashed over Thomas Godolphin's heart as he opened it—the death of Sarah Anne Grame.

From Lady Sarah it proved to be. Not a much more satisfactory message than had been Lady Godolphin's; for if hers had not been explanatory, this was incoherent.

"The breath has just gone out of my dear child's body. I will write by next post. She died at four o'clock. How shall we all bear it?"

Thomas returned to the room; his mind full. In the midst of his sorrow and regret for Sarah Anne, his compassion for Lady Sarah—and he did feel all that with true sympathy—intruded the thought of his own marriage. It must be postponed now.

"What did Andrew want with you?" asked Sir George, when he entered.

"A telegraphic message had come for me from Prior's Ash."

"A business message?"

"No, sir. It is from Lady Sarah."

By the tone of his voice, by the falling of his countenance, they could read instinctively what had occurred. But they kept silence, all,—waiting for him to speak further.

"Poor Sarah Anne is gone. She died at four o'clock."

"This will delay your plans, Thomas," observed Sir George, after some minutes had been given to expressions of regret.

"It will, sir."

The knight leaned over to his son, and spoke in a whisper, meant for his ear alone: "I shall not be very long after her. I feel that I shall not. You may yet take Ethel home at once to Ashlydyat."

Very early indeed did they start in the morning, long before daybreak. Prior's Ash they would reach, all things being well, at nine at night. Margery was sent to attend them, a very dragon of a guardian, as particular as Miss Godolphin herself—had a guardian been necessary.

A somewhat weary day; a long one, at any rate; but at last their train steamed into the station at Prior's Ash. It was striking nine. Mr. Hastings was waiting for Maria, and Mrs. Verrall's carriage for Charlotte Pain. A few minutes were spent in collecting the luggage.

"Shall I give you a seat as far as the bank, Mr. Godolphin?" inquired Charlotte, who must pass it on her way to Ashlydyat.

“Thank you, no. I shall just go up for a minute’s call upon Lady Sarah Grame.”

Mr. Hastings, who had been placing Maria in a fly, heard the words. He turned hastily, caught Thomas Godolphin’s hand, and drew him aside.

“Are you aware of what has occurred?”

“Alas, yes!” replied Thomas. “Lady Sarah telegraphed to me last night.”

The Rector pressed his hand, and returned to his daughter. Thomas Godolphin struck into a by-path, a short cut from the station, which would take him to Grame House.

Six days ago, exactly, since he had been there before. The house looked precisely as it had looked then, all in darkness, excepting the faint light that burned from Sarah Anne’s chamber. It burnt there still. Then it was lighting the living; now—

Thomas Godolphin rang the bell gently.—Does any one like to do otherwise at a house in which death is an inmate? Elizabeth, as usual, opened the door, and burst into tears when she saw who it was. “I said it would bring you back, sir!” she exclaimed.

“Does Lady Sarah bear it pretty well?” he asked, as she showed him into the drawing-room.

“No, sir, not over well,” sobbed the girl. “I’ll tell my lady that you are here.”

He stood over the fire, as he had done the other night: it was low now, as it had been then. Strangely still seemed the house: he could almost have told that one was lying dead in it. He listened, waiting for Ethel’s step, hoping she would be the first to come to him.

Elizabeth returned. “My lady says would you be so good as to walk up to her, sir?”

Thomas Godolphin followed her upstairs. She made for the room to which he had been taken the former night—Sarah Anne’s chamber. In point of fact, the chamber of Lady Sarah, until it was given up to Sarah Anne for her illness. Elizabeth, with soft and stealthy tread, crossed the corridor to the door, and opened it.

Was she going to show him into the presence of the dead? He thought she must have mistaken Lady Sarah’s orders, and he hesitated on the threshold.

“Where is Miss Ethel?” he whispered.

“Who, sir?”

“Miss Ethel. Is she well?”

The girl stared, flung the door full open, and with a great cry flew down the staircase.

He looked after her in amazement. Had she gone crazy? Then he turned and walked into the room with a hesitating step.

Lady Sarah was coming forward to meet him. She was convulsed with grief. He took both her hands in his with a soothing gesture, essaying a word of comfort: not of inquiry, as to why she should have brought him to this room. He glanced to the bed, expecting to see the dead upon it. But the bed was empty. And at that moment, his eyes caught something else.

Seated by the fire in an invalid chair, surrounded with pillows, covered with shawls, with a wan, attenuated face, and eyes that seemed to have a glaze over them, was—*who?*

*Sarah Anne?* It certainly *was* Sarah Anne, and in life still. For she feebly held out her hand in welcome, and the tears suddenly gushed from her eyes. “I am getting better, Mr. Godolphin.”

Thomas Godolphin—Thomas Godolphin—how shall I write it? For one happy minute he was utterly blind to what it could all mean: his whole mind was a chaos of wild perplexity. And then, as the dreadful truth burst upon him, he staggered against the wall, with a wailing cry of agony.

It was Ethel who had died.

## CHAPTER XIII. UNAVAILING REGRETS

Yes. It was Ethel who had died.

Thomas Godolphin leaned against the wall in his agony. It was one of those moments that can fall only once in a lifetime; in many lives never; when the greatest limit of earthly misery bursts upon the startled spirit, shattering it for all time. Were Thomas Godolphin to live for a hundred years, he never could know another moment like this: the power so to feel would have left him.

It had not left him yet. Nay, it had scarcely come to him in its full realization. At present he was half stunned. Strange as it may seem, the first impression upon his mind, was—that he was so much nearer to the next world. How am I to define this “nearer?” It was not that he was nearer to it by time; or in goodness: nothing of that sort. *She* had passed within its portals; and the great gulf, which divides time from eternity, seems to be only a span now to Thomas Godolphin: it was as if he, in spirit, had followed her in. From being a place far, far off, vague, indefinite, indistinct, it had been suddenly brought to him, close and palpable: or he to it: Had Thomas Godolphin been an atheist, denying a hereafter,—Heaven in its compassion have mercy upon all such!—that one moment of suffering would have recalled him to a sense of his mistake. It was as if he looked above with the eye of inspiration and saw the truth; it was as a brief, passing moment of revelation from God. She, with her loving spirit, her gentle heart, her simple trust in God, had been taken from this world to enter upon a better. She was as surely living in it, had entered upon its mysteries, its joys, its rest, as that he was living here; she, he believed, was as surely regarding him now and his great sorrow, as that he was left alone to battle with it. From henceforth Thomas Godolphin possessed a lively, ever-present link with that world; and knew that its gates would, in God’s good time, be opened for him.

These feelings, impressions, facts—you may designate them as you please—took up their place in his mind all in that first instant, and seated themselves there for ever. Not yet very consciously. To his stunned senses, in his weight of bitter grief, nothing could be to him very clear: ideas passed through his brain quickly, confusedly; as the changing scenes in a phantasmagoria. He looked round as one bewildered. The bed, prepared for occupancy, on which, on entering, he had expected to see the dead, but not *her*, was between him and the door. Sarah Anne Grame in her invalid chair by the fire, a table at her right hand, covered with adjuncts of the sick-room—a medicine-bottle with its accompanying wine-glass and tablespoon—jelly, and other delicacies to tempt a faded appetite—Sarah Anne sat there and gazed at him with her dark hollow eyes, from which the tears rolled slowly over her cadaverous cheeks. Lady Sarah stood before him; sobs choking her voice as she wrung her hands. Ay, both were weeping. But he—it is not in the presence of others that man gives way to grief: neither will tears come to him in the first leaden weight of anguish.

Thomas Godolphin listened mechanically, as one who cannot do otherwise, to the explanations of Lady Sarah. “Why did you not prepare me?—why did you let it come upon me with this startling shock?” was his first remonstrance.

“I did prepare you,” sobbed Lady Sarah. “I telegraphed to you last night, as soon as it had happened. I wrote the message with my own hand, and sent it off to the office before I turned my attention to any other thing.”

“I received the message. But you did not say—I thought it was,”—Thomas Godolphin turned his glance on Sarah Anne. He remembered her state, in the midst of his own anguish, and would not alarm her. “You did not mention Ethel’s name,” he continued to Lady Sarah. “How could I suppose you alluded to her? How could I suppose that she was ill?”

Sarah Anne divined his motive for hesitation. She was uncommonly keen in penetration: sharp, as the world says; and she had noted his words on entering, when he began to soothe Lady Sarah for



the loss of a child; she had noticed his startled recoil, when his eyes fell on her. She spoke up with a touch of her old querulousness, the tears arrested, and her eyes glistening.

“You thought it was I who had died! Yes, you did, Mr. Godolphin, and you need not attempt to deny it. You would not have cared, so that it was not Ethel.”

Thomas Godolphin had no intention of contradicting her. He turned from Sarah Anne in silence, to look inquiringly and reproachfully at her mother.

“Mr. Godolphin, I could not prepare you better than I did,” said Lady Sarah, “When I wrote the letter to you, telling of her illness—”

“What letter?” interrupted Thomas Godolphin. “I received no letter.”

“But you must have received it,” returned Lady Sarah in her quick, cross manner. Not cross with Thomas Godolphin, but from a rising doubt whether the letter had miscarried. “I wrote it, and I know that it was safely posted. You ought to have had it by last evening’s delivery, before you would receive the telegraphic despatch.”

“I never had it,” said Thomas Godolphin. “When I waited in your drawing-room now, I was listening for Ethel’s footsteps to come to me.”

Thomas Godolphin knew, later, that the letter had arrived duly and safely at Broomhead, at the time mentioned by Lady Sarah. Sir George Godolphin either did not open the box that night; or, if he opened it, had overlooked the letter for his son. Charlotte Pain’s complaint, that the box ought not to be left to the charge of Sir George, had reason in it. On the morning of his son’s departure with the young ladies, Sir George had found the letter, and at once despatched it back to Prior’s Ash. It was on its road at this same hour when he was talking with Lady Sarah. But the shock had come.

