

МАРГАРЕТ

ОЛИФАНТ

BROWNLOWS

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Brownlows

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Mrs. Oliphant Brownlows

CHAPTER I. MR. BROWNLOW'S MONEY

Every body in the neighborhood was perfectly aware what was the origin of John Brownlow's fortune. There was no possibility of any mistake about it. When people are very well known and respectable, and inspire their neighbors with a hearty interest, some little penalty must be paid for that pleasant state of affairs. It is only when nobody cares for you, when you are of no importance to the world in general, that you can shroud your concerns in mystery; but the Brownlows were very well known, much respected, and quite unable to hide themselves in a corner. In all Dartfordshire there was no family better known; not that they were county people, or had any pretensions to high connection, but then there was not one family in the county of whom John Brownlow did not know more than they knew themselves, and in his hands, and in the hands of his fathers before him, had reposed the papers and affairs of all the squires about, titled or otherwise, for more years than could be counted. It was clever of the Brownlows to have had so much business in their hands and yet not to be rich; but virtue, when it is exceptional, is perhaps always a little extreme, and so it is probable that an honest lawyer is honestest than most honest men who have no particular temptation. They were not rich, and yet, of course, they were far from being poor. They had the kind of substantial old brick house, standing close up to the pavement in the best end of the High Street of Masterton, which would be described as a mansion in an auctioneer's advertisement. It was very red and infinitely clean, and had a multitude of windows all blinking in the sun, and lighting up into impromptu illuminations every winter afternoon, when that blazing red luminary went down, not over the river and the open country, as he ought to have done, but into the rectory garden, which happened to lie in his way as he halted along toward the west. The Brownlows for generations back had lived very comfortably in this red house. It had a great, rich, luxuriant, warm garden behind, with all sorts of comforts attached to it, and the rooms were handsome and old-fashioned, as became a house that had served generations; and once upon a time many good dinners, and much good wine, and the most beautiful stores of fine linen, and crystal, and silver were in the house, for comfort, and not for show. All this was very well, and John Brownlow was born to the possession of it; but there can be no doubt that the house in the High Street was very different from the house he now inhabited and the establishment he kept up in the country. Even the house in the High Street had been more burdened than was usual in the family when it came to his turn to be its master. Arthur, the younger brother, who was never good for much, had just had his debts paid for the second time before his father died. It was not considered by many people as quite fair to John, though some did say that it was he above all who urged the step upon old Mr. Brownlow. Persons who professed to know, even asserted that the elder son, in his generosity, had quite a struggle with his father, and that his argument was always "for my mother's sake." If this, was true, it was all the more generous of him, because his mother was well known to have thought nothing of John in comparison with the handsome Arthur, whom she spoiled as long as she lived. Anyhow, the result was that John inherited the house and the business, the furniture and old crystal and silver, and a very comfortable income, but nothing that could be called a fortune, or that would in any way have justified him in launching out into a more expensive description of life.

At this time he was thirty at least, and not of a speculative turn of mind; and when old Mrs. Thomson's will—a will not even drawn up in his office, which would have been a kind of preparation—was read to him, it is said that he lost his temper on the occasion, and used very unbecoming

language to the poor woman in her coffin. What had he to do with the old hag? “What did she mean by bothering him with her filthy money?” he said, and did not show at all the frame of mind that might have been expected under the circumstances. Mrs. Thomson was an old woman, who had lived in a very miserly sort of way, with an old servant, in a little house in the outskirts of the town. Nobody could ever tell what attracted her toward John Brownlow, who never, as he himself said, had any thing to do with her; and she had relations of her own in Masterton—the Fennells—who always knew she had money, and counted upon being her heirs. But they were distant relations, and perhaps they did not know all her story. What petrified the town, however, was, when it was found out that old Mrs. Thomson had left a fortune, not of a few hundreds, as people supposed, but of more than fifty thousand pounds, behind her, and that it was all left in a way to John Brownlow. It was left to him in trust for Mrs. Thomson’s daughter Phœbe, a person whose existence no one in Masterton had ever dreamed of, but who, it appeared had married a common soldier, and gone off with him ages before, and had been cursed and cast off by her hard-hearted mother. That was long, long ago, and perhaps the solitary old creature’s heart, if she had a heart, had relented to her only child; perhaps, as John Brownlow thought, it was a mere suggestion of Satan to trouble and annoy him, a man who had nothing to do with Phœbe Thomson. Anyhow, this was the substance of the will. The money was all left to John Brownlow in trust for this woman, who had gone nobody knew where, and whose very name by marriage her mother did not state, and nobody could tell. If Phœbe Thomson did not make her appearance within the next twenty-five years, then the money was to pass to John Brownlow and his heirs in perpetuity beyond all power of reclamation. This was the strange event which fell like a shell into the young lawyer’s quiet life, and brought revolution and change to every thing around.

He was very much annoyed and put out about it at first; and the Fennells, who had expected to be Mrs. Thomson’s heirs, were furious, and not disinclined to turn upon him, blameless as he was. To tell the truth, theirs was a very hard case. They were very poor. Good-for-nothing sons are not exclusively reserved for the well-to-do portion of the community; and poor Mrs. Fennell, as well as the Brownlow family, had a good-for-nothing son, upon whom she had spent all her living. He had disappeared at this time into the darkness, as such people do by times, but of course it was always on the cards that he might come back and be a burden upon his people again. And the father was paralytic and helpless, not only incapable of doing any thing, but requiring to have every thing done for him, that last aggravation of poverty. Mrs. Fennell herself was not a prepossessing woman. She had a high temper and an eloquent tongue, and her disappointment was tragic and desperate. Poor soul! it was not much to be wondered at—she was so poor and so helpless and burdened; and this money would have made them all so comfortable. It was not that she thought of herself, the poor woman said, but there was Fennell, who was cousin to the Thomsons, and there was Tom out in the world toiling for his bread, and killing himself with work. And then there was Bessie and her prospects. When she had talked it all over at the highest pitch of her voice, and stormed at every body, and made poor Fennell shake worse than ever in his paralytic chair, and overwhelmed Bessie with confusion and misery, the poor woman would sit down and cry. Only one thousand pounds of it would have done them such a great deal of good; and there was fifty thousand, and it was all going to be tied up and given to John Brownlow. It was hard upon a woman with a hot head and a warm heart, and no temper or sense to speak of; and to storm at it was the only thing she took any comfort from, or that did her any good.

This money, which Mrs. Fennell regretted so bitterly for a long time, was nothing but a nuisance to John Brownlow. He advertised and employed detectives, and did every thing a man could do to find Phœbe Thomson and relieve himself of the burden. But Phœbe Thomson was not to be found. He sought her far and near, but no such person was to be heard of—for, to be sure, a poor soldier’s wife was not very likely to be in the way of seeing the second column of the “Times;” and if she should happen to be Mrs. Smith or Mrs. Doherty by marriage, nobody but herself and her husband might be aware that she had ever been Phœbe Thomson. Anyhow, all the advertisements and all the

detectives failed; and after working very hard at it for a year or more, John Brownlow very quietly, and to his own consciousness alone, d—d Phoebe Thomson, and gave up the useless investigation.

But he was a man who had eyes, and a strong sense of justice. When he thought of the poor Fennells, his anger rose against the wretched old woman who had laid on him the burden of her money. Poor Mrs. Fennell's son was good for nothing, but she had a daughter who was good for much; and Bessie had a lover who would gladly have married her, had that wicked old miser, as John Brownlow in his indignation said, left only a thousand pounds out of her fifty to help the paralytic father and passionate mother. Bessie's lover was not mercenary—he was not covetous of a fortune with his wife; but he could not marry all the family, or work for the old people, as their daughter had to do. This was what Mrs. Fennell meant when she raved of poor Bessie and her prospects. But Bessie herself said nothing. The lover went very sorrowfully away, and Bessie was silent and went on with her work, and made no show of her trouble. John Brownlow, without knowing it, got to watch her. He was not aware for a long time why it was that, though he always had so much to do, he never missed seeing Bessie when by chance she passed his windows. As luck would have it, it was always at that moment he raised his eyes; and he did his best to get pupils for her, “taking an interest” in her which was quite unusual in so quiet a man. But it was not probable that Bessie could have had much of an education herself, much less was qualified to give it to others. And whether it was want of skill, or the poverty of her surroundings, her poor dress, or her mother's aspect and temper, it is certain that, diligent and patient and “nice” as she was, pupils failed her. She did not get on; yet she kept struggling on, and toiling, keeping a smile in her eyes for every body that looked friendly on her, whatever sinking there might be in her heart. And she was a slight fragile little creature to bear all that weight on her shoulders. John Brownlow, without knowing it, watched her little figure about the streets all the year through, marveling at that “soft invincibility,” that steady standing up against defeat and every kind of ill which the gentle soul was capable of. And as he watched her, he had many thoughts in his mind. He was not rich, as we have said; on the contrary, it would have been his bounden duty, had he done his duty, to have married somebody with a modest little fortune, who would have helped him to keep up the house in the High Street, and give the traditionary dinners; and to maintain his wife's family, if he were to marry, was something out of the question. But then that fifty thousand pounds—this money which did not belong to him but to Phoebe Thomson, whosoever she was, and wheresoever she might be. All this produced a confusion of thought which was of very strange occurrence in Mr. Brownlow's office, where his ancestors for generations had pondered over other people's difficulties—a more pleasing operation than attending to one's own. Gradually, as time wore on, Phoebe Thomson grew into a more and more mythical figure to Mr. Brownlow's mind, and Bessie Fennell became more and more real. When he looked up one winter's afternoon and saw her passing the office window in the glow of the frosty sunset, which pointed at her in its clear-sighted way, and made thrice visible the thinness of her cheek and the shabbiness of her dress, Mr. Brownlow's pen fell from his fingers in amaze and self-reproach. She was wearing herself out, and he had permitted her to do so, and had sat at his window thinking about it for two whole years. Two years had passed since Mrs. Thomson's death. All the investigations in the world had not been able to find Phoebe; and John Brownlow was master of the old woman's fifty thousand pounds; and the Fennells might be starving for any thing he could tell. The result was, that he proposed to Bessie, to the unbounded amazement not only of the town of Masterton, but even of the county people, who all knew Mr. Brownlow. Probably Bessie was as much surprised as any body; but she married him after a while, and made him a very good wife. And he pensioned her father and mother in the most liberal way, and saw as little of them as possible. And for a few years, though they did not give many dinners, every thing went on very well in the big brick house.