He took a seat by the table, and covered his eyes with his hand as Lady Sarah gave him a detailed account of the illness and death. Not all the account, that she or any one else could give, would take one iota from the dreadful fact staring him in the face. She was gone; gone for ever from this world; he could never again meet the glance of her eye, or hear her voice in response to his own. Ah, my readers, there are griefs that change all our after-life! rending the heart as an earthquake will rend the earth: and, all that can be done is, to sit down under them, and ask of Heaven strength to bear them. To bear them as we best may, until time shall in a measure bring healing upon its wings.

On the last night that Thomas Godolphin had seen her, Ethel’s brow and eyes were heavy. She had wept much in the day, and supposed the pain in her head to arise from that circumstance; she had given this explanation to Thomas Godolphin. Neither she, nor he, had had a thought that it could come from any other source. More than a month since Sarah Anne was taken with the fever; fears for Ethel had died out. And yet those dull eyes, that hot head, that heavy weight of pain, were only the symptoms of approaching sickness! A night of tossing and turning, snatches of disturbed sleep, of terrifying dreams, and Ethel awoke to the conviction that the fever was upon her. About the time that she generally rose, she rang her bell for Elizabeth.

“I do not feel well,” she said. “As soon as mamma is up, will you ask her to come to me? Do not disturb her before then.”

Elizabeth obeyed her orders. But Lady Sarah, tired and wearied out with her attendance upon Sarah Anne, with whom she had been up half the night, did not rise until between nine and ten. Then the maid went to her and delivered the message.

“In bed still! Miss Ethel in bed still!” exclaimed Lady Sarah. She spoke in much anger: for Ethel was wont to be up betimes and in attendance upon Sarah Anne. It was *required* of her to be so.

Throwing on a dressing-gown, Lady Sarah proceeded to Ethel’s room. And there she broke into a storm of reproach and anger; never waiting to ascertain what might be the matter with Ethel, anything or nothing. “Ten o’clock, and that poor child to have lain until now with no one near her but a servant!” she reiterated. “You have no feeling, Ethel.”

Ethel drew the clothes from her flushed face, and turned her glistening eyes, dull last night, bright with fever now, upon her mother. "Oh, mamma, I am ill, indeed I am! I can hardly lift my head for the pain. Feel how it is burning! I did not think I ought to get up."

"What is the matter with you?" sharply inquired Lady Sarah.

"I cannot quite tell," answered Ethel. "I only know that I feel ill all over. I feel, mamma, as if I could not get up."

"Very well! There's that dear suffering angel lying alone, and you can think of yourself before you think of her! If you choose to remain in bed you must. But you will reproach yourself for your selfishness when she is gone. Another four and twenty hours and she may be no longer with us. Do as you think proper."

Ethel burst into tears, and caught her mother's robe as she was turning away. "Mamma, do not be angry with me! I trust I am not selfish. Mamma"—and her voice sank to a whisper—"I have been thinking that it may be the fever."

The fever! For one moment Lady Sarah paused in consternation, but the next she decided there was no fear of it. She really believed so.

"The fever!" she reproachfully said. "Heaven help you for a selfish and a fanciful child, Ethel! Did I not send you to bed with headache last night, and what is it but the remains of that headache that you feel this morning? I can see what it is; you have been fretting after this departure of Thomas Godolphin! Get up and dress yourself, and come in and attend upon your sister. You know she can't bear to be waited on by any one but you. Get up, I say, Ethel."

Will Lady Sarah Grame remember that little episode until death shall take her? I should, in her place. She suppressed all mention of it to Thomas Godolphin. "The dear child told me she did not feel well, but I only thought she had a headache, and that she would perhaps feel better up," were the words in which she related it to him. What sort of a vulture was gnawing at her heart as she spoke them? It was true that, in her blind selfishness for that one undeserving child, she had lost sight of the fact that illness could come to Ethel; she had not allowed herself to entertain its probability; she, who had accused of selfishness that devoted, generous girl, who was ready at all hours to sacrifice herself to her sister; who would have sacrificed her very life to save Sarah Anne's.

Ethel got up. Got up as she best could; her limbs aching, her head burning. She went into Sarah Anne's room, and did for her what she was able, gently, lovingly, anxiously, as of yore. Ah, child! let those, who are left, be thankful that it was so: it is well to be stricken down in the path of duty, working until we can work no more.

She did so. She stayed where she was until the day was half gone; bearing up, it was hard to say how. She could not touch breakfast; she could not take anything. None saw how ill she was. Lady Sarah was wilfully blind; Sarah Anne had eyes and thoughts for herself alone. "What are you shivering for?" Sarah Anne once fretfully asked her. "I feel cold, dear," was Ethel's unselfish answer: not a word said she further of her illness. In the early part of the afternoon, Lady Sarah was away from the room for some time upon domestic affairs; and when she returned to it Mr. Snow was with her. He had been prevented from calling earlier in the day. They found that Sarah Anne had dropped into a doze, and Ethel was stretched on the floor before the fire, moaning. But the moans ceased as they entered.

Mr. Snow, regardless of waking the invalid, strode up to Ethel, and turned her face to the light. "How long has she been like this?" he cried out, his voice shrill with emotion. "Child! child! why did they not send for me?"

Alas! poor Ethel was, even then, growing too ill to reply. Mr. Snow carried her to her room with his own arms, and the servants undressed her and laid her in the bed from which she was never more to rise. The fever attacked her violently: but not more so than it had attacked Sarah Anne; scarcely as badly; and danger, for Ethel, was not imagined. Had Sarah Anne not got over a similar crisis, they would have feared for Ethel: so are we given to judge by collateral circumstances. It was only on the third or fourth day that highly dangerous symptoms declared themselves, and then Lady Sarah

wrote to Thomas Godolphin the letter which had not reached him. There was this much of negative consolation to be derived from its miscarriage: that, had it been delivered to him on the instant of its arrival, he could not have been in time to see her.

“You ought to have written to me as soon as she was taken ill,” he observed to Lady Sarah.

“I would have done so had I apprehended danger,” she repentantly answered. “But I never did apprehend it. Mr. Snow did not do so. I thought how pleasant it would be to get her safe through the danger and the illness, before you should know of it.”

“Did she not wish me to be written to?”

The question was put firmly, abruptly, after the manner of one who will not be cheated of his answer. Lady Sarah dared not evade it. How could she equivocate, with her child lying dead in the house.

“It is true. She did wish it. It was on the first day of her illness that she spoke. ‘Write, and tell Thomas Godolphin.’ She never said it but that once.”

“And you did not do so?” he returned, his voice hoarse with pain.

“Do not reproach me! do not reproach me!” cried Lady Sarah, clasping her hands in supplication, while the tears fell in showers from her eyes. “I did it for the best. I never supposed there was danger: I thought what a pity it was to bring you back, all that long journey: putting you to so much unnecessary trouble and expense.”

Trouble and expense, in such a case! She could speak of expense to Thomas Godolphin! But he remembered how she had had to battle both with expense and trouble her whole life long; that for her these must wear a formidable aspect: and he remained silent.

“I wish now I had written,” she resumed, in the midst of her choking sobs. “As soon as Mr. Snow said there was danger, I wished it. But”—as if she would seek to excuse herself—“what with the two upon my hands, she upstairs, Sarah Anne here, I had not a moment for proper reflection.”

“Did you tell her you had not written?” he asked. “Or did you let her lie waiting for me, hour after hour, day after day, blaming me for my careless neglect?”

“She never blamed any one; you know she did not,” wailed Lady Sarah: “and I believe she was too ill to think even of you. She was only sensible at times. Oh, I say, do not reproach me, Mr. Godolphin! I would give my own life to bring her back again! I never knew her worth until she was gone. I never loved her as I love her now.”

There could be no doubt that Lady Sarah Grame was reproaching herself far more bitterly than any reproach could tell upon her from Thomas Godolphin. An accusing conscience is the worst of all evils. She sat there, her head bent, swaying herself backwards and forwards on her chair, moaning and crying. It was not a time, as Thomas Godolphin felt, to say a word of her past heartless conduct, in forcing Ethel to breathe the infection of Sarah Anne’s sick-room. And, all that he could say, all the reproaches, all the remorse and repentance, would not bring Ethel back to life.

“Would you like to see her?” whispered Lady Sarah, as he rose to leave.

“Yes.”

She lighted a candle, and preceded him upstairs. Ethel had died in her own room. At the door, Thomas Godolphin took the candle from Lady Sarah.

“I must go in alone.”

He passed on into the chamber, and closed the door. On the bed, laid out in her white night-dress, lay what remained of Ethel Grame. Pale, still, pure, her face was wonderfully like what it had been in life, and a calm smile rested upon it.—But Thomas Godolphin wished to be alone.

Lady Sarah stood outside, leaning against the opposite wall, and weeping silently, the glimmer from the hall-lamp below faintly lighting the corridor. Once she fancied that a sound, as of choking sobs, struck upon her ears, and she caught up a small black shawl that she wore, for grief had chilled her, flung it over her shoulders, and wept the faster.

He came out by-and-by, calm and quiet as he ever was. He did not perceive Lady Sarah standing there in the shade, and went straight down, the wax-light in his hand. Lady Sarah caught him up at the door of Sarah Anne's room, and took the light from him.

"She looks very peaceful, does she not?" was her whisper.

"She could not look otherwise."

He went on down alone, wishing to let himself out. But Elizabeth had heard his steps, and was already at the door. "Good night, Elizabeth," he said, as he passed her.

The girl did not answer. She slipped out into the garden after him. "Oh, sir! and didn't you know of it?" she whispered.

"No."

"If anybody was ever gone away to be an angel, sir, it's that sweet young lady," continued Elizabeth, letting her tears and sobs come forth as they would. "She was just one here! and she's gone to her own fit place above."

"Ay. It is so."

"You should have been in this house throughout the whole of the illness, to have seen the difference between them, sir! Nobody would believe it. Miss Grame, angry and snappish, and not caring who suffered, or who was ill, or who toiled, so that she was served: Miss Ethel, lying like a tender lamb, patient and meek, thankful for all that was done for her. It does seem hard, sir, that we should lose her for ever."