I tell the story thus briefly, instead of introducing these people to show their existence for themselves, because all this is much prior to the real date of this history. Mrs. Brownlow made a very good and sweet wife; and my own opinion is that she was fond of her husband in a quiet way. But, of

course, people said she had married him for his money, and Bessie was one of those veiled souls who go through the world without much faculty of revealing themselves even to their nearest and dearest. When she did, nobody could make quite sure whether she had enjoyed her life or merely supported it. She had fulfilled all her duties, been very kind to every body, very faithful and tender to her husband, very devoted to her family; but she died, and carried away a heart within her of which no man seemed ever to have found the key. Sara and John were very little at the time of her death—so little, that they scarcely remembered their mother. And they were not like her. Little John, for his part, was like big John, as he had a right to be; and Sara was like nobody else that ever had been seen in Masterton. But that is a subject which demands fuller exposition. Mr. Brownlow lived very quietly for some years after he lost his wife; but then, as was natural, the ordinary course of affairs was resumed. And then it was that the change in his fortunes became fully evident. His little daughter was delicate, and he got a carriage for her. He got ponies for her, and costly governesses and masters down from town at the wildest expense; and then he bought that place in the country which had once been Something Hall or Manor, but which Dartfordshire, in its consternation, henceforward called Brownlow's. Brownlow's it was, without a doubt; and Brownlows it became—without the apostrophe—in the most natural way, when things settled down. It was, as old Lady Hetherton said, “quite a *place*, my dear; not one of your little bits of villas, you know.” And though it was so near Masterton that Mr. Brownlow drove or rode in every day to his office, its grounds and gardens and park were equal to those of any nobleman in the county. Old Mrs. Thomson's fifty thousand pounds had doubled themselves, as money skillfully managed has a way of doing. It had got for her executor every thing a man could desire. First, the wife of his choice—though that gift had been taken from him—and every other worldly good which the man wished or could wish for. He was able to surround the daughter, who was every thing to him—who was more to him, perhaps, than even his wife had ever been—with every kind of delightful thing; and to provide for his son, and establish him in the world according to his inclinations; and to assume, without departing from his own place, such a position as no former Brownlow had ever occupied in the county. All this came to John Brownlow through old Mrs. Thomson; and Phoebe Thomson, to whom the money in reality belonged, had never turned up to claim it, and now there was but one year to run of the five-and-twenty which limited his responsibilities. All this being made apparent, it is the history of this one year that I have now to tell.

CHAPTER II.

SARA

Mr. Brownlow had one son and one daughter—the boy, a very good natured, easy-minded, honest sort of young fellow, approaching twenty-one, and not made much account of either at home or abroad. The daughter was Sara. For people who know her, or indeed who are at all acquainted with society in Dartfordshire, it is unnecessary to say more; but perhaps the general public may prefer a clearer description. She was the queen of John Brownlow's house, and the apple of his eye. At the period of which we speak she was between nineteen and twenty, just emerging from what had always been considered a delicate girlhood, into the full early bloom of woman. She had too much character, too much nonsense, too many wiles, and too much simplicity in her, to be, strictly speaking, beautiful; and she was not good enough or gentle enough to be lovely. And neither was she beloved by all, as a heroine ought to be. There were some people who did not like her, as well as some who did, and there were a great many who fluctuated between love and dislike, and were sometimes fond of her, and sometimes affronted with her; which, indeed, was a very common state of mind with herself. Sara was so much a girl of her age that she had even the hair of the period, as the spring flowers have the colors of spring. It was light-brown, with a golden tint, and abundant as locks of that color generally are; but it can not be denied that it was darker than the fashionable shade, and that Sara was not above being annoyed by this fact, nor even above a vague and shadowy idea of doing something to bring it to the correct tint; which may rank as one of the constantly recurring proofs that young women are in fact the least vain portion of the creation, and have less faith in the efficacy of their natural charms than any other section of the race. She had a little rosebud mouth, dewy and pearly, and full eyes, which were blue, or gray, or hazel, according as you looked at them, and according to the sentiment they might happen to express. She was very tall, very slight and flexible, and wavy like a tall lily, with the slightest variable stoop in her pretty shoulders, for which her life had been rendered miserable by many well-meaning persons, but which in reality was one of her charms. To say that she stooped is an ugly expression, and there was nothing ugly about Sara. It was rather that by times her head drooped a little, like the aforesaid lily swayed by the softest of visionary breezes. This, however, was the only thing lily-like or angelic about her. She was not a model of any thing, nor noted for any special virtues. She was Sara. That was about all that could be said for her; and it is to be hoped that she may be able to evidence what little bits of good there were in her during the course of this history, for herself.

“Papa,” she said, as they sat together at the breakfast-table, “I will call for you this afternoon, and bring you home. I have something to do in Masterton.”

“Something to do in Masterton?” said Mr. Brownlow; “I thought you had got every thing you could possibly want for three months at least when you were in town.”

“Yes,” said Sara, “every thing one wants for one's bodily necessities—pins and needles and music, and all that sort of thing—but one has a heart, though you might not think it, papa; and I have an idea that one has a soul.”

“Do you think so?” said her father, with a smile; “but I can't imagine what your soul can have to do in Masterton. We don't cultivate such superfluities there.”

“I am going to see grandmamma,” said Sara. “I think it is my duty. I am not fond of her, and I ought to be. I think if I went to see her oftener perhaps it might do me good.”

“O! if it's only for grandmamma,” said young John, “I go to see her often enough. I don't think you need take any particular trouble to do her good.”

Upon which Sara sighed, and drooped a little upon its long stem her lily head. “I hope I am not so stupid and conceited as to think I can do any body good,” she said. “I may be silly enough, but I

am not like that; but I am going to see grandmamma. It is my duty to be fond of her, and see after her; and I know I never go except when I can't help it. I am going to turn over a new leaf."

Mr. Brownlow's face had been overshadowed at the first mention of the grandmother, as by a faint mist of annoyance. It did not go so far as to be a cloud. It was not positive displeasure or dislike, but only a shade of dissatisfaction, which he expressed by his silence. Sara's resolutions to turn over a new leaf were not rare, and her father was generally much amused and interested by her good intentions; but at present he only went on with his breakfast and said nothing. Like his daughter, he was not fond of the grandmamma, and perhaps her sympathy with his own sentiments in this respect was satisfactory to him at the bottom of his heart; but it was not a thing he could talk about.

"There is a great deal in habit," said Sara, in that experienced way which belongs to the speculatist of nineteen. "I believe you can train yourself to any thing, even to love people whom you don't love by nature. I think one could get to do that if one was to try."

"I should not care much for your love if that was how it came," said young John.

"That would only show you did not understand," said Sara, mildly. "To like people for a good reason, is not that better than liking them merely because you can't help it? If there was any body that it suited papa, for instance, to make me marry, don't you think I would be very foolish if I could not make myself fond of him? and ungrateful too?"

"Would you really do as much for me, my darling?" said Mr. Brownlow, looking up at her with a glimmer of weakness in his eyes; "but I hope I shall never require to put you to the test."

"Why not, papa?" said Sara, cheerfully. "I am sure it would be a much more sensible reason for being fond of any body that you wished it, than just my own fancy. I should do it, and I would never hesitate about it," said the confident young woman; and the father, though he was a man of some experience, felt his heart melt and glow over this rash statement with a fond gratification, and really believed it, foolish as it was.

"And I shall drive down," said Sara, "and look as fine as possible; though, of course, I would far rather have Meg out, and ride home with you in the afternoon. And it would do Meg a world of good," she added, pathetically. "But you know if one goes in for pleasing one's grandmamma, one ought to be content to please her in her own way. *She* likes to see the carriage and the grays, and a great noise and fuss. If it is worth taking the trouble for at all, it is worth doing it in her own way."

"I walk, and she is always very glad to see me," said John, in what must be allowed was an unpleasant manner.

"Ah! you are different," said Sara, with a momentary bend of her graceful head. And, of course, he was very different. He was a mere man or boy—whichever you prefer—not in the least ornamental, nor of very much use to any body—whereas Sara—But it is not a difference that could be described or argued about; it was a thing which could be perceived with half an eye. When breakfast was over, the two gentlemen went off to Masterton to their business; for young John had gone into his father's office, and was preparing to take up in his turn the hereditary profession. Indeed, it is not clear that Mr. Brownlow ever intended poor Jack to profit at all by his wealth, or the additional state and grandeur the family had taken upon itself. To his eyes, so far as it appeared, Sara alone was the centre of all this magnificence; whereas Jack was simply the heir and successor of the Brownlows, who had been time out of mind the solicitors of Masterton. For Jack, the brick house in the High Street waited with all its old stores; and the fairy accessories of their present existence, all the luxury and grace and beauty—the grays—the conservatories—the park—the place in the country—seemed a kind of natural appanage to the fair creature in whom the race of Brownlow had come to flower, the father could not tell how; for it seemed strange to think that he himself, who was but a homely individual, should have been the means of bringing any thing so fair and fine into the world. Probably Mr. Brownlow, when it came to making his will, would be strictly just to his two children; but in the mean time, in his thoughts, that was, no doubt, how things stood; and Jack accordingly was brought up as he himself had been, rather as the heir of the Brownlows' business, their excellent connection

and long-established practice, than as the heir of Brownlows—two very different things, as will be perceived.

When they went away Sara betook herself to her own business. She saw the cook in the most correct and exemplary way. Fortunately the cook was also the housekeeper, and a very good-tempered woman, who received all her young mistress's suggestions with amiability, and only complained sometimes that Miss Brownlow would order every thing that was out of season. "Not for the sake of extravagance," Mrs. Stock said, in answer to Sara's maid, who had made that impertinent suggestion; "oh, no, nothin' of the sort—only out of always forgettin', poor dear, and always wantin' me to believe as she knows." But as Sara fortunately paid but little attention to the dinner when produced, making no particular criticism—not for want of will, but for want of knowledge—her interview with the cook at least did no harm. And then she went into many small matters which she thought were of importance. She had an hour's talk, for instance, with the gardener, who was, like most gardeners, a little pig-headed, and fond of having his own way; and Sara was rather of opinion that some of her hints had done him good; and she made him, very unwillingly, cut some flowers for her to take to her grandmother. Mrs. Fennell was not a woman to care for flowers if she could have got them for the plucking; but expensive hothouse flowers in the depth of winter were a different matter. Thus Sara reasoned as she carried them in her basket, with a ground-work of moss beneath to keep them fresh, and left them in the hall till the carriage should come round. And she went to the stables, and looked at every thing in a dainty way—not like your true enthusiast in such matters, but with a certain gentle grandeur, as of a creature to whom satin-skinned cattle and busy grooms were vulgar essentials of life, equally necessary, but equally far off from her supreme altitude. She cared no more for the grays in themselves than she did for Dick and Tom, which will be sufficient to prove to any body learned in such matters how imperfect her development was in this respect. All these little occupations were very different from the occupations of her father and brother, who were both of them in the office all day busy with other people's wills and marriage-settlements and conveyances. Thus it would have been as evident to any impartial looker-on as it was to Mr. Brownlow, that the fortune which had so much changed his position in the county, and given him such very different surroundings, all centered in, and was appropriated to, his daughter, while his old life, his hereditary business, the prose and plain part of his existence, was to be carried out in his son.

When all the varieties of occupation in this useful day were about exhausted, Sara prepared for her drive. She wrapped herself up in fur and velvet, and every thing that was warmest and softest and most luxurious; and with her basket of flowers and another little basket of game, which she did not take any personal charge of, rolled away out of the park gates to Masterton. Brownlows had belonged to a very unsuccessful race before it came to be Brownlow's. It had been in the hands of poor, failing, incompetent people, which was, perhaps, the reason why its original name had dropped so completely out of recollection. Now, for the first time in its existence, it looked really like "a gentleman's place." But yet there were eye-sores about. One of these was a block of red brick, which stood exactly opposite the park gates, opposite the lodge which Mr. Brownlow had made so pretty. There were only two cottages in the block, and they were very unpretending and very clean, and made the life of the woman in the lodge twice as lightsome and agreeable; but to Sara's eyes at least, Swayne's Cottages, as they were called, were very objectionable. They were two-storied houses, with windows and doors very flush with the walls; as if, which indeed was the case, the walls themselves were of the slightest construction possible; and Swayne himself, or rather Mrs. Swayne, who was the true head of the house, let a parlor and bedroom to lodgers who wanted country air and quiet at a cheap rate. "Any body might come," Sara was in the habit of saying; "your worst enemy might come and sit down there at your very door, and spy upon every thing you were doing. It makes me shudder when I think of it." Thus she had spoken ever since her father's entrance upon the glories of his "place," egging him up with all her might to attack this little Naboth's vineyard. But there never was a Naboth more obstinate in his rights than Mr. Swayne, who was a carpenter and builder, and

had put the two houses together himself, and was proud of them; and Sara was then too young and too much under the sway of her feelings to take upon her in cold blood Jezebel's decisive part.

She could not help looking at them to-day as she swept out, with the two grays spurning the gravel under foot, and the lodge-woman at the gate looking up with awe while she made her courtesy as if to the queen. Mrs. Swayne, too, was standing at her door, but she did not courtesy to Sara. She stood and looked as if she did not care—the splendor and the luxury were nothing to her. She looked out in a calm sort of indifferent way, which was to Sara what, to continue a scriptural symbolism, Mordecai was to another less fortunate personage. And Mrs. Swayne had a ticket of “Lodgings” in her window. It could do her no good, for nobody ever passed along that road who could be desirous of country lodgings at a cheap rate, and this advertisement looked to Sara like an intentional insult. The wretched woman might get about eight shillings a week for her lodgings, and for that paltry sum she could allow herself to post up bills opposite the very gate of Brownlows; but then some people have so little feeling. This trifling incident occupied Sara's mind during at least half her drive. The last lodger had been a consumptive patient, whose pale looks had filled her with compassionate impulses, against which her dislike of Mrs. Swayne contended vainly. Who would it be next? Some other invalid most likely, as pale and as poor, to make one discontented with the world and ashamed of one's self the moment one issued forth from the park gates, and all because of the determination of the Swaynes to annoy their wealthy neighbors. The thought made Sara angry as she drove along; but it was a brisk winter afternoon, with frost in the air, and the hoofs of the grays rang on the road, and even the country waggons seemed to move along at an exhilarated pace. So Sara thought, who was young, and whose blood ran quickly in her veins, and who was wrapped up to the throat in velvet and fur. Now and then another carriage would roll past, when there were people who nodded or kissed their hands to Sara as they passed, with all that clang of hoofs and sweep of motion, merrily on over the hard road beneath the naked trees. And the people who were walking walked briskly, as if the blood was racing in their veins too, and rushing warm and vigorous to healthy cheeks. If any cheeks were blue rather than red, if any hearts were sick with the cold and the weary way, if any body she met chanced to be going heavily home to a hearth where there was no fire, or a house from which love and light had gone, Sara, glowing to the wind, knew nothing of that; and that the thought never entered her mind was no fault of hers.

The winter sky was beginning to dress itself in all the glories of sunset when she got to Masterton. It had come to be the time of the year when the sun set in the rectory garden, and John Brownlow's windows in the High Street got all aglow. Perhaps it brought associations to his mind as the dazzling red radiance flashed in at the office window, and he laid down his pen. But the fact was that this pause was caused by a sound of wheels echoing along the market-place, which was close by. That must be Sara. Such was the thought that passed through Mr. Brownlow's mind. He did not think, as the last gleam came over him, how he used to look up and see Bessie passing—that Bessie who had come to be his wife—nor of any other moving event that had happened to him when the sun was coming in at his windows aslant in that undeniable way. No; all that he thought was, There goes Sara; and his face softened, and he began to put his papers together. The child in her living importance, little lady and sovereign of all that surrounded her, triumphed thus even over the past and the dead.

Mrs. Fennell had lodgings in a street which was very genteel, and opened off the market-place. The houses were not very large, but they had pillars to the doors and balconies to all the first-floor windows; and some very nice people lived there. Mrs. Fennell was very old and not able to manage a house for herself, so she had apartments, she and her maid—one of the first floors with the balconies—a very comfortable little drawing-room, which the care of her friends had filled with every description of comfortable articles. Her paralytic husband was dead ages ago, and her daughter Bessie was dead, and her beloved but good-for-nothing son—and yet the old woman had lived on. Sometimes, when any thing touched her heart, she would mourn over this, and ask why she had been left when every thing was gone that made life sweet to her; but still she lived on; and at other times it

must be confessed that she was not an amiable old woman. It is astonishing how often it happens that the sweet domestic qualities do not descend from mother to daughter, but leap a generation as it were, interjecting a passionate, peevish mother to bring out in full relief the devotion of her child—or a selfish exacting child to show the mother’s magnanimity. Such contrasts are very usual among women—I don’t know if they are visible to the same extent as between father and son. Mrs. Fennell was not amiable. She was proud and quarrelsome and bitter—exacting of every profit and every honor, and never contented. She was proud to think of her son-in-law’s fine house and her granddaughter’s girlish splendor; and yet it was the temptation of her life to rail at them, to tell how little he had done for her, and to reckon up all he ought to have done, and to declare if it had not been for the Fennells and their friends, it was little any body would ever have heard of John Brownlow. All this gave her a certain pleasure; and at the same time Sara’s visit with the grays and the state equipage and the tall footman, and her entrance in her rich dress with her sables, which had cost nobody could tell how much, and her basket of flowers which could not have been bought in Dartfordshire for their weight in gold, was the triumph of her life. As soon as she heard the sound of the wheels in the street—which was not visited by many carriages—she would steal out into her bedroom and change her cap with her trembling hands. She never changed her cap for Jack, who came on foot, and brought every kind of homely present to please her and make her comfortable. But Sara was different—and Sara’s presents added not to her comfort, but to her glory, which was quite another affair.

“Well, my dear,” she said, with a mixture of peevishness and pleasure, as the girl came in, “so this is you. I thought you were never coming to see me any more.”

“I beg your pardon, grandmamma,” said Sara. “I know I have been neglecting my duty, but I mean to turn over a new leaf. There are some birds down below that I thought you would like, and I have brought you some flowers. I will put them in your little vases if I may ring for Nancy to bring some water. I made Pitt cut me this daphne, though I think he would rather have cut off my head. It will perfume the whole room.”

“My dear, you know I don’t like strong smells,” said Mrs. Fennell. “I never could bear scents—a little whiff of musk, and that was all I ever cared for—though your poor mamma was such a one for violets and trash. And I haven’t got servants to be running up and down stairs as you have at your fine place. One maid for every thing is considered quite enough for me.”

“Well, grandmamma,” said Sara, “you have not very much to do, you know. If I were you, I would have a nice *young* maid that would look pleasant and cheerful instead of that cross old Nancy, who never looks pleased at any thing.”

“What good do you think I could have of a young maid?” said Mrs. Fennell—“nasty gossiping tittering things, that are twenty times more bother than they’re worth. I have Nancy because she suits me, and because she was poor old Mrs. Thomson’s maid, as every body has forgotten but her and me. The dead are soon out of mind, especially when they’ve got a claim on living folks’ gratitude. If it wasn’t for poor Mrs. Thomson where would your grand carriage have been, and your daphnes, and your tall footmen, and all your papa’s grandeur? But there’s nobody that thinks on her but me.”

“I am sure *I* have not forgotten her,” said Sara. “I wish I could. She must have been a horrible old wretch, and I wish she had left papa alone. I’d rather not have Brownlows if I am always to hear of that wretched old woman. I suppose Nancy is her ghost and haunts you. I hate to hear her horrid old name.”

“You are just like all the rest,” said the grandmother—“ashamed of your relations because you are so fine; and if it had not been for your relations—she was your poor mamma’s cousin, Miss Sairah—if it was only that, and out of respect to me—”

“Don’t call me Sairah, please,” said the indignant little visitor. “I do hate it so; and I have not done any thing that I know of to be called Miss for. What is the use of quarreling, grandmamma? Do let us be comfortable a little. You can’t think how cold it is out of doors. Don’t you think it is rather

nice to be an old lady and sit by the fire and have every body come to see you, and no need to take any trouble with making calls or any thing? I think it must be one of the nicest things in the world.”