"Not for ever, Elizabeth," he answered.

"And that's true, too! But, sir, the worst is, one can't think of that sort of consolation just when one's troubles are fresh. Good night to you, sir."

"No, no," he murmured to himself; "not for ever."

## CHAPTER XIV. GONE ON BEFORE

Thomas Godolphin walked on, leaving the high-road for a less-frequented path, the one by which he had come. About midway between this and the railway station, a path, branching to the right, would take him into Prior's Ash. He went along, musing. In the depth of his great grief, there was no repining. He was one to trace the finger of God in all things. If Mrs. Godolphin had imbued him with superstitious feelings, she had also implanted within him something better: and a more entire trust in God it was perhaps impossible for any one to feel, than was felt by Thomas Godolphin. It was what he lived under. He could not see why Ethel should have been taken; why this great sorrow should fall upon him: but that it must be for the best, he implicitly believed. The best: for God had done it. How he was to live on without her, he knew not. How he could support the lively anguish of the immediate future, he did not care to think about. All his hope in this life gone! all his plans, his projects, uprooted by a single blow! never, any of them, to return. He might still look for the bliss of a hereafter—ay! that remains even for the most heavy-laden, thank God!—but his sun of happiness in this world had set for ever.

Thomas Godolphin might have been all the better for a little sun then—not speaking figuratively. I mean the good sun that illumines our daily world; that would be illumining my pen and paper at this moment, but for an envious fog, which obscures everything but itself. The moon was not shining as it had shone the last night he left Lady Sarah's, when he had left his farewell kiss—oh that he could have known it was the last!—on the gentle lips of Ethel. There was no moon yet; the stars were not showing themselves, for a black cloud enveloped the skies like a pall, fitting accompaniment to his blasted hopes; and his path altogether was dark. Little wonder then, that Thomas Godolphin all but fell over some dark object, crouching in his way: he could only save himself by springing back. By dint of peering, he discovered it to be a woman. She was seated on the bare earth; her hands clasped under her knees, which were raised almost level with her chin which rested on them, and was swaying herself backwards and forwards as one does in grief; as Lady Sarah Grame had done not long before.

"Why do you sit here?" cried Thomas Godolphin. "I nearly fell over you."

"Little matter if ye'd fell over me and killed me," was the woman's response, given without raising her head, or making any change in her position. "'Twould only have been one less in an awful cold world, as seems made for nothing but trouble. If the one half of us was out of it, there'd be room perhaps for them as was left."

"Is it Mrs. Bond?" asked Thomas Godolphin, as he caught a glimpse of her features.

"Didn't you know me, sir? I know'd you by the voice as soon as you spoke. You have got trouble too, I hear. The world's full of nothing else. Why does it come?"

"Get up," said Thomas Godolphin. "Why do you sit there? Why are you here at all at this hour of the night?"

"It's where I'm going to stop till morning," returned the woman, sullenly. "There shall be no getting up for me."

"What is the matter with you?" he resumed.

"Trouble," she shortly answered. "I've been toiling up to the work'us, asking for a loaf, or a bit o' money: anything they'd give to me, just to keep body and soul together for my children. They turned me back again. They'll give me nothing. I may go into the union with the children if I will, but not a stiver of help'll they afford me out of it. Me, with a corpse in the house, and a bare cubbort."

"A corpse!" involuntarily repeated Thomas Godolphin. "Who is dead?"

"John."

Curtly as the word was spoken, the tone yet betrayed its own pain. This John, the eldest son of the Bonds, had been attacked with the fever at the same time as the father and brother. They had succumbed to it: this one had recovered: or, at least, had appeared to be recovering.

"I thought John was getting better," observed Thomas Godolphin.

"He might ha' got better, if he'd had things to make him better! Wine and meat, and all the rest of it. He hadn't got 'em; and he's dead."

Now a subscription had been entered into for the relief of the poor sufferers from the fever, Godolphin, Crosse, and Godolphin having been amongst its most liberal contributors; and to Thomas Godolphin's certain knowledge, a full share, and a very good share, had been handed to the Bonds. Quite sufficient to furnish proper nourishment for John Bond for some time to come. He did not say to the woman, "You have had enough: where has it gone to? it has been wasted in riot." That it had been wasted in riot and improvidence, there was no doubt, for it was in the nature of the Bonds so to waste it; but to cast reproach in the hour of affliction was not the religion of everyday life practised by Thomas Godolphin.

"Yes, they turned me back," she resumed, swaying herself nose and knees together, as before. "They wouldn't give me as much as a bit o' bread. I wasn't going home without taking something to my famished children; and I wasn't going to beg like a common tramp. So I just sat myself down here; and I shan't care if I'm found stark and stiff in the morning!"

"Get up, get up," said Thomas Godolphin. "I will give you something for bread for your children to-night."

In the midst of his own sorrow he could feel for her, improvident old sinner though she was, and though he knew her to be so. He coaxed and soothed, and finally prevailed upon her to rise, but she was in a reckless, sullen mood, and it took him a little effort before it was effected. She burst into tears when she thanked him, and turned off in the direction of the Pollard cottages.

The reflection of Mr. Snow's bald head was conspicuous on the surgery blind: he was standing between the window and the lamp. Thomas Godolphin observed it as he passed. He turned to the surgery door, which was at the side of the house, opened it, and saw that Mr. Snow was alone.

The surgeon turned his head at the interruption, put down a glass jar which he held, and grasped his visitor's hand in silence.

"Snow! why did you not write for me?"

Mr. Snow brought down his hand on a pair of tiny scales, causing them to jangle and rattle. He had been bottling up his anger against Lady Sarah for some days now, and this was his first explosion.

"Because I understood that she had done so. I was present when that poor child asked her to do it. I found her on the floor in Sarah Anne's chamber. On the floor, if you'll believe me! Lying there, because she could not hold her aching head up. My lady had dragged her out of bed in the morning, ill as she was, and forced her to attend as usual upon Sarah Anne. I got it all out of Elizabeth. 'Mamma,' she said, when I pronounced it to be fever, though she was almost beyond speaking then, 'you will write to Thomas Godolphin.' I never supposed but that my lady did it. Your sister, Miss Godolphin, inquired if you had been written for, and I told her yes."

"Snow," came the next sad words, "could you not have saved her?"

The surgeon shook his head and answered in a quiet tone, looking down at the stopper of a phial, which he had taken up and was turning about listlessly in his fingers.

"Neither care nor skill could save her. I gave her the best I had to give. As did Dr. Beale. Godolphin,"—raising his quick dark eyes, flashing then with a peculiar light—"she was ready to go. Let it be your consolation."

Thomas Godolphin made no answer, and there was silence for a time. Mr. Snow resumed. "As to my lady, the best consolation I wish her, is, that she may have her heart wrung with remembrance for years to come! I don't care what people may preach about charity and forgiveness; I do wish it.

But she'll be brought to her senses, unless I am mistaken: she has lost her treasure and kept her bane. A year or two more, and that's what Sarah Anne will be."

"She ought to have written for me."

"She ought to do many things that she does not do. She ought to have sent Ethel from the house, as I told her, the instant the disorder appeared in it. Not she. She kept her in her insane selfishness: and now I hope she's satisfied with her work. When alarming symptoms showed themselves in Ethel, on the fourth day of her illness, I think it was, I said to my lady, 'It is strange what can be keeping Mr. Godolphin!' 'Oh,' said she, 'I did not write to him.' 'Not write!' I answered: and I fear I used an ugly word to my lady's face. 'I'll write at once,' returned she humbly. 'Of course,' cried I, 'when the steed's stolen we shut the stable-door.' It's the way of the world."

Another pause. "I would have given anything to take Ethel from the house at the time; to take her from the town," observed Thomas Godolphin in a low tone. "I said so then. But it could not be."

"I should have done it, in your place," said Mr. Snow. "If my lady had said no, I'd have carried her off in the face of it. Not married, you say? Rubbish! Every one knows she'd have been safe with you. And you would have been married as soon as was convenient. What are forms and ceremonies and carping tongues, in comparison with a girl's life? A life, precious as was Ethel's!"

Thomas Godolphin leaned his forehead in his hand, lost in retrospect. Oh, that he *had* taken her! that he had set at nought what he had then bowed to, the *convenances* of society! She might have been by his side now, in health and life, to bless him! Doubting words interrupted the train of thought.

"And yet I don't know," the surgeon was repeating, in a dreamy manner. "What is to be, will be. We look back, all of us, and say, 'If I had acted thus, if I had done the other, so and so would not have happened; events would have turned out differently.' But who is to be sure of it? Had you taken Ethel out of harm's way—as we might have thought it—there's no telling but she'd have had the fever just the same: her blood might have become infected before she left the house. There's no knowing, Mr. Godolphin."

"True. Good evening, Snow."

He turned suddenly and hastily to the outer door, but the surgeon caught him before he passed its threshold, and touched his arm to detain him. They stood there in the obscurity, their faces shaded in the dark night.

"She left you a parting word, Mr. Godolphin."

"Ah?"

"An hour before she died she was calm and sensible, though fear fully weak. Lady Sarah had gone to her favourite, and I was alone with Ethel. 'Has he not come yet?' she asked me, opening her eyes. 'My dear,' I said, 'he could not come; he was never written for.' For I knew she alluded to you, and was determined to tell her the truth, dying though she was. 'What shall I say to him for you?' I continued. She put up her hand to motion my face nearer hers, for her voice was growing faint. 'Tell him, with my dear love, not to grieve,' she whispered, between her panting breath. 'Tell him that I have gone on before.' I think they were almost the last words she spoke."

Thomas Godolphin leaned against the modest post of the surgery door, and eagerly drank in the words. Then he wrung the doctor's hand, and departed, hurrying along the street as one who shrank from observation: for he did not care, just then, to encounter the gaze of his fellow-men.

Coming with a quick step up the side street, in which the entrance to the surgery was situated, was the Reverend Mr. Hastings. He stopped to accost the surgeon.

"Was that Mr. Godolphin?"