“Do you think *you* would like it?” the old woman said grimly from the other side of the fire.

“It is different, you know,” said Sara, drooping her pretty head as she sat before the fire with the red light gleaming in her hair. “You were once as young as me, and you can go back to that in your mind; and then mamma was once as young as me, and you can go back to that. I should think it must feel like walking out in a garden all your own, that nobody else has any right to; while the rest of us, you know—”

“Ah!” said the old woman with a cry; “but a garden that you once tripped about, and once saw your children tripping about, and now you have to hobble through it all alone. Oh child, child! and never a sound in it, but all the voices gone and all the steps that you would give the world to hear!”

Sara roused herself up out of her meditation, and gave a startled astonished look into the corner where the cross old grandmother was sobbing in the darkness. The child stumbled to her feet, startled and frightened and ashamed of what she had done, and went and threw herself upon the old woman’s neck. And poor old Mrs. Fennell sobbed and pushed her granddaughter away, and then hugged and kissed her, and stroked her pretty hair and the feather in her hat and her soft velvet and fur. The thoughtless girl had given her a stab, and yet it was such a stab as opens while it wounds. She sobbed, but a touch of sweetness came along with the pain, and for the moment she loved again, and grew human and motherlike, warming out of the chills of her hard old age.

“*You* need not talk of cold, at least,” she said when the little *accès* was over, and when Sara, having bestowed upon her the first real affectionate kiss she had given her since she came to woman’s estate, had dropped again into the low chair before the fire, feeling a little astonished, yet rather pleased with herself for having proved equal to the occasion—“you need not talk of cold with all that beautiful fur. It must have cost a fortune. Mrs. Lyon next door will come to see me to-morrow and she will take you all to pieces, and say it isn’t real. And such a pretty feather! I like you in that kind of hat—it is very becoming; and you look like a little princess just now as you sit before the fire.”

“Do I?” said Sara. “I am very glad you are pleased, grandmamma. I put on my very best to please you. Do you remember the little cape you made for me, when I was a tiny baby, out of your great old muff? I have got it still. But oh, listen to that daphne how it tells it is here! It is all through the room, as I said it would be. I must ring for some water, and your people, when they come to call, will never say the daphne is not real. It will contradict them to their face. Please, Nancy, some water for the flowers.”

“Thomas says it’s time for you to be a-going, Miss,” said Nancy, grimly.

“Oh, Thomas can say what he pleases; papa will wait for me,” cried Sara; “and grandmamma and I are such friends this time. There is some cream in the basket, Nancy, for tea; for you know our country cream is the best; and some of the grapes of my pet vine; don’t look sulky, there’s an old dear. I am coming every week. And grandmamma and I are such friends—”

“Anyhow, she’s my poor Bessie’s own child,” said Mrs. Fennell, with a little deprecation; for Nancy, who had been old Mrs. Thomson’s servant, was stronger even than herself upon the presumption of Brownlows, and how, but for them as was dead and gone and forgotten, such splendor could never have been.

“Sure enough,” said Nancy, “and more people’s child as well,” which was the sole but pregnant comment she permitted herself to make. Sara, however, got her will, as she usually did. She took off her warm cloak, which the two old women examined curiously, and scorned Thomas’s recommendations, and made and shared her grandmother’s tea, while the grays drove up and down the narrow street, dazzling the entire neighborhood, and driving the coachman desperate. Mr. Brownlow, too, sat waiting and wondering in his office, thinking weakly that every cab that passed must be Sara’s carriage. The young lady did not hurry herself. “It was to please grandmamma,” as she said; certainly it was not to please herself, for there could not be much pleasure for Sara in the society of those two

old women, who were not sweet-tempered, and who were quite as like, according to the mood they might happen to be in, to take the presents for insults as for tokens of love. But, then, there was always a pleasure in having her own way, and one of which Sara was keenly susceptible. When she called for her father eventually, she complained to him that her head ached a little, and that she felt very tired. “The daphne got to be a little overpowering in grandmamma’s small room,” she said; “I dare say they would put it out of window as soon as I was gone; and, besides, it *is* a little tiring, to tell the truth. But grandmamma was quite pleased,” said the disinterested girl. And John Brownlow took great care of his Sara as they drove out together, and felt his heart grow lighter in his breast when she recovered from her momentary languor, and looked up at the frosty twinkling in the skies above, and chattered and laughed as the carriage rolled along, lighting up the road with its two lamps, and dispersing the silence with a brisk commotion. He was prouder of his child than if she had been his bride—more happy in the possession of her than a young man with his love. And yet John Brownlow was becoming an old man, and had not been without cares and uncomfortable suggestions even on that very day.

CHAPTER III. A SUDDEN ALARM

The unpleasant suggestion which had been brought before Mr. Brownlow's mind that day, while Sara accomplished her visit to her grandmother, came after this wise:

His mind had been going leisurely over his affairs in general, as he went down to his office; for naturally, now that he was so rich, he had many affairs of his own beside that placid attention to other people's affairs which was his actual trade; and it had occurred to him that at one point there was a weakness in his armor. One of his investments had not been so skillful or so prudent as the rest, and it looked as if it might call for farther and farther outlay before it could be made profitable, if indeed it were ever made profitable. When he got to the office, Mr. Brownlow, like a prudent man, looked into the papers connected with this affair, and took pains to understand exactly how he stood, and what farther claims might be made upon him. And while he was doing this, certain questions of date arose which set clearly before him, what he had for the moment forgotten, that the time of his responsibility to Phoebe Thomson was nearly over, and that in a year no claim could be made against him for Mrs. Thomson's fifty thousand pounds. The mere realization of this fact gave him a certain thrill of uncertainty and agitation. He had not troubled himself about it for years, and during that time he had felt perfectly safe and comfortable in his possessions; but to look upon it in actual black and white, and to see how near he was to complete freedom, gave him a sudden sense of his present risk, such as he had never felt before. To repay the fifty thousand pounds would have been no such difficult matter, for Mrs. Thomson's money had been lucky money, and had, as we have said, doubled and trebled itself; but there was interest for five-and-twenty years to be reckoned; and there was no telling what other claims the heir, if an heir should turn up, might bring against the old woman's executor. Mr. Brownlow felt for one sharp moment as if Sara's splendor and her happiness was at the power of some unknown vagabond who might make a sudden claim any moment when he was unprepared upon the inheritance which for all these years had appeared to him as his own. It was a sort of danger which could not be guarded against, but rather, indeed, ought to be invited; though it would be hard—no doubt it would be hard, after all this interval—to give up the fortune which he had accepted with reluctance, and which had cost him, as he felt, a hundred times more trouble than it had ever given him pleasure. Now that he had begun to get a little good out of it, to think of some stealthy vagrant coming in and calling suddenly for his rights, and laying claim perhaps to all the increase which Mr. Brownlow's careful management had made of the original, was an irritating idea. He tried to put it away, and perhaps he might have been successful in banishing it from his mind but for another circumstance that fixed it there, and gave, as it seemed, consistency and force to the thought.

The height of the day was over, and the sun was veering toward that point of the compass from which its rays shone in at John Brownlow's windows, when he was asked if he would see a young man who came about the junior clerk's place. Mr. Brownlow had very nearly made up his mind as to who should fill this junior clerk's place; but he was kind-hearted, and sent no one disconsolate away if it were possible to help it. After a moment's hesitation, he gave orders for the admission of this young man. "If he does not do for that, he may be good for something else," was what John Brownlow said; for it was one of his crotchets, that to help men to work was better than almsgiving. The young man in question had nothing very remarkable in his appearance. He had a frank, straightforward, simple sort of air, which partly, perhaps, arose from the great defect in his face—the projection of the upper jaw, which was well garnished with large white teeth. He had, however, merry eyes, of the kind that smile without knowing it whenever they accost another countenance; but his other features were all homely—expressive, but not remarkable. He came in modestly, but he was not afraid; and he stood respectfully and listened to Mr. Brownlow, but there was no servility in his attitude. He had come

about the clerk's place, and he was quite ready to give an account of himself. His father had been a non-commissioned officer, but was dead; and his mother wanted his help badly enough.

"But you are strangers in Masterton," said Mr. Brownlow, attracted by his frank looks. "Had you any special inducement to come here?"

"Nothing of any importance," said the youth, and he colored a little. "The fact is, sir, my mother came of richer people than we are now, and they cast her off; and some of them once lived in Masterton. She came to see if she could hear any thing of her friends."

"And did she?" said John Brownlow, feeling his breath come a little quick.

"They are all dead long ago," said the young man. "We have all been born in Canada, and we never heard what had happened. Her moth—I mean her friends, are all dead, I suppose; and Masterton is just as good as any other place to make a beginning in. I should not be afraid if I could get any thing to do."

"Clerk's salaries are very small," said Mr. Brownlow, without knowing what it was he said.

"Yes, but they improve," said his visitor, cheerfully; "and I don't mind what I do. I could make up books or do any thing at night, or even have pupils—I have done that before. But I beg your pardon for troubling you with all this. If the place is filled up—"

"Nay, stop—sit down—you interest me," said Mr. Brownlow. "I like a young fellow who is not easily cast down. Your mother—belongs—to Masterton, I suppose," he added, with a little hesitation; he, that gave way to no man in Dartfordshire for courage and coolness, he was afraid. He confessed it to himself, and felt all the shame of the new sensation, but it had possession of him all the same.

"She belongs to the Isle of Man," said the young man, with his frank straightforward look and the smile in his eyes. He answered quite simply and point-blank, having no thought that there was any second meaning in his words; but it was otherwise with him who heard. John Brownlow sat silent, utterly confounded. He stared at the young stranger in a blank way, not knowing how to answer or how to conceal or account for the tremendous impression which these simple words made on him. He sat and stared, and his lower lip fell a little, and his eyes grew fixed, so that the youth was terrified, and did not know what to make of it. Of course he seized upon the usual resource of the disconcerted—"I beg your pardon," he said, "but I am afraid you are ill."

"No, no; it is nothing," said Mr. Brownlow. "I knew some people once who came from the Isle of Man. But that is a long time ago. I am sorry she has not found the people she sought for. But, as you say, there is nothing like work. If you can engross well—though how you should know how to engross after taking pupils and keeping books—"

"We have to do a great many things in the colony," said his young visitor. "If a man wants to live, he must not be particular about what he does. I was two years in a lawyer's office in Paris—"

"In Paris?" said Mr. Brownlow, with amazement.

"I mean in Paris, Canada West," said the youth, with a touch of momentary defiance, as who would say, "and a very much better Paris than any you can boast of here."

This little accident did so much good that it enabled Mr. Brownlow to smile, and to shake off the oppression that weighed upon him. It was a relief to be able to question the applicant as to his capabilities, while secretly and rapidly in his own mind he turned over the matter, and asked himself what he should do. Discourage the young man and direct him elsewhere, and gently push him out of Masterton—or take him in and be kind to him, and trust in Providence? The panic of the moment suggested the first course, but a better impulse followed. In the first place, it was not easy to discourage a young fellow with those sanguine brown eyes, and blood that ran so quickly in his veins; and if any danger was at hand, it was best to have it near, and be able to study it, and be warned at once how and when it might approach. All this passed rapidly, like an under-current, through John Brownlow's mind, as he sat and asked innumerable questions about the young applicant's capabilities and antecedents. He did it to gain time, though all young Powys thought was that he had never gone through so severe an examination. The young fellow smiled within himself at the wonderful precision

and caution of the old man, with a kind of transatlantic freedom—not that he was republican, but only colonial; not irritated by his employer's superiority, but regarding it as an affair of perhaps only a few days or years.

"I will think it over," said Mr. Brownlow at last. "I can not decide upon any thing all at once. If you settle quietly down and get a situation, I think you may do very well here. It is not a dear place, and if your mother has friends—"

"But she has no friends now that we know of," said the young man, with the unnecessary and persistent explanatoriness of youth.

"If she has friends here," persisted Mr. Brownlow, "you may be sure they will turn up. Come back to me to-morrow. I will think it all over in the mean time, and give you my answer then. Powys—that is a very good name—there was a Lady Powys here some time ago, who was exceedingly good and kind to the poor. Perhaps it was she whom you sought—"

"Oh, no," said the young man, eagerly; "it was my mother's people—a family called—"

"I am afraid I have an engagement now," said Mr. Brownlow; and then young Powys withdrew, with that quiet sense of shame and compunction which belongs only to his years. He, of course, as was natural, could see nothing of the tragic under-current. It appeared to him only that he was intruding his private affairs, in an unjustifiable way, on his probable patron—on the man who had been kind to him, and given him hope. "What an ass I am!" he said to himself as he went away, "as if he could take any interest in my mother's friends." And it troubled the youth all day to think that he had possibly wearied Mr. Brownlow by his explanations and iteration—an idea as mistaken as it was possible to conceive.

When he had left the office, the lawyer fell back in his chair, and for a long time neither moved nor spoke. Probably it was the nature of his previous reflections which gave this strange visit so overwhelming an effect. He sat in a kind of stupor, seeing before him, as it appeared in actual bodily presence, the danger which it had startled him this same morning to realize as merely possible. If it had been any other day, he might have heard, without much remarking, all those singular coincidences which now appeared so startling; but they chimed in so naturally, or rather so unnaturally, with the tenor of his thoughts, that his panic was superstitious and overwhelming. He sat a long time without moving, almost without breathing, feeling as if it was some kind of fate that approached him. After so many years that he had not thought of this danger, it seemed to him at last that the thoughts which had entered his mind in the morning must have been premonitions sent by Providence; and at a glance he went over the whole position—the new claimant, the gradually expanding claim, the conflict over it, the money he had locked up in that one doubtful speculation, the sudden diminution of his resources, perhaps the necessity of selling Brownlows and bringing Sara back to the old house in the High Street where she was born. Such a downfall would have been nothing for himself: for him the old wainscot dining-parlor and all the well-known rooms were agreeable and full of pleasant associations; but Sara—Then John Brownlow gave another wide glance over his social firmament, asking himself if there was any one whom, between this time and that, Sara's heart might perhaps incline to, whom she might marry, and solve the difficulty. A few days before he used to dread and avoid the idea of her marriage. Now all this rushed upon him in a moment, with the violent impulse of his awakened fears. By-and-by, however, he came to himself. A woman might be a soldier's wife, and might come from the Isle of Man, and might have had friends in Masterton who were dead, without being Phœbe Thomson. Perhaps if he had been bold, and listened to the name which was on his young visitor's lips, it might have reassured him, and settled the question; but he had been afraid to do it. At this early stage of his deliberations he had not a moment's doubt as to what he would do—what he must do—at once and without delay, if Phœbe Thomson really presented herself before him. But it was not his business to seek her out. And who could say that this was she? The Isle of Man, after all, was not so small a place, and any one who had come to Masterton to ask after old Mrs. Thomson would have been referred at once to her executor. This conviction came slowly upon Mr. Brownlow's mind as he got

over the first wild thrill of fear. He put his terror away from him gradually and slowly. When a thought has burst upon the mind at once, and taken possession of it at a stroke, it is seldom dislodged in the same complete way. It may cease to be a conviction, but it never ceases to be an impression. To this state, by degrees, his panic subsided. He no longer thought it certain that young Powys was Phœbe Thomson's representative; but only that such a thing was possible—that he had something tangible to guard against and watch over. In place of his quiet every-day life, with all its comforts, an exciting future, a sudden whirl of possibilities opened before him. But in one year all this would be over. One year would see him, would see his children, safe in the fortune they had grown used to, and come to feel their own. Only one year! There are moments when men are fain to clog the wheels of time and retard its progress; but there are also moments when, to set the great clock forward arbitrarily and to hasten the measured beating of that ceaseless leisurely pendulum, is the desire that goes nearest the heart. Thus it came to appear to Mr. Brownlow as if it was now a kind of race between time and fate; for as yet it had not occurred to him to think of abstract justice nor of natural rights higher than those of any legal testament. He was thinking only of the letter, of the stipulated year. He was thinking if that time were past that he would feel himself his own master. And this sentiment grew and settled in his mind as he sat alone, and waited for Sara's carriage—for his child, whom in all this matter he thought of the most. He was disturbed in the present, and eager with the eagerness of a boy for the future. It did not even occur to him that ghosts would arise in that future even more difficult to exorcise. All his desire in the mean time was—if only this year were over—if only anyhow a leap could be made through this one interval of danger. And the sharp and sudden pain he had come through gave him at the same time a sense of lassitude and exhaustion. Thus Sara's headache and her fatigue and fanciful little indisposition were very lucky accidents for her father. They gave him an excuse for the deeper compunctious tenderness with which he longed to make up to her for a possible loss, and occupied both of them, and hid his disturbed air, and gave him a little stimulus of pleasure when she mended and resumed her natural chatter. Thus reflection and the fresh evening air, and Sara's headache and company, ended by almost curing Mr. Brownlow before he reached home.

CHAPTER IV. A LITTLE DINNER

There was a very pleasant party that evening at Brownlows—the sort of thing of which people say, that it is not a party at all, you know, only ourselves and the Hardcastles, or whoever else it may happen to be. There was the clergyman of the parish, of course—who is always, if he happens to be at all agreeable, the very man for such little friendly dinners; and there was his daughter; for he was a widower, like Mr. Brownlow—and his Fanny was half as much to him, to say the least, as Sara was to her admiring father. And there was just one guest besides—young Keppel, to wit, the son of old Keppel of Ridley, and brother of the present Mr. Keppel—a young fellow who was not just precisely what is called *eligible*, so far as the young ladies were concerned, but who did very well for all secondary purposes, and was a barrister with hopes of briefs, and a flying connection with literature, which helped him to keep his affairs in order, and was rather of service to him than otherwise in society, as it sometimes is to a perfectly well-connected young man. Thus there were two girls and two young men, and two seniors to keep each other company; and there was a great deal of talk and very pleasant intercourse, enough to justify the rector in his enthusiastic utterance of his favorite sentiment, that this was true society, and that he did not know what people meant by giving dinners at which there were more than six. Mr. Hardcastle occasionally, it is true, expressed under other circumstances opinions which might be supposed a little at variance with this one; but then a man can not always be in the same mind, and no doubt he was quite sincere in what he said. He was a sort of man that exists, but is not produced now-a-days. He was neither High Church nor Low Church, so to speak. If you had offered to confess your sins to him he would have regarded you with as much terror and alarm as if you had presented a pistol at his head; and if you had attempted to confess your virtues under the form of spiritual experience, he would have turned from you with disgust. Neither was he in the least freethinking, but a most correct orthodox clergyman, a kind of man, as I have said, not much produced in these times. Besides this indefinite clerical character he had a character of his own, which was not at all indefinite. He was a little red-faced, and sometimes almost jovial in his gayety, and at the same time he was in possession of a large stock of personal griefs and losses, which had cost him many true tears and heartaches, poor man, but which were very useful to him in the way of his profession. And he had an easy way of turning from the one phase of life to the other, which had a curious effect sometimes upon impartial spectators. But all the same it was perfectly true and genuine. He made himself very agreeable that night at Brownlows, and was full of jest and frolic; but if he had been called to see somebody in trouble as he went home, he would have gone in and drawn forth from his own private stores of past pain, and manifested plainly to the present sufferer that he himself had suffered more bitterly still. He had “come through” all the pangs that a man can suffer in this world. He had lost his wife and his children, till nothing was left to him but this one little Fanny—and he loved to open his closed-up chambers to your eyes, and to meet your pitiful looks and faltering attempt at consolation; and yet at the same time you would find him very jolly in the evening at Mr. Brownlow’s, which hurt the feelings of some sensitive people. His daughter, little Fanny, was pretty and nice, and nothing particular, which suited her position and prospects perfectly well. These were the two principal guests, young Keppel being only a man, as ladies who are in the habit of giving dinners are wont to describe such floating members of the community. And they all talked and made themselves pleasant, and it was as pretty and as lively a little party as you could well have seen. Quantities of flowers and lights, two very pretty girls, and two good-looking young men, were enough to guarantee its being a very pretty scene; and nobody was afraid of any body, and every body could talk, and did so, which answered for the latter part of the description. Such little parties were very frequent at Brownlows.