"Ay. This is a blow for him."

Mr. Hastings's voice insensibly shrank to a whisper. "Maria tells me that he did not know of Ethel's death or illness. Until they arrived here to-night, they thought it was Sarah Anne who died. He went up to Lady Sarah's after the train came in, thinking so."

"Lady Sarah's a fool," was the complimentary rejoinder of Mr. Snow.

"She is, in some things," warmly assented the Rector. "The telegraphic message she despatched to Scotland, telling of the death, was so obscurely worded as to cause them to assume that it alluded to Sarah Anne."

"Ah well! she's only heaping burdens on her conscience," rejoined Mr. Snow in a philosophic tone. "She has lost Ethel through want of care (as I firmly believe) in not keeping her out of the way of infection; she prevented their last meeting, through not writing to him; she—"

"He could not have saved her, had he been here," interrupted Mr. Hastings.

"No one said he could. There would have been satisfaction in it for him, though. And for her too, poor child."

Mr. Hastings did not contest the point. He was so very practical a man (in contradistinction to an imaginative one) that he saw little use in "last" interviews, unless they produced actual good. Turning away, he walked home at a brisk pace. Maria was alone when he entered. Mrs. Hastings and Grace were out of the room, talking to some late applicant: a clergyman's house, like a parish apothecary's, is never free long together. Divested of her travelling cloaks and seated before the fire in her quiet merino dress, Maria looked as much at home as if she had never left it. The blaze, flickering on her face, betrayed to the keen glance of the Rector that her eyelashes were wet.

"Grieving after Broomhead already, Maria?" asked he, his tone a stern one.

"Oh, papa, no! I am glad to be at home. I was thinking of poor Ethel."

"She is better off. The time may come, Maria—we none of us know what is before us—when some of you young ones who are left may wish you had died as she has. Many a one, battling for very existence with the world's cares, wails out a vain wish that he had been taken early from the evil to come."

"It must be so dreadful for Thomas Godolphin!" Maria resumed, looking straight into the fire, and speaking as if in commune with herself, more than to her father.

"Thomas Godolphin must find another love."

It was one of those phrases, spoken in satire only, to which the Rector of All Souls' was occasionally given. He saw so much to condemn in the world, things which grated harshly on his advanced mind, that his speech had become imbued with a touch of gall, and he would often give utterance to cynical remarks, uncalled for at the moment.

Maria took up the words literally. She turned to Mr. Hastings; her cheek flushed, her hands clasped; altogether betraying vivid emotion. "Oh, papa! another love! You should not say it of Thomas Godolphin. Love, such as his, is not for a week or a year: it is for all time."

The Rector paused a moment in his reply. His penetrating gaze was fixed upon his daughter. "May I inquire whence you have derived your knowledge of 'love,' Miss Maria Hastings?"

Her eyes drooped, her face turned crimson, her manner grew confused. She turned her countenance from that of her father, and stammered forth some lame excuse. "Every one knows, papa, that Thomas Godolphin was fond of Ethel."

"Possibly. But every one does not know that Maria Hastings deems herself qualified to enlarge upon the subject," was the Rector's reply. And Maria shrank into silence.

There came a day, not many days afterwards, when Maria Hastings, her sisters, and two of her brothers, were gathered in sombre silence around the study window of the Rectory. The room was built out at the back of the house, over the kitchen, and its side window commanded a full view of the churchyard of All Souls', and of the church porch. Grace, who constituted herself mistress of the others a great deal more than did Mrs. Hastings herself, allowed the blind to be drawn up about two inches at the bottom of the window; and Maria, Isaac, Harry, and Rose, kneeling down for convenience sake, brought their faces into contact with it, as the mob outside the churchyard gate did there. Human nature is the same everywhere, whether in the carefully-trained children of a Christian gentleman, or in those who know no training but what the streets have given.



The funeral, even now, was inside the church: it had been inside so long that those eager watchers, estimating time by their impatience, began to think it was never coming out again. A sudden movement in the church porch reassured them, and Grace knelt down and made one with the rest.

Slowly—slowly—on it came. The Reverend Mr. Hastings first, in his white robes; the coffin next; Thomas Godolphin last, with a stranger by his side. Nothing more, except some pall-bearers in their white scarfs, and the necessary attendants. It was a perfectly simple funeral: according well with what the dead had been in her simple life.

The appearance of this stranger took the curious gazers by surprise. Who was he? A spare man, past middle age, with a red nose and an unmistakable wig on his head. Rumours circulating in Prior's Ash had said that Thomas Godolphin would be sole mourner. Lady Sarah Grame's relatives—and she could not boast of many—lived far north of Aberdeen. "Who can he be?" murmured Grace Hastings.

"Why, don't you girls know? That's through your having stuck yourselves in the house all the morning, for fear you should lose the funeral. If you had gone out, you'd have heard who he is." The retort came from Harry Hastings. Let it be a funeral or a wedding, that may be taking place under their very eyes, boys must be boys all the world over. And so they ever will be.

"Who is he, then?" asked Grace.

"He is Ethel's uncle," answered Harry. "He arrived by train this morning. The Earl of Macsomething."

"The Earl of Macsomething!" repeated Grace.

Harry nodded. "Mac begins the name, and I forget the rest. Lady Sarah was his sister."

"Is, you mean," said Grace. "It must be Lord Macdoune."

The church porch was opposite the study window. The grave had been dug in a line between the two, very near to the family vault of the Godolphins and to the entrance gate of the churchyard. On it came, crossing the broad churchyard path which wound round to the road, treading between mounds and graves. The clergyman took his place at the head, the mourners near him, the rest disposing themselves decently around.

"Grace," whispered Isaac, "if we had the window open an inch, we should hear." And Grace was pleased to accord her sanction, and they silently raised it.

"Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery. He cometh up and is cut down like a flower; he fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay."

The children—indeed they were little more—hushed their breath and listened, and looked at Thomas Godolphin. Thomas Godolphin stood there, his head bowed, his face still, the gentle wind stirring his thin dark hair. It was probably a marvel to himself in after-life, how he had contrived, in that closing hour, to retain his calmness before the world.

"The coffin's lowered at last!" broke out Harry, who had been more curious to watch the movements of the men, than the aspect of Thomas Godolphin.

"Hush, sir!" sharply rebuked Grace. And the minister's voice again stole over the silence.

"Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God of his great mercy to take unto himself the soul of our dear sister here departed, we therefore commit her body to the ground; earth to earth ... ashes to ashes ... dust to dust ... in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change our vile body, that it may be like unto his glorious body, according to the mighty working, whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself."

Every word came home to Thomas Godolphin's senses; every syllable vibrated upon his heartstrings. That sure and certain hope laid hold of his soul, never again to quit it. It diffused its own holy peace and calm into his troubled mind: and never, until that moment, had he fully realized the worth, the truth, of her dying legacy: "Tell him that I have gone on before." A few years—God, now present with him, alone knew how few or how many—and Thomas Godolphin would have joined her in eternal life.

But why had Mr. Hastings come to a temporary pause? Because his eye had fallen upon one, then gliding up from the entrance of the churchyard to take his place amidst the mourners. One who had evidently arrived in a hurry. He wore neither scarf nor hatband, neither cloak nor hood: nothing but a full suit of plain black clothes.

“Look, Maria,” whispered Grace.

It was George Godolphin. He fell quietly in below his brother, his hat carried in his hand, his head bowed, his fair curls waving in the breeze. It was all the work of an instant: and the minister resumed:

“I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me, Write, From henceforth blessed are the dead which die in the Lord: even so saith the Spirit; for they rest from their labours.”

And so went on the service to the end.

The beadle, with much bustle and a liberal use of his staff, scattered and dispersed the mob from the gates, to clear a passage. Two mourning coaches were in waiting. Thomas Godolphin came forth, leaning on his brother’s arm, both of them bare-headed still. They entered one; Lord Macdoune stepped into the other.

“Thomas!” cried George Godolphin, leaning forward and seizing his brother’s hand impulsively, as the mourning-coach paced slowly on: “I should have been here in good time, but for a delay in the train.”

“How did you hear of it? I did not know where to write to you,” was Thomas’s reply, spoken calmly.

“I heard of it at Broomhead. I went back there, and then I came off at once. Thomas, could they not save her?”

A slight negative movement was all Thomas Godolphin’s answer. “How did you find your father, George?”

“Breaking. Breaking fast. Thomas, all his talk is, that he must come home to die.”

“To Ashlydyat. I know. How is he to come to it? The Folly is not Ashlydyat. He has desired me to see that he is at Prior’s Ash before Christmas, and I shall do so.”

George looked surprised. “Desired you to see that he is?”

“If he is not back speedily, I am to go to Broomhead.”

“Oh, I see. That your authority, upholding his, may be pitted against my lady’s. Take care, Thomas: she may prove stronger than both of you put together.”

“I think not,” replied Thomas quietly; and he placed his elbow on the window frame, and bent his face upon his hand, as if wishing for silence.

Meanwhile the Reverend Mr. Hastings had passed through the private gate to his own garden; and half a dozen men were shovelling earth upon the coffin, sending it with a rattle upon the bright plate, which told who was mouldering within:

**“Ethel Grame. Aged twenty years.”**

## CHAPTER XV. A MIDNIGHT WALK

Thomas Godolphin sat in his place at the bank, opening the morning letters. It was some little time after the interment of Ethel Grame, and the second week in December was already on the wane. In two days more it was his intention to start for Broomhead: for no tidings arrived of the return of Sir George. The very last of the letters he came upon, was one bearing the Scotch post-mark. A poor little note with a scrawled address: no wonder the sorting-clerk had placed it last of all! It looked singularly obscure, in comparison with those large blue letters and their business hands.