After dinner the two girls had a little talk by themselves. They came floating into the great drawing-room with those heaps of white drapery about them which make up for any thing that may be intrinsically unamiable¹ in crinoline. Before they went up stairs, making it ready for them, a noble fire, all red, clear, and glowing, was in the room, and made it glorious; and the pretty things which glittered and reddened and softened in the bright warm atmosphere were countless.

There was a bouquet of violets on the table, which was Mr. Pitt the gardener's daily quit-rent to Sara for all the honors and emoluments of his situation, so that every kind of ethereal sense was satisfied. Fanny Hardcastle dropped into a very low chair at one side of the fire, where she sat like a swan with her head and throat rising out of the white billowy waves which covered yards of space round about her. Sara, who was at home, drew a stool in front of the fire, and sat down there, heaping up in her turn snow-wreaths upon the rosy hearth. A sudden spark might have swallowed them both in fiery destruction. But the spark happily did not come; and they had their talk in great comfort and content. They touched upon a great many topics, skimming over them, and paying very little heed to logical sequences. And at last they stumbled into metaphysics, and had a curious little dive into the subject of love and love-making, as was not unnatural. It is to be regretted, however, that neither of these young women had very exalted ideas on this point. They were both girls of their period, who recognized the necessity of marriage, and that it was something likely to befall both of them, but had no exaggerated notions of its importance; and, indeed, so far from being utterly absorbed in the anticipation of it, were both far from clear whether they believed in such a thing as love.

"I don't think one ever could be so silly as they say in books," said Fanny Hardcastle, "unless one was a great fool—feeling as if every thing was changed, you know, as soon as *he* was out of the room, and feeling one's heart beat when he was coming, and all that stuff; I don't believe it Sara; do you?"

"I don't know," said Sara, making a screen of her pretty laced handkerchief to protect her face from the firelight; "perhaps it is because one has never seen the right sort of man. The only man I have ever seen whom one could really love is papa."

"Papa!" echoed Fanny, faintly, and with surprise. Perhaps, after all, she had a lingering faith in ordinary delusions; at all events, there was nothing heroic connected in her mind with papas in general; and she could but sit still and gaze and wonder what next the spoiled child would say.

"I wonder if mamma was very fond of him," said Sara, meditatively. "She ought to have been, but I dare say she never knew him half as well as I do. That is the dreadful thing. You have to marry them before you know."

"Oh, Sara, don't you believe in love at first sight?" said Fanny, forgetting her previously expressed sentiments. "I do."

Sara threw up her drooping head into the air with a little impatient motion. "I don't think I believe any thing about it," she said.

"And yet there was once somebody that was fond of you," said little Fanny breathlessly. "Poor Harry Mansfield, who was so nice—every body knows about that—and, I do think, Mr. Keppel, if you would not be so saucy to him—"

"Mr. Keppel!" exclaimed Sara, with some scorn. "But I will tell you plainly what I mean to do. Mind it is in confidence between us two. You must never tell it to any body. I have made up my mind to marry whoever papa wishes me to marry—I don't mind who it is. I shall do whatever he says."

"Oh, Sara!" said her young companion, with open eyes and mouth, "you will never go so far as that."

"Oh yes, I will," said Sara, with calm assurance. "He would not ask me to have any body very old or very hideous; and if he lets it alone I shall never leave him at all, but stay still here."

¹ If there *is* anything; most of us think there is not. If the unthinking male creatures who abuse it only knew the comfort of it! and what a weariness it saves us! and as for the people who are burnt, it is not because of their crinolines, but because of losing their heads—a calamity to which in all kinds of dresses we are constantly liable.

“That might be all very well for a time,” said the prudent Fanny; “but you would get old, and you couldn’t stay here forever. That is what I am afraid of. Things get so dull when one is old.”

“Do you think so?” said Sara. “I don’t think I should be dull—I have so many things to do.”

“Oh, you are the luckiest girl in the whole world,” said Fanny Hardcastle, with a little sigh. She, for her own part, would not have despised the reversion of Mr. Keppel, and would have been charmed with Jack Brownlow. But such blessings were not for her. She was in no hurry about it; but still, as even now it was dull occasionally at the rectory, she could not but feel that when she was old—say, seven-and-twenty or so—it would be duller still; and if accordingly, in the mean time, somebody “nice” would turn up—Fanny’s thoughts went no farther than this. And as for Sara, she has already laid her own views on the subject before her friends.

It was just then that Jack Brownlow, leaving the dining-room, invited young Keppel to the great hall door to see what sort of a night it was. “It looked awfully like frost,” Jack said; and they both went with serious countenances to look out, for the hounds were to meet next day.

“Smoke! not when we are going back to the ladies,” said Keppel, with a reluctance which went far to prove the inclination which Fanny Hardcastle had read in his eyes.

“Put yourself into this overcoat,” said Jack, “and I’ll take you to my room, and perfume you after. The girls don’t mind.”

“Your sister must mind, I am sure,” said Keppel. “One can’t think of any coarse sort of gratification like this—I suppose it is a gratification—in her presence.”

“Hum,” said Jack; “I have her presence every day, you know, and it does not fill me with awe.”

“It is all very easy for you,” said Keppel, as they went down the steps into the cold and darkness. Poor fellow! he had been a little thrown off his balance by the semi-intimacy and close contact of the little dinner. He had sat by Sara’s side, and he had lost his head. He went along by Jack’s side rather disconsolate, and not even attempting to light his cigar. “You don’t know how well off you are,” he said, in touching tones, “whereas another fellow would give his head—”

“Most fellows I know want their heads for their own affairs,” said the unfeeling Jack. “Don’t be an ass; you may talk nonsense as much as you like, but you know you never could be such an idiot as to marry at your age.”

“Marry!” said Keppel, a little startled, and then he breathed forth a profound sigh. “If I had the ghost of a chance,” he said, and stopped short, as if despair choked farther utterance. As for Jack Brownlow, he was destitute of sensibility, as indeed was suitable to his trade.

“I shouldn’t say you had in this case,” he said, in his imperturbable way; “and all the better for you. You’ve got to make your way in the world like the rest of us, and I don’t think you’re the sort of fellow to hang on to a girl with money. It’s all very well after a bit, when you’ve made your way; but no fellow with the least respect for himself should think of such a thing before, say five-and-thirty; unless, of course, he is a duke, and has a great family to keep up.”

“I hope you’ll keep to your own standard,” said Keppel, with a little bitterness, “unless you think an only son and a duke on equal ground.”

“Don’t sneer,” said Jack; “I’m young Brownlow the attorney; you know that as well as I do. I can’t go visiting all over the country at my uncle’s place and my cousin’s place, like you. Brownlows is a sort of a joke to most people, you know. Not that I haven’t as much respect for my father and my family as if we were all princes; and I mean to stand by my order. If I ever marry it will be twenty years hence, when I can afford it; and you can’t afford it any more than I can. A fellow might love a woman and give up a great deal for her,” Jack added with a little excitement; “but, by Jove! I don’t think he would be justified in giving up his life.”

“It depends on what you call life,” said Keppel. “I suppose you mean society and that sort of thing—a few stupid parties and club gossip, and worse.”

“I don’t mean any thing of the sort,” said Jack, tossing away his cigar; “I mean working out your own career, and making your way. When a fellow goes and marries and settles down, and cuts

off all his chances, what use is his youth and his strength to him? It would be hard upon a poor girl to be expected to make up for all that.”

“I did not know you were such a philosopher, Jack,” said his companion, “nor so ambitious; but I suppose you’re right in a cold-blooded sort of way. Anyhow; if I were that duke—”

“You’d make an ass of yourself,” said young Brownlow; and then the two congratulated each other that the skies were clouding over, and the dreaded frost dispersing into drizzle, and went in and took off their smoking coats, and wasted a flask of eau-de-cologne, and went up stairs; where there was an end of all philosophy, at least for that night.

And the seniors sat over their wine, drinking little, notwithstanding Mr. Hardcastle’s ruddy countenance, which was due rather to fresh air, taken in large and sometimes boisterous drafts, than to any stronger beverage. But they liked their talk, and they were, in a friendly way, opposed to each other on a great many questions; the rector, as in duty bound, being steadily conservative, while the lawyer had crotchets in political matters. They were discussing the representatives of the county, and also those of some of the neighboring boroughs, which was probably the reason why Mr. Hardcastle gave a personal turn to the conversation as he suddenly did.

“If you will not stand for the borough yourself, you ought to put forward Jack,” said the rector. “I think he is sounder than you are. The best sign I know of the country is that all the young fellows are tories, Brownlow. Ah! you may shake your head, but I have it on the best authority. Sir Robert would support him, of course; and with your influence at Masterton—”

“Jack must stick to his business,” said Mr. Brownlow; “neither he nor I have time for politics. Besides, we are not the sort of people—county families, you know.”

“Oh, bother county families!” said Mr. Hardcastle. “You know there is not another place in the county kept up like Brownlows. If you will not stand yourself, you ought to push forward your boy.”

“It is out of my way,” said Mr. Brownlow, shaking his head, and then a momentary smile passed over his face. It had occurred to him, by means of a trick of thought he had got into unawares—if Sara could but do it! and then he smiled at himself. Even while he did so, the recollection of his disturbed day returned to him; and though he was a lawyer and a self-contained man, and not given to confidences, still something moved in his heart and compelled him, as it were, to speak.

“Besides,” he went on, “we are only here on sufferance. You know all about my circumstances—every body in Dartfordshire does, I believe; and Phoebe Thomson may turn up any day and make her claim.”

“Nonsense,” said the rector; but there was something in John Brownlow’s look which made him feel that it was not altogether nonsense. “But even if she were to turn up,” he added, after a pause, “I suppose it would not ruin you to pay her her fifty thousand pounds.”

“No, that is true enough,” said Mr. Brownlow. It was a kind of ease to him to give this hint that he was still human and fallible, and might have losses to undergo; but the same instinct which made him speak closed his lips as to any more disastrous consequences than the loss of the original legacy. “Sara will have some tea for us up stairs,” he said, after a pause. And then the two fathers went up to the drawing-room in their turn, and nothing could be more cheerful than the rest of the evening, though there were a good many thoughts and speculations of various kinds going on under this lively flood of talk, as may be perceived.

CHAPTER V. SARA'S SPECULATIONS

The next morning the frost had set in harder than before, contrary to all prognostications, to the great discomfiture of Jack Brownlow and of the Dartfordshire hounds. The world was white, glassy, and sparkling, when they all looked out upon it from the windows of the breakfast-room—another kind of world altogether from that dim and cloudy sphere upon which Jack and his companion had looked with hopes of thaw and an open country. These hopes being all abandoned, the only thing that remained to be thought of was, whether Dewsbury Mere might be “bearing,” or when the ice would be thick enough for skaters—which were questions in which Sara, too, took a certain interest. It was the parish of Dewsbury in which Brownlows was situated, and of which Mr. Hardcastle was the parish priest; and young Keppel, along with his brother Mr. Keppel of Ridley, and all the visitors he might happen to have, and Sir Charles Hetheron, from the other side, with any body who might be staying in his house—not to speak of the curate and the doctor, and Captain Stanmore, who lived in the great house in Dewsbury village, and a number of other persons less known in the upper circles of the place, would crowd to the Mere as soon as it was known that it might yield some diversion, which was a scant commodity in the neighborhood. Mr. Brownlow scarcely listened to the talk of the young people as he ate his eggs sedately. He was not thinking of the ice for one. He was thinking of something quite different—of what might be waiting him at his office, and of the changes which any moment, as he said to himself, might produce. He was not afraid, for daylight disperses many ghosts that are terrible by night; but still his fright seemed to have opened his eyes to all the advantages of his present position, and the vast difference there was between John Brownlow the attorney's children, and the two young people from Brownlows. If that change were ever to occur, it would make a mighty alteration. Lady Hetheron would still know Sara, no doubt, but in how different a way! and their presence at Dewsbury then would be of no more importance than that of Fanny Hardcastle or young Stanmore in the village—whereas, now—This was what their father was reflecting, not distinctly, but in a vague sort of way, as he ate his egg. He had once been fond of the ice himself, and was not so old but that he felt the wonted fires burn in his ashes; but the office had an attraction for him which it had never had before, and he drove down by himself in the dog-cart with the vigor and eagerness of a young man, while his son got out his skates and set off to ascertain the prospects of the Mere. In short, at that moment Mr. Brownlow rather preferred to go off to business alone.

As for Sara, she did not allow her head to be turned by the prospect of the new amusement; she went through her duties, as usual, with serene propriety—and then she put all sorts of coverings on her feet and her hands, and her person generally, and set out with a little basket to visit her “poor people.” I can not quite tell why she chose the worst weather to visit her poor people—perhaps it was for their sakes, to find out their wants at the worst; perhaps for her own, to feel a little meritorious. I do not pretend to be able to fathom Sara's motives; but this is undeniably what she did. When it rained torrents, she put on a large waterproof, which covered her from head to foot, and went off with drops of rain blown upon her fair cheeks under her hood, on the same charitable mission. This time it was in a fur-trimmed jacket, which was the envy of half the parish. Her father spoiled her, it was easy to see, and gave her every thing she could desire; but her poor people liked to see her in her expensive apparel, and admired and wondered what it might cost, and were all the better pleased with the tea and sugar. They were pleased that she should wear her fine things for them as well as for the fine people she went to visit. I do not attempt to state the reason why.

When she went out at the park gates, Mrs. Swayne was the first person who met Sara's eyes, standing at her door. The lines of the road were so lost in snow that it seemed an expanse of level white from the gate of Brownlows to the door-step, cleared and showing black over the whiteness, upon

which Mrs. Swayne stood. She was a stout woman, and the cold did not seem to affect her. She had a black gown on and a little scarlet shawl, as if she meant to make herself unusually apparent; and there she stood defiant as the young lady came out. Sara was courageous, and her spirit was roused by this visible opponent. She gave herself a little shake, and then she went straight over the road and offered battle. "Are you not afraid of freezing up," she said to Mrs. Swayne, with an abruptness which might have taken away any body's breath—"or turning into Lot's wife, standing there at the open door?"

Mrs. Swayne was a woman of strong nerves, and she was not frightened. She gave a little laugh to gain time, and then she retorted briskly, "No, miss, no more nor you in all your wraps; poor folks can stand a deal that rich folks couldn't bear."

"It must be much better to be poor than to be rich, then," said Sara, "but I don't believe that—your husband, for instance, is not half so strong as—but I beg your pardon—I forgot he was ill," she cried, with a compunction which covered her face with crimson, "I did not mean to say that; when one speaks without thinking, one says things one doesn't mean."

"It's a pity to speak without thinking," said Mrs. Swayne; "If I did, I'd say a deal of unpleasant things; but, to be sure, you're but a bit of a girl. My man is independent, and it don't matter to nobody whether he is weakly or whether he is strong."

"I beg your pardon," said Sara, meekly; "I am very sorry he is not strong."

"My man," continued Mrs. Swayne, "is well-to-do and comfortable, and don't want no pity: there's a plenty in the village to be sorry for—not them as the ladies visit and get imposed upon. Poor folks understands poor folks—not as I mean to say we're poor."

"Then, if you are not poor you can't understand them any better than I do," said Sara, with returning courage. "I don't think they like well-to-do people like you; you are always the most hard upon them. If we were never to get any thing we did not deserve, I wonder what would become of us; and besides, I am sure they don't impose upon me."

"They'd impose upon the Apostle Paul," said Mrs. Swayne; "and as for the rector—not as he is much like one of the apostles; he is one as thinks his troubles worse than other folks. It ain't no good complaining to him. You may come through every thing as a woman can come through; but the parson'll find as he's come through more. That's just Mr. Hardcastle. If a poor man is left with a young family, it's the rector as has lost two wives; and as for children and money—though I don't believe for one as he ever had any money—your parsons 'as come through so much never has—"

"You are a Dissenter, Mrs. Swayne," said Sara, with calm superiority.

"Bred and born and brought up in the church, miss," said Mrs. Swayne, indignantly, "but druve to the chapel along of Swayne, and the parson being so aggravatin'. I'm one as likes a bit of sympathy, for my part; but it ain't general in this world," said the large woman, with a sigh.

Sara looked at her curiously, with her head a little on one side. She was old enough to know that one liked a little sympathy, and to feel too that it was not general in this world; but it seemed mighty strange to her that such an ethereal want should exist in the bosom of Mrs. Swayne. "Sympathy?" she said, with a curious tone of wonder and inquiry. She was candid enough, notwithstanding a certain comic aspect which the conversation began to take to her, to want to know what it meant.

"Yes," said Mrs. Swayne, "just sympathy, miss. I'm one as has had my troubles, and as don't like to be told that they ain't troubles at all. The minister at the chapel is 'most as bad, for he says they're blessins in disguise—as if Swayne being weakly and awful worritin' when his rheumatism's bad, could ever be a blessin'. And as for speaking to the rector, you might as well speak to the Mere, and better too, for that's got no answer ready. When a poor body sees a clergyman, it's their comfort to talk a bit and to tell all as they're going through. You can tell Mr. Hardcastle I said it, if you please. Lord bless us! I don't need to go so far if it's only to hear as other folks is worse off. There's old Betty at the lodge, and there's them poor creatures next door, and most all in the village, I'm thankful to say, is worse off nor we are; but I would like to know what's the good of a clergyman if he won't listen to you rational, and show a bit of sympathy for what you've com'd through."

Perhaps Sara's attention had wandered during this speech, or perhaps she was tired of the subject; at all events, looking round her with a little impatience as she listened, her eye was caught by the little card with "Lodgings" printed thereon which hung in Mrs. Swayne's parlor window. It recalled her standing grievance, and she took action accordingly at once, as was her wont.

"What is the good of that?" she said, pointing to it suddenly. "I think you ought to keep your parlor to sit in, you who are so well off; but, at least, it can't do you any good to hang it up there—nobody can see it but people who come to us at Brownlows; and you don't expect them to take lodgings here."

"Begging your pardon, miss," said Mrs. Swayne, solemnly, "It's been that good to me that the lodgings is took."

"Then why do you keep it up to aggravate people?" said Sara; "It makes me wild always when I pass the door. Why do you keep it there?"

"Lodgers is but men," said Mrs. Swayne, "or women, to be more particular. I can't never be sure as I'll like 'em; and they're folks as never sees their own advantages. It might be as we didn't suit, or they wasn't satisfied, or objected to Swayne a-smoking when he's bad with the rheumatism, which is a thing I wouldn't put a stop to not for forty lodgers; for it's the only thing as keeps him from worritin'. So I always keeps it up; it's the safest way in the end."

"I think it is a wretched sort of way," cried Sara, impetuously. "I wonder how you can confess that you have so little faith in people; instead of trying to like them and getting friends, to be always ready to see them go off. I couldn't have servants in the house like that: they might just as well go to lodge in a cotton-mill or the work-house. There can't be any human relations between you."

"Relations!" said Mrs. Swayne, with a rising color. "If you think my relations are folks as go and live in lodgings, you're far mistaken, miss. It's well known as we come of comfortable families, both me and Swayne—folks as keeps a good house over their heads. That's our sort. As for taking 'em in, it's mostly for charity as I lets my lodgings—for the sake of poor folks as wants a little fresh air. You was a different looking-creature when you come out of that stuffy bit of a town. I've a real good memory, and I don't forget. I remember when your papa come and bought the place off the old family; and vexed we all was—but I don't make no doubt as it was all for the best."

"I don't think the old family, as you call them, were much use to anybody in Dewsbury," said Sara, injudiciously, with a thrill of indignation and offended pride.

"Maybe not, miss," said Mrs. Swayne, meekly; "they was the old Squires, and come natural. I don't say no more, not to give offense; but you was a pale little thing then, and not much wonder neither, coming out of a house in a close street as is most fit for a mill, as you was saying. It made a fine difference in you."

"Our house in Masterton is the nicest house I know," said Sara, who was privately furious. "I always want papa to take me back in the winter. Brownlows is very nice, but it is not so much of a house after all."

"It was a different name then," said Mrs. Swayne, significantly; "some on us never can think of the new name; and I don't think as you'd like living in a bit of a poky town after this, if your papa was to let you try."