Thomas Godolphin knew the writing. It was Margery's. And we may as well read the contents with him, *verbatim*:

“Mr. Thomas Sir,

“I imbrace this favurable oportunity of adresing you for I considur it my duty to take up my pen and inform you about my master, *He's not long for this world*, Mr. Thomas I know it by good tokens which I don't write not being an easy writer but they are none the less true, The master's fretting his life away because he is not at home and she is keeping him because she's timorus of the fever. But you saw how it was sir when you were here and it's the same story still. There'd have been a fight for it with my lady but if I'd been you Mr. Thomas I'd have took him also when me and the young ladies went with you to Prior's Ash. When I got back here, sir I saw an awful change in him and Mr. George he saw it but my lady didn't. I pen these lines sir to say you had better come off at once and not wait for it to be nearer Christmas, The poor master is always saying *Thomas is coming for me*, *Thomas is coming for me* but I'd not answer for it now that he will ever get back alive, Sir it was the worst day's work he ever did to go away at all from Ashlydyat if my lady was dying to live at the new Folly place she might have gone to it but not him, When we do a foolish wrong thing we don't think of the consekences at the time at least not much of em but we think all the more after and fret our hearts out with blame and it have been slowly killing him ever since, I am vexed to disturb you Mr. Thomas with this epistle for I know you must be in enough grief of your own just now.

“*Your humble servant,*

“*Margery.*”

Thomas Godolphin read it over twice, and then crossed to the opposite side of the private room, where sat a gentleman at another desk. A tall, portly man, with a fresh colour, large, keen dark eyes, and hair white as snow. It was Mr. Crosse.

“Anything particular, Thomas?” he asked, as Thomas Godolphin put the letter into his hand.

“Not in business. Read it, will you?”

Mr. Crosse read the letter through. “Is it my advice you wish for?” asked he, when he came to the last word.

“Not exactly,” replied Thomas Godolphin. “I have made up my mind, I believe.”

“To go immediately?”

“Yes. Within an hour.”

“Right. It is what I should have recommended you to do, had you been undecided. When it comes to letter-writing with Margery, the thing is serious, rely upon it.”

And within the hour Thomas Godolphin had started.

The railway station nearest to Broomhead, was three miles distant from it, by the road: but there was a shorter cut across some fields—bearing past the house of that Mr. Sandy Bray, if you

are curious to know—which reduced it to less than two. It was one of those rural stations so little frequented that travellers are tempted to ask why they were built at all. Such a thing as a fly, or an omnibus, had never yet been seen at it, at midday: you may therefore judge what chance Thomas Godolphin had of either, getting there, as he did, at midnight. He was the only passenger to alight, and the train went puffing on. The man, who lived in the one-roomed cottage close by, and was called the station-master, appeared to be the only official to receive him. A man who had been drafted thither from one of the English lines.

“For Broomhead, sir?” he questioned, recognizing the traveller.

“Yes. Do you happen to know how Sir George Godolphin is?”

“He looks rare and poorly, sir. He was past here in his carriage to-day. Huddled up in a corner of it, as if he was cold; or else hadn’t the strength to sit up. Her ladyship was inside with him.”

“There’s no porter about, I suppose?”

“He has been gone this two hours, sir. I’d offer to carry your luggage myself, but I shall have the up-express by in half an hour. I shut up for the night then.”

“I would not trouble you for so trifling a matter, at this hour, were you at liberty,” replied Thomas Godolphin.

He took up his portmanteau himself: a thing not much larger than what the French would call a *petit sac-de-nuit*, containing little besides a clean shirt and his shaving-tackle: and started, bending his steps not along the road, but across it to the stile.

“I wouldn’t take the field way to-night, sir, if I were you,” said the man from the station door. “The road is safest.”

“Why is it?” asked Thomas Godolphin.

“There’s a nasty bit by the field way, a quarter of a mile before you come to Bray’s. Anybody, not knowing it well, might take the wrong turning, and go, head first, into the dam.”

“But I do know it well,” said Thomas Godolphin. “And the night is light enough to distinguish the turnings.”

The station-master looked up at the skies—figuratively speaking, for he could see nothing but fog. A light, hazy mist; not a dark one; which seemed likely to turn to rain. He said no more, except a “Good night, sir:” and Thomas Godolphin walked on, hesitating for a moment between the two roads, and then turning decisively to that of the fields, as if some hidden impulse impelled him. Perhaps it did so.

It was not a pleasant night, a pleasant time, or a pleasant way; and Thomas Godolphin began to think he should have done well to have telegraphed his intended journey from Prior’s Ash to Broomhead, that they might have sent a conveyance to await him at the station. Regrets were of no use now, and he trudged along, taking two steps forward, and one backward, for the ground in places was wet and slippery. It was a peculiar night. There was no moon; there were no stars; no skies in fact to be seen at all, as you have heard; and yet the night was light.

What were Thomas Godolphin’s thoughts bent upon? Need you ask? For some time to come, days and weeks and months, they must run chiefly upon her who had left him. He remembered his last arrival at Broomhead: he remembered his thoughts as he had walked from the station as he was doing now; though then it had been by daylight. His musings had been of Ethel, and his coming marriage; of that farewell kiss which she had pressed upon his lips. Now—now he must only think of her as one of Heaven’s angels.

He lifted his hat to wipe his brow, and then changed his load to the other hand. He was coming to the dam now. He could hear its waters. Go carefully, Thomas Godolphin! A few steps down that dark turning, and you might never be heard of more. But he knew his way, and the night was light, and he bore on his course, and the dangerous turn was passed.

A little way farther on, and he could discern the outline of Bray’s cottage in the distance. A light burnt in one of the windows, and he wondered who was ill. Probably Margery’s sister. It diverted

his own sad reflections. Next he became absorbed in thoughts of his father. How should he find him? Ideas, we all know, assume the colouring of surrounding associations, and Thomas Godolphin, in that solitary midnight hour, grew to take a more sombre view of the news contained in Margery's letter than he had hitherto done. It is wonderful how circumstances affect us! In the broad light of day, walking, for instance, as he had done previously to Broomhead, apprehensions would not have come over him. Now he pictured his father (by no will of his own: the scenes rose up unbidden) as lying ill; perhaps dying. Perhaps even then a telegraphic message to him might be on its road to Prior's Ash! Perhaps—

A cry right over his head! And Thomas Godolphin positively started. It proceeded from some night-bird that had dived down upon him, and now flew onwards, flapping its wings. Superstitious Margery would have called it an omen.

Thomas Godolphin followed it with his eyes, speculating upon what bird it could be. It looked like a sea-gull; had screamed like one; but the sea was far off, and, if it was one, it must have come a long distance.

Back it came again, and dived down as before. Thomas Godolphin did not like it, and he wished the portmanteau in his hand had been a gun. "I wonder what good these restless night-birds do," he ejaculated, "except to disturb from sleep any worn-out mortal who may be within hearing?"

Scenes of the recent past rose up before him: the sombre scenes in which he had been an actor. The ominous Shadow of Ashlydyat, striking on his sight as he turned the ash-trees, the night of his previous summons to Broomhead: the dead face of Ethel lying on her bed; the reminiscence of the funeral scene; of his walking away from it with the dull sound of the earth falling on her coffin smiting his ears! None of them pleasant things to recall at that particular hour. Why should they have come to him?

"What business had they there at such a time?"

Drive them away he could not. But neither did he try to do so. They served to make doubly sad, doubly ominous, his new fears for his father. He knew how precarious was Sir George's life. What if he were then dying! Nay, what if it were the very moment of his departure?—if he were dead? having called upon his children; upon him, Thomas, in vain?

That odious bird once more! It flew over his head with a shriller cry than the last. Thomas Godolphin was at that moment within a few paces of a stile which lay in his path. He turned his head round to look after the bird, without slackening his pace, putting out his hand before him to feel for the stile. The hand came into contact with it, and Thomas let it rest momentarily. His head was turned, still watching the bird, which was then flying round and round, making fierce circlets in the air.

But he could not stop there all night, staring at the bird, and he turned sharply round to cross the stile. Placing one foot on its lower rail, he—

What made Thomas Godolphin start as if he had been shot? Who and what was that standing on the other side of the stile fixedly gazing at him? A tall, shadowy, upright form, bearing the unmistakable features of Sir George Godolphin.

Will you—strong, practical, unimaginative men of the world—forgive Thomas Godolphin if in that one brief moment the wild superstitions, instilled into his mind in childhood, were allowed their play? Forgive him, or not, it was the fact. In imagination, only the instant before, he had seen his father lying upon his bed, the soul parting from the body: and Thomas Godolphin as much believed what he now saw before him was his father's spirit, as that he, himself, was in existence. The spirit, appearing to him at the moment of its departure. His flesh turned cold, and dew gathered on his brow.

"My son, can it be you?"

Thomas Godolphin came out of his folly, and grasped his father. That it was real flesh and blood which yielded to his arms, he knew now: but perhaps the *surprise* that it should be so, was even greater than the other emotion. Sir George Godolphin there! at that midnight hour! nearly a

mile from home! and bareheaded! Was it really Sir George? Thomas Godolphin rubbed his eyes, and thought he, himself, must have taken leave of his senses.

“My father! my dear father! what are you doing here?”

“I thought I’d go to the station, Thomas, and see about a special train. I must go back to Ashlydyat to die.”

Thomas climbed over the stile. The tone, the manner, the words, altogether had betrayed to him an unhappy fact—that his father’s mind was not in a state of perfect sanity. He trembled for his health, too. It was a cold raw night, and here was Sir George in evening dress, without so much as an overcoat thrown on! He, who had only been out since the last fainting-fit in a close carriage: and then well wrapped up.

“Where is your hat, father?”

The old knight lifted his hand to his head, as if he had not known that his hat was not there. “I must have come out without it, Thomas,” he said. “What was that noise over there?” he continued, pointing above the stile to the way Thomas had come, his frame shivering with cold as he spoke.

“I think it was a sea-gull. Or some screaming night-bird.”

“I could not get over the stile, Thomas. The walk seemed to have taken the strength out of me. How did you come here? I thought you were at Prior’s Ash.”

Thomas Godolphin was busy. He had taken off his great coat, and was putting it upon his father, buttoning it up carefully. A smaller man than Sir George, it did not fit well: but Sir George had shrunk. The hat fitted better.