"On the contrary, I should like it excessively," said Sara, with much haughtiness; and then she gave Mrs. Swayne a condescending little nod, and drew up a corner of her dress, which had drooped upon the snow. "I hope your lodgers will be nice, and that you will take down your ticket," she said; "but I must go now to see my poor people." Mrs. Swayne was so startled by the sudden but affable majesty with which the young lady turned away, that she almost dropped her a courtesy in her surprise. But in fact she only dropped her handkerchief, which was as large as a towel, and which she had a way of holding rolled up like a ball in her hand. It was quite true that the old family had been of little use to any body at Dewsbury; and that they were almost squalid in their poverty and pretensions and unrespected misfortune before they went away; and that all the little jobs in carpentry which kept Mr.

Swayne in employment had been wanting during the old *régime*; in short, it was on Brownlows, so to speak—on the shelves and stands, and pegs and bits of cupboard, and countless repairs which were always wanting in the now prosperous house—that Swayne's Cottages had been built. This, however, did not make his wife compunctious. She watched Sara's active footsteps over the snow, and saw her pretty figure disappear into the white waste, and was glad she had given her that sting. To keep this old family bottled up, and give the new people a little dose from time to time of the nauseous residue, was one of her pleasures. She went in and arranged the card more prominently in her parlor window, and felt glad that she had put it there; and then she went and sat with her poor neighbor next door, and railed at the impudent little thing in her furs and velvets, whom the foolish father made such an idol of. But she made her poor neighbor's tea all the same, and frightened away the children, and did the woman good, not being bad any more than most people are who cherish a little comfortable animosity against the nearest great folks. Mrs. Swayne, however, not being democratic, was chiefly affected by the fact that the Masterton lawyer's family had no right to be great folks, which was a reasonable grievance in its way.

As for Sara, she went off through the snow, feeling hot at heart with this little encounter, though her feet were cold with standing still. Why had she stood still to be insulted? this was what Sara asked herself; for, after all, Mrs. Swayne was nothing to her, and what could it matter to Brownlows whether or not she had a bill in her window? But yet unconsciously it led her thoughts to a consideration of her present home—to the difference between it and her father's house at Masterton, to all the fairy change which, within the bounds of her own recollection, had passed upon her life. Supposing any thing was to happen, as things continually happened to men in business—supposing some bank was to fail, or some railway to break down—a thing which occurred every day—and her papa should lose all his money? Would she really be quite content to go back to the brick house in which she was born? Sara thought it over with a great deal of gravity. In case of such an event happening (and, to be sure, nothing was more likely), she felt that she would greatly prefer total ruin. Total ruin meant instant retirement to a cottage with or without roses—with only two, or perhaps only one, servants—where she would be obliged, with her own hands to make little dishes for poor papa, and sew the buttons on his shirts, and perhaps milk a very pretty little Alderney cow, and make beautiful little pats of butter for his delectation. This Sara felt that she was equal to. Let the bank or the railway break down tomorrow, and the devoted daughter was ready to go forth with her beloved parent. She smiled to herself at the thought that such a misfortune could alarm her. What was money? she said to herself; and Sara could not but feel that it was quite necessary to take this plan into full consideration in all its details, for nobody could tell at what moment it might be necessary to put it in practice. As for the house at Masterton, that was quite a different matter, which she did not see any occasion for considering. If papa was ruined, of course he would have to give up every thing, and the Masterton house would be as impossible as Brownlows; and so long as he was not ruined, of course every thing would go on as usual. Thus Sara pursued her way cheerfully, feeling that a possible new future had opened upon her, and that she had perceived and accepted her duty in it, and was prepared for whatever might happen. If Mr. Brownlow returned that very night, and said, "I am a ruined man," Sara felt that she was able to go up to him, and say, "Papa, you have still your children;" and the thought was so far from depressing her that she went on very cheerfully, and held her head high, and looked at every body she met with a certain affability, as if she were the queen of that country. And, to tell the truth, such people as she met were not unwilling to acknowledge her claims. There were many who thought her the prettiest girl in Dewsbury parish, and there could be no doubt that she was the richest and most magnificent. If it had been known what heroic sentiments were in her heart, no doubt it would have deepened the general admiration; but at least she knew them herself, and that is always a great matter. To have your mind made up as to what you must and will do in case of a sudden and at present uncertain, but on the whole quite possible, change of fortune, is a thing to be very thankful for. Sara felt that, considering this suddenly revealed prospect of ruin, it perhaps was not quite prudent to promise future bounties

to her poor pensioners; but she did it all the same, thinking that surely somehow she could manage to get her promises fulfilled, through the means of admiring friends or such faithful retainers as might be called forth by the occasion—true knights, who would do any thing or every thing for her. Thus her course of visits ended quite pleasantly to every body concerned, and that glow of generosity and magnanimity about her heart made her even more liberal than usual, which was very satisfactory to the poor people. When she had turned back and was on her way home, she encountered the carrier's cart on its way from Masterton. It was a covered waggon, and sometimes, though very rarely, it was used as a means of traveling from one place in the neighborhood to another by people who could not afford more expensive conveyances. There were two such people in it now who attracted Sara's attention—one an elderly woman, tall and dark, and somewhat gaunt in her appearance; the other a girl about Sara's own age, with very dark brown hair cut short and lying in rings upon her forehead like a boy's. She had eyes as dark as her hair, and was closely wrapped in a red cloak, and regarded by her companion with tender and anxious looks, to which her paleness and fragile appearance gave a ready explanation. "It ain't the speediest way of traveling, for I've a long round to make, miss, afore I gets where they're a-going," said the carrier; "they'd a most done better to walk, and so I told 'em. But I reckon the young un ain't fit, and they're tired like, and it's mortal cold." Sara walked on remorseful after this encounter, half ashamed of her furs, which she did not want—she whose blood danced in her veins, and who was warm all over with health and comfort, and happiness and pleasant thoughts. And then it occurred to her to wonder whether, if papa were ruined, he and his devoted child would ever have to travel in a carrier's cart, and go round and round a whole parish in the cold before they came to their destination. "But then we could walk," Sara said to herself as she went briskly up the avenue, and saw the bright fire blinking in her own window, where her maid was laying out her evening dress. This, after all, felt a great deal more natural even than the cottage with the roses, and put out of her mind all thought of a dreary journey in the carrier's cart.

CHAPTER VI. AN ADVENTURE

Jack in the mean time was on the ice.

Dewsbury Mere was bearing, which was a wonder, considering how lately the frost had set in; and a pretty scene it was, though as yet some of the other magnates of the parish, as well as Sara, were absent. It was a round bit of ornamental water, partly natural, partly artificial, touching upon the village green at one side, and on the other side bordered by some fine elm-trees, underneath which in summer much of the love-making of the parish was performed. The church, with its pretty spire, was visible through the bare branches of the plantation, which backed the elm-trees like a little host of retainers; and on the other side—the village side—glittering over the green in the centre of all the lower and humbler dwellings, you could see the Stanmores' house, which was very tall and very red, and glistening all over with reflections from the brass nobs on the door, and the twinkling glass of the windows, and even from the polished holly leaves which all but blocked up the entrance. The village people were in full possession of the Mere without the gêne imposed by the presence of Lady Hetherton or Mrs. Keppel. Fanny Hardcastle, who, if the great people had been there, would have pinned herself on tremblingly to their skirts and lost the fun, was now in the heart of it, not despising young Stanmore's attentions, nor feeling herself painfully above the doctor's wife; and thus rosy and blooming and gay, looked a very different creature from the blue little Fanny whom old Lady Hetherton, had she been there, would have awed into cold and propriety. And the doctor's wife, though she was not exactly in society, was a piquant little woman, and the curate was stalwart, if not interesting, very muscular, and slow to commit himself in the way of speech. Besides, there were many people of whom no account was made in Dewsbury, who enjoyed the ice, and knew how to conduct themselves upon it, and looked just as well as if they had been young squires and squireses. Jack Brownlow came into the midst of them cordially, and thought there were many more pretty faces visible than were to be seen in more select circles, and was not in the least appalled by the discovery that the prettiest of all was the corn-factor's daughter in the village. When little Polly Huntly from the baker's wavered on her slide, and was near falling, it was Jack who caught her, and his friendliness put some very silly thoughts into the poor little girl's head; but Jack was thinking of no such vanity. He was as pleased to see the pretty faces about as a right-thinking young man ought to be, but he felt that he had a great many other things to think of for his part, and gave very sensible advice, as has been already seen, to other young fellows of less thoroughly established principles. Jack was not only fancy free, but in principle he was opposed to all that sort of thing. His opinion was, that for any body less than a young duke or more than an artisan to marry under thirty, was a kind of social and moral suicide. I do not pretend to justify or defend his opinions, but such were his opinions, and he made no secret of them. He was a young fellow with a great many things to do in this world, or at least so he thought. Though he was only a country solicitor's son, he had notions in his head, and there was no saying what he did not aspire to; and to throw every thing away for the sake of a girl's pretty face, seemed to him a proceeding little short of idiocy. All this he had expounded to many persons of a different way of thinking; and indeed the only moments in which he felt inclined to cast aside his creed were when he found it taken up and advocated by other men of the same opinion, but probably less sense of delicacy than himself.

"Where is your father?" said Mr. Hardcastle; "he used to be as fond as any one of the ice. Gone to business! he'll kill himself if he goes on going to business like this all the year round, every day."

"Oh, no," said Jack, "he'll not kill himself; all the same he might have come, and so would Sara, had we known that the Mere was bearing. I did not think it possible there could have been such good ice to-day."

“Not Sara,” said the rector; “this sort of thing is not the thing for her. The village folks are all very well, and in the exercise of my profession I see a great deal of them. But not for Sara, my dear boy—this sort of thing is not in her way.”

“Why Fanny is here,” said Jack, opening his eyes.

“Fanny is different,” said Mr. Hardcastle; “clergywomen have got to be friendly with their poor neighbors—but Sara, who will be an heiress—”

“Is she to be an heiress?” said Jack, with a laugh which could not but sound a little peculiar. “I am sure I don’t mind if she is; but I think we may let the future take care of itself. The presence of the cads would not hurt her any more than they hurt me.”

“Don’t speak of cads,” said the rector, “to me; they are all equal—human beings among whom