“But you have no hat yourself!” said Sir George, surveying his son’s head, when he had submitted in patient silence to the dressing.

“I don’t want one,” replied Thomas. “The night air will not hurt me.” Nevertheless, all the way to Broomhead, he was looking on either side, if perchance he might come upon Sir George’s hat, lying in the road.

Thomas drew his father close, to support him on his arm, and they commenced their walk to the house. Not until then did Thomas know how very weak his father was. Stooping, shivering, tripping, with every other step, it appeared impossible that he could walk back again: the wonder was, how he had walked there.

Thomas Godolphin halted in dismay. How was he to get his father home? Carry him, he could not: it was of course beyond his strength. The light in Bray’s window suggested a thought to him.

“Father, I think you had better go to Bray’s and stay there, while I see about your hand-chair. You are not able to walk.”

“I won’t go to Bray’s,” returned the knight, with a touch of vehemence. “I don’t like Bray, and I will not put my foot inside his threshold. Besides, it’s late, and my lady will miss us.”

He pressed on somewhat better towards home, and Thomas Godolphin saw nothing else that could be done, except to press on with him, and give him all the help in his power. “My dear father, you should have waited until the morning,” he said, “and have gone out then.”

“But I wanted to see about a train, Thomas,” remonstrated the knight. “And I can’t do it in the day. She will not let me. When we drive past the railway station, she won’t get out, and won’t let me do so. Thomas, I want to go back to Ashlydyat.”

“I have come to take you back, my dear father.”

“Ay, ay. And mind you are firm when she says I must not go because of the fever. The fever will not hurt me, Thomas. I can’t be firm. I have grown feeble, and people take my will from me. You are my first-born son, Thomas.”

“Yes.”

“Then you must be firm for me, I say.”

“I will be, father.”

“This is a rough road, Thomas.”

“No, it is smooth; and I am glad that it is so. But you are tired.”

The old knight bent his head, as if choosing his steps. Presently he lifted his head:

“Thomas, when do they leave Ashlydyat?”

“Who, sir? The Verralls? They have not had notice yet.”

Sir George stopped. He drew up his head to its full height, and turned to his son. “Not had notice? When, then, do I go back? I won’t go to Lady Godolphin’s Folly. I must go to Ashlydyat.”

“Yes, sir,” said Thomas soothingly. “I will see about it.”

The knight, satisfied, resumed his walk. “Of course you will see about it. You are my son and heir, Thomas. I depend upon you.”

They pursued their way for some little time in silence, and then Sir George spoke again, his tone hushed. “Thomas, I have put on mourning for her. I mourn her as much as you do. And you did not get there in time to see her alive!”

“Not in time. No,” replied Thomas, looking hard into the mist overhead.

“I’d have come to the funeral, Thomas, if she had let me. But she was afraid of the fever. George got there in time for it?”

“Barely.”

“When he came back to Broomhead, and heard of it, he was so cut up, poor fellow. Cut up for your sake, Thomas. He said he should be in time to follow her to the grave if he started at once, and he went off then and there. Thomas”—dropping his voice still lower—“whom shall you take to Ashlydyat now?”

“My sisters.”

“Nay. But as your wife? You will be replacing Ethel sometime.”

“I shall never marry now, father.”

At length Broomhead was reached. Thomas held open the gate of the shrubbery to his father, and guided him through it.

“Shall we have two engines, Thomas?”

“Two engines, sir! What for?”

“They’d take us quicker, you know. This is not the station!” broke forth Sir George in a sharp tone of complaint, as they emerged beyond the shrubbery, and the house stood facing them. “Oh, Thomas! you said you were taking me to Ashlydyat! I cannot die away from it!”

Thomas Godolphin stood almost confounded. His father’s discourse, the greater part of it, at any rate, had been so rational that he had begun to hope he was mistaken as to his weakness of mind. “My dear father, be at rest,” he said: “we will start if you like with to-morrow’s dawn. But to go now to the station would not forward us: it is by this time closed for the night.”

They found the house in a state of commotion. Sir George had been missed, and servants were out searching for him. Lady Godolphin gazed at Thomas with all the eyes she possessed, thunderstruck at his appearance. “What miracle brought you here?” she exclaimed, wonderingly.

“No miracle, Lady Godolphin. I am thankful that I happened to come. What might have become of Sir George without me, I know not. I expect he would have remained at the stile where I found him until morning; and might have caught his death there.”

“He will catch that speedily enough if he is to wander out of the house at midnight in this mad manner,” peevishly rejoined my lady.

## CHAPTER XVI. THE LAST JOURNEY

"I beg your pardon, Lady Godolphin. That is not the question."

"Not the question!" reiterated Lady Godolphin. "I say that it is the question. The question is, whether Sir George is better and safer here than he would be at Prior's Ash. And of course he is so."

"I think not," replied Thomas Godolphin quietly. "He would be equally well at Prior's Ash: equally safe, as I believe and trust. And the anxiety to be there, which has taken hold of his mind, has grown too strong to be repressed. To detain him here, against his wish, would make him ill, Lady Godolphin. Not returning home."

"Prior's Ash is an unhealthy place just now."

"Its unhealthiness has passed away. The last to be attacked was—was Ethel. And you are aware that time, since then, may be counted by weeks."

"Sir George is partially childish," pursued Lady Godolphin. "You may see for yourself that he is so. It would be most unreasonable, it would be ridiculous to take notice of his whims. Look at his starting out of the house to-night, with nothing on, and roaming a mile or two away in the dark! Is that a proof of sanity?"

"It is a proof how fixedly his mind is bent upon returning home," replied Thomas Godolphin. "He was endeavouring, as I have already informed you, Lady Godolphin, to make his way to the station."

"I shall have him watched in future," said she.

"Lady Godolphin," he resumed, speaking in the calmly quiet tone which characterized him, unmistakably firm now, in spite of its courteousness: "I am here by the desire of my father to accompany him back to Prior's Ash. I may almost say, to convey him back: for I fear he can no longer boast much power of his own, in any way. The last words I said to him, before entering, were, that he should start, if it pleased him, with to-morrow's dawn. I must keep my promise."

"Do you defy me, Thomas Godolphin?"

"I have no wish to do so. I have no wish to abate a particle of the respect and consideration due to you as my father's wife. At the same time, my duty to him is paramount: I hold it more sacred, Lady Godolphin, than any earthly thing. He has charged me, by my duty, to take him back to Ashlyd—to Prior's Ash: and I shall do so."

"You would take him back, I suppose, if Prior's Ash were full of snakes and scorpions?" returned my lady, somewhat losing her temper.

"It is full of neither. Nothing is there, so far as I am aware, that can harm Sir George. Can you urge a single good reason why he should not return to it, Lady Godolphin!"

The delicate bloom on my lady's cheeks was surely heightened—or did Thomas Godolphin fancy it? "But, what if I say he shall *not* return?" she asked, her voice slightly raised.

"I think you will not say it, Lady Godolphin," he replied. "It is Sir George's wish to go to Prior's Ash, and it is my province to see that wish carried out—as he has requested me. Much as I desire to respect your feelings and any plans you may have formed, they cannot weigh with me in this case. There is no necessity whatever for your returning home, Lady Godolphin, unless you choose to do so: but Sir George will leave for it to-morrow."

"And you boast that you do not defy me!" cried Lady Godolphin, with a short laugh. "I would use force to keep him in this house, rather than he should go out of it against my will."

"Force?" repeated Thomas Godolphin, looking at her for an explanation. "What sort of force?"

"Physical force," she answered, assuming a degree of fair suavity. "I would command the servants to bar his exit."



A faint smile crossed Thomas Godolphin's lips. "Do not attempt that, Lady Godolphin," he replied in the respectful manner of one who tenders earnest advice. "I should be sorry indeed to publicly oppose my authority to yours. You know the servants have, most of them, grown old in our service: and that may plead their excuse: but there is not one of them who would not be obedient to the lifting of my finger, in the cause of their master."

Lady Godolphin was foiled. Lady Godolphin had long been aware that she should be foiled, if it ever came to an encounter—strength against strength—between herself and Thomas Godolphin. Easy George she could manage, the Miss Godolphins she could put down, Sir George was, now, as a reed in her hands. But Thomas?—he was different. None of them had been so uniformly respectful and courteous to her as Thomas. And yet she had known that he, of all the rest, would not bend to her authority, were any cause to arise why he should not do so.

She sat biting—as far as she dared—her rose-tinted lips; she lifted one hand and toyed with her perfumed ringlets; she opened a fan which lay at her side, and gently fanned herself; she glanced at the still countenance of Thomas Godolphin: and she knew that she must give up the game. To give it up with a good grace was essential to her future ruling: and she was now making up her mind to do this. It would never do, either, for her to stand in the hall on the morrow, call the servants around her, and say, "It is my pleasure that Sir George does not leave this place for Prior's Ash. Keep him in; hold him in; lock the door; use any necessary means," while Thomas Godolphin was at hand, to lift—as he had phrased it—his finger, and say, "It is my pleasure that my father does go to Prior's Ash. Stand back while he passes." Lady Godolphin was no simpleton, and she could hazard a shrewd guess as to which of the two would be obeyed. So she sat, bringing her mind to make a virtue of necessity, and throw up the plea. In point of fact, she had no cause of objection to Sir George's returning to Prior's Ash, except that she did not care to return to it herself. For two reasons: one, that she liked Broomhead best: the other, that she could not yet subdue her fears of the fever. She bent her head, as if examining the chaste devices on her fan, and spoke indifferently.

"You must be aware that my wish to keep Sir George here arises solely from the state of Prior's Ash. It always has been our custom to spend Christmas there, amongst you all, and I should have had no other thought for this Christmas, but for the illness which arose. Will you guarantee that it is safe for him?"

"Nay, Lady Godolphin. To 'guarantee' an assurance of the sort would be impossible at the best of times. I believe that any fears you may entertain now of the fever will prove only a bugbear."

"The fever has been more than a bugbear to you," she exclaimed, acidity in her tone.

"Yes," he sadly answered.

He drew his chair from the table, where he had been taking some refreshment after his journey, and at that moment the hall clock struck two.

"I am keeping you up very late, Lady Godolphin."

"It is a pleasant change," she answered. "The life here, with Sir George in his delicate state, is so excessively monotonous, that a few nights of sitting up and days of bed, might prove an agreeable variety. Did I understand you rightly—that you intend to start in the morning?"

"If Sir George shall then wish to do so as anxiously as he appeared to wish it to-night. Otherwise, I shall not object to delay it until the following one. I cannot remain longer: business demands my presence at home. And," he added, lowering his voice, "I fear that speed is necessary for my father's sake. If he does not go pretty soon, he may not be able to go at all. It is more than likely that we shall start to-morrow."

"You cannot expect me to be ready in that space of time."

"Certainly not. Just as you please, Lady Godolphin."

Thomas Godolphin was shown to his room. Margery waylaid him in the corridor and entered it with him. "Did you get my epistle, Mr. Thomas?"

"It was that which brought me here now, Margery. Otherwise, I should not have come until the end of the week."

"Then you would have come too late, sir. Yes, Mr. Thomas, I mean what I say," added the woman, dropping her voice to solemnity. "By dreams and signs and tokens, which I have had—"

"Stay, Margery. You know that I am never very tolerant of your dreams and signs. Let them rest."

"It's true you are not," answered Margery, without the least appearance of discomfiture; "and many's the argument I would have liked to hold with you over it. But you'd never let me. When you were a young man, you'd laugh and joke it down—just as Mr. George might now, were I so foolish as to waste words upon *him*—and since you grew older and steadier you have just put me off as you are doing at this moment. Mr. Thomas, gifts are different in different people. They are not sent upon all alike: and the Scripture says so. One will see what another can't. One will play beautiful music, while another can't tell one tune from another. One man has a head for steam-engines and telegraphs, and will put 'em together as if he had a workshop inside him; and another, his own cousin maybe, can hardly tell an engine when he sees it, and couldn't work one out if he lived to be a hundred years old. And so with other things."

"Well?" responded Thomas Godolphin: for Margery paused, as if waiting for an answer.

"And do you suppose, Mr. Thomas, that it's not the same with signs and warnings? It is not given to all to see or understand them. It is not given, as I take it, for many to see or understand them. But it *is* given to a few. And those few can no more be talked out of knowing that it's truth, than they can be talked out of their own life, or of the skies above 'em. And, Mr. Thomas, it's not only that those who have not the gift can't see or believe for themselves, but they can't be brought to believe that others may do so: and so they laugh at and ridicule it. Many a time, sir, you have laughed at me."

"You see so many, you know, Margery," said Thomas Godolphin, with a slight smile.

Margery looked at him. "Sometimes I have thought, sir, that you are not quite as unbelieving as you seem. But I know it does not do for a gentleman, high and educated and looked up to in his town, to say he puts faith in such. So I'll not trouble you, Mr. Thomas, with the tokens I have had. I'll not tell you that only last night that ever was, I heard the footsteps of—"

"But you are telling me, Margery."

"That's just how you take me up, Mr. Thomas! Well, sir, I say I'll not bring forward these things, but I'll speak of what you may think a surer sign—and that's Sir George's state of health."

"Ay! I can follow you there."

He let her talk on. And she did so, until he was obliged to give her a gentle hint that he should be glad to be alone and get to bed.

The house was awakened before it was yet dawn. Sir George had rung for his servant, had rung for Margery, had rung for the coachman to say the carriage was wanted—in short, had rung for so many, that the whole household was aroused. My lady appeared, in fur slippers and a warm dressing-gown, to know what the commotion could mean. His son Thomas was there, the knight answered. He was sure he had not dreamt it, but that Thomas *had* come the previous night; he met him at the stile; and Thomas had promised that they should go to Ashlydyat in the early morning.

It appeared he was sane enough to remember that. My lady retired, grumbling; and Margery went and called Thomas.

When Thomas reached the room, Sir George was almost in the last stage of dressing. His own trembling, eager fingers had done as much towards it as his servant. He lifted his face with its ashy hue and its strange yearning. "Thomas, my son, I must hasten back to Ashlydyat. You said I should go there to die."

"Do you wish to start immediately, father?"

"You said I should do so!" he wailed in a tone imploringly earnest. "You said I should start with this morning's dawn."

“Yes, yes,” acquiesced Thomas. And he forthwith busied himself to advance the preparations.

The best hour that they could leave the station was a little before nine. No train, except one much earlier, stopped at it before. This gave time to get off comfortably: though Sir George, in his impatience, could with difficulty be induced to sit down to breakfast. My lady came in when they were at the table.

“This is really the most extraordinary proceeding!” she exclaimed, speaking chiefly to Thomas Godolphin. “Were such a thing related to me as taking place in another house I should decline to give credence to it. Are the hours of the day so few that you must choose the gloom of a winter’s morning for commencing a journey?”

Thomas glanced at Sir George, as if to draw her attention to him. “My father’s anxiety will not allow him to wait, Lady Godolphin. I think it well that we should catch the first train.”

“I wash my hands of the journey altogether,” said Lady Godolphin. “If Sir George does not reach the other end of it alive, you will have the goodness to remember that *I* am not to blame. Far better that he were safely kept in his room wrapped up in his dressing-gown in front of a good fire.”

“In that case, my lady, I would not answer for it that he reached the end of the day alive,” interposed Margery, who was in and out of the room busier than any of them. “Whether Sir George stays, or whether he goes, he’ll not last many days,” she added in a lower tone, so that it might not reach her master’s ear.

“If I must have gone, I would have started at a Christian hour, Sir George,” resumed his wife. “Getting us all out of bed as if we were so many milkmaids?”

Sir George looked round, timidity in his voice and manner. Did he fear that she would detain him even now? “You can come on afterwards, you know, Lady Godolphin; we need not hurry you. Oh, I must, I must be at Ashlydyat!”

Thomas Godolphin came to the rescue. “We shall be in the carriage in five minutes, my dear father, if you will only take your breakfast.”

And in a little more than five minutes they were seated in it, on their way to the station, Sir George’s own man and Margery attending them. Margery would have deemed it just as possible to cut herself in twain, as to be separated from her master in his present state.

They did not get him that night to Prior’s Ash. Thomas feared the long journey for him without a break, so they halted for the night about midway. Singularly to state, Sir George did not utter an impatient word at the delay: from the moment of leaving Broomhead he had become perfectly calm. Whether the fact of his being indisputably on the road had soothed his mind to tranquillity, or whether the strangely eager desire to be home had now left it, certain it was, that he had never mentioned Ashlydyat throughout the day. Of one thing there could be no doubt—that he was fast sinking. Sinking both in mind and body. Margery grew terrified. “Pray Heaven we may get him home!” she aspired. “Mr. Thomas, as sure as that we are here, he would have been dead before this, had he stopped at Broomhead!”

In the twilight of the second evening, Sir George was at length once more at Prior’s Ash. Thomas had telegraphed their arrival, and Janet was at the station with the carriage. But, with the first few words, Janet perceived that he was perfectly childish. Not only childish, but alarmingly changed. Janet grew pale as she turned to Margery.

“Since when?” she murmured.

“Since many days, off and on; but worse since we left Broomhead yesterday morning. He has been sinking hour by hour. Miss Janet, it’s death.”

They got him to the Folly. And, in half an hour, the whole of his family were gathered round his death-bed. His partner, Mr. Crosse; the surgeon; and the Rector of All Souls’ were also there.

He was rambling for the most part in a disconnected manner: but he recognized them all individually, and occasionally gave utterance to rational remarks, as he might have done had he been in full possession of his senses. He fancied himself at Ashlydyat.

"I could not have died away from it, you know, Crosse," he suddenly cried to that gentleman. "Thomas was for bringing me back to the Folly, but I told him I must go to Ashlydyat. If I did let it to strangers, they could not keep me out of it, when I wanted to go there to die. A Godolphin must not die away from Ashlydyat. Where's Cecil?" he added, after a pause.

Poor Cecil, the tears streaming down her cheeks, was close to him; in view then. "I am here, papa."

The knight laid his hand upon her arm—or rather, essayed to do so, but it fell again. His thoughts seemed to pass to another subject.

"Crosse, I have been telling Thomas that I should not allow more than three per cent. on those deposits. Have you seen Mainwaring lately?"

Mr. Snow stepped forward and administered something in a wine-glass. There appeared to be a difficulty in swallowing, and only part of it was taken. "He grows more restless," said the surgeon in an undertone.

Sir George's eyes, as he was slightly raised to take the medicine, had fallen upon some object at the other end of the room, and continued to be strained on it. "Who has changed the position of the cabinet?" he exclaimed, in a stronger tone than he had yet spoken.

It caused them all to turn and look at the spot. A fine old ebony cabinet, inlaid with silver, stood opposite the bed: had stood there ever since they removed to Lady Godolphin's Folly; transplanted thither from Ashlydyat. In the latter house, it had stood on the right of Sir George's bed: and his memory had evidently gone back to that. There could not be a better proof that he was fancying himself at Ashlydyat, lying in his own chamber.

"Janet! why have you placed the cabinet there?"

Janet Godolphin bent her head soothingly over him. "My dear father, it shall be moved, if you wish it."

The knight looked at her, inquiringly for a moment, perhaps not recognizing her. Then he feebly essayed to look beyond her, as if her head interposed between his own view and something behind. "Hush, my dear, I am speaking to your mother. I want to know why she changed the place of the cabinet."

"We thought you'd like it there, Sir George; that you could see it better there," interposed Margery, who knew better than most of them how to deal with the sick. "I'll have it put back before to-morrow morning."

This satisfied him, and he lay still for a few minutes. They thought, he would sleep. Presently his eyes opened again, and they rested on George.

"George, where's Charlotte?"

"Who, sir?" demanded George, somewhat taken aback at the question. "Do you mean Charlotte Pain? She is at—she is not here."

"Are you married yet?"

"Oh no," said George hastily, while several pairs of wondering eyes were directed towards him, and those of the Reverend Mr. Hastings were of the number. "Time enough for that, father."

"George!" next came the words, in a hollow whisper this time, "don't let her die, as Ethel did."

"Not if I can help it," replied George, speaking without any serious meaning, except that of humouring his father.

"And don't let Verrall go off the bargain with the money. He is keen that way; but he has no right to touch Charlotte's. If he does—Bessy, is Jekyl dead?"

"Oh no, papa," said Bessy, suppressing her tears as she caressed her father's hand: it was in stooping to do this, that the knight had observed her. "Jekyl is well and hearty yet, and he asked after you to-day. He heard you were coming home."

"Ay! All well and hearty, but me. But it is the will of God to take me, and He knows what's best. Where's Thomas?"

"I am here, father," replied Thomas Godolphin, leaning forward so that his father could see him.

Sir George tried to put up his hand with a beckoning gesture. Thomas understood it: he bent his face close to that pale one, and clasped the nearly inanimate hand in his, listening reverently to the whisper that was breathed so solemnly.

"Thomas, I charge you, never quit Ashlydyat."

"I will not," replied Thomas Godolphin.

"If you bring one home to it, and she would urge you to quit it, urge you until you have no will of your own left, do not yield to it. Do not listen to her. Break with her, let her go forth alone, rather than quit Ashlydyat."

"Father, I will never, of my own free will, leave Ashlydyat. I promise you that, so far as I can hold control over human events, I will live and die in it."

Certainly Sir George understood the promise and its meaning. There could be no mistaking that he did so, by the smile of content which from that moment overspread his countenance, lighting up with satisfaction even his dying eye. He lay for a considerable time still, and then suddenly called for Margery.

"You'll tell your mistress that we can't root up those bushes," he said, as she approached. "It's of no use trying. As fast as they are up from one place they grow in another. They'll not hurt. Tell her I say so."

"I'd get some quicklime, Sir George, and see what that would do," was Margery's response, and the words brought up a smile from one or two of her listeners, solemn moment though it was. Margery's maxim was, never to contradict the dying, but to humour their hallucinations. "Obstinate things, those gorses!" she continued. "But, never you trouble about my mistress, sir: she don't mind them."

The children, standing round his bed, knew quite well that he was alluding to their mother, his first wife. Indeed, Lady Godolphin appeared to have passed entirely from his mind.

Again he lapsed into silence, and remained to all appearance in a stupor, his eyes closed, his breathing ominously slow. Mr. Crosse took his departure, but the Rector and surgeon stayed on yet. The latter saw that the final moment was at hand, and he whispered to Miss Godolphin that she and her sisters might be better from the room. "At any rate," he added, for he saw the dissenting, displeased look which overspread her face, "it might be as well to spare the sight to Cecil."

"No," briefly responded Miss Godolphin. "Our place is here." And they watched on.

With an impulse of strength surprising to see, Sir George suddenly rose up in bed, his eyes fixed with a yearning gaze at the opposite end of the room. Not at the cabinet this time, but at some spot, far, far up, beyond the ceiling, as it appeared. His voice, startling in its clearness, rang through the air, and his arms were outstretched as if he were about to fly.

"Janet!—Janet!—Janet! Oh, my dear Janet, I am coming!"

He fell back and died. Did anything really appear to him, not visible to the mortal eyes around? Were his senses, in that moment of the soul's departure, opened to a glimpse of the world he was about to enter? It cannot be known. Had it been fiction it would not have been written here.

A little later, the bell of All Souls' Church, booming out over the town on the night air, told that Sir George Godolphin had passed away.

It was somewhat remarkable that another funeral, at which Thomas Godolphin was again chief mourner, should follow so closely upon Ethel's. A different sort of ceremony, this: a rare pageant. A pageant which was made up of plumes and trappings and decorated horses, and carriages and mutes and batons, and a line of attendants, and all the other insignia of the illustrious dead. Ethel could be interred simply and quietly, but Sir George must be attended to the grave as the Godolphin of Ashlydyat. I don't suppose poor Sir George rested any the better for it.

Sir George made an equitable will, but it proved a vexatious one to his widow. Thomas had Ashlydyat: George, a fair sum of money; the Miss Godolphins, each her portion; and there were certain bequests to servants. But little was left to Lady Godolphin: indeed, the amount of the bequest was more in accordance with what might be willed to a friend, than to a wife. But, it was not in that that the grievance lay. Lady Godolphin had the Folly, she had Broomhead, and she had an ample income of her own. She was not a particularly covetous woman, and she had never expected or wished that Sir George should greatly take from his family, to add to it. No, it was not that: but the contents of a certain little codicil which was appended to the will. This codicil set forth that every article of furniture or property, which had been removed to the Folly from Ashlydyat, whatever might be its nature, and down to the minutest item, should be returned to Ashlydyat, and become the property of Thomas Godolphin.

It would pretty nearly strip the Folly, and my lady was very wrathful. Not for the value of the things: she sustained no injury there: for the codicil directed that a specified sum of money (their full value) should be handed over to Lady Godolphin to replace them with new at the Folly. But it struck upon her in the light of a slight, and she chose to resent it as one. It was specially enjoined that the things should be placed at Ashlydyat in the old spots where they had formerly stood.

But, be wrathful as she might, grumble as she would, there could be no rebellion to it in action. And Lady Godolphin had to bow to it.

## CHAPTER XVII. A ROW ON THE WATER

The time went on. Three months glided by; nay, four, for April had come in: and positions were changed. Thomas Godolphin was the resident master of Ashlydyat; Janet its acting mistress; Bessy and Cecil lived with them. George had taken up his residence at the bank, with Margery to look after his comforts, never to remove from it, as he supposed, unless Ashlydyat should fall to him. My lady had left the Folly for a permanency (unless any whim should at any time send her back to it), and the Verralls had taken it. It may be said that Lady Godolphin gave up the Folly in a fit of pique. When she found that the things were positively to go out of it, she protested that she would never replace them with others: she would rather throw the money, left for the purpose, into the midst of the sea. She would let it to any one who would take it, and go back to Broomhead for ever. Mr. Verrall heard of this, and made an application for it; and my lady, still smarting, let it to him off-hand, accepting him as a yearly tenant. Whether she repented, or not, when the deed was done, and her anger had cooled down, could not be told: she took her farewell and departed for Scotland without betraying signs of it. Many thought that she would return after a while to the place which she had so eagerly and fondly erected. Perhaps she might: she could get rid of the Verralls at any time by giving them due notice.

Thomas had settled down in his father's place: head of the bank, head of all things, as Sir George had been; Mr. Godolphin, of Ashlydyat. Mr. George was head of himself alone. No one of very particular note was he: but I can tell you that a great many more anxious palpitations were cast to him from gentle bosoms, than were given to unapproachable Thomas. It seemed to be pretty generally conceded that Thomas Godolphin was wedded to the grave of Ethel. Perhaps his establishing his sisters at Ashlydyat, as their home, helped to further the opinion, and dash all hopes; but, very possible hopes from many quarters were wafted secretly to George. He would be no mean prize: with his good looks, his excellent position, and his presumptive heirloom to Ashlydyat.

April, I say, had come in. A sunny April. And these several changes had taken place, and the respective parties were settled in their new homes. It went forth to the world that the Verralls intended to give a brilliant fête, a sort of house-warming, as they styled it; and invitations were circulated far and wide. Amongst those favoured with one, were Mr. and the Miss Godolphins.

Janet was indignant. She could scarcely bring herself to decline it civilly. Cecil, who was not less fond of fêtes, and other gay inventions for killing time, than are pretty girls in general, would have given her head to go. It appeared that Mrs. Hastings also declined the invitation: and George Godolphin—who had no intention of declining it on his own score—resolved to know the reason why.

Though not a frequent visitor at the Rectory: for he could not go there much, in the teeth of discouragement so evident as had latterly been shown to him by Mr. Hastings, and depended mostly upon chance meetings in the street for keeping in exercise his love-vows to Maria: George resolved to go boldly down that evening.

Down he accordingly went. And was shown into an empty room. The Rector and Mrs. Hastings were out, the servant said, and the young ladies were in the study with the boys. She would tell them.

Maria came to him. There was no mistaking her start of surprise when she saw him, or the rush of emotion which overspread her face.

“Who did you think it was?” asked George.

“I thought it was your brother. She said ‘Mr. Godolphin.’ Grace will be down in an instant.”

“Will she?” returned George. “You had better go and tell her it’s Mr. George, and not Mr. Godolphin, and then she won’t hurry herself. I am not a favourite with Miss Grace, I fancy.”

Maria coloured. She had no excuse to offer for the fact, and she could not say that it was untrue. George stood with his elbow on the mantel-piece, looking down at her.

“Maria, I hear that Mrs. Hastings has declined to go to the Folly on Thursday. What’s that for?”

“I don’t know,” replied Maria. “We do not go very much amidst those unusually grand scenes,” she added, laughing. “Mamma says she always feels as much out of place in them as a fish does out of water. And I think, if papa had his own wish, we should never go within a mile of anything of the sort. He likes quiet social visiting, but not such entertainments as the Verralls give. He and mamma were consulting for a few minutes over the invitation, and then she directed Grace to write and decline it.”

“It is an awful shame!” responded George. “I thought I should have had you with me for a few hours that day, at any rate, Maria.”

Maria lifted her eyes. “It had nothing to do with me, George. I was not invited.”

“Not invited!” repeated George Godolphin.

“Only Grace. ‘Mrs. and Miss Hastings.’”

“What was that for?” he exclaimed. “Why were you left out?”

“I do not know,” replied Maria, bending her eyelids and speaking with involuntary hesitation. In her heart of hearts, Maria believed that she did know: but the last person she would have hinted it to, was George Godolphin. “Perhaps,” she added, “it may have been an omission, an oversight? Or, they may have so many to invite that they can only dispense their cards charily.”

“Moonshine!” cried George. “I shall take upon myself to ask Mrs. Verrall why you were left out.”



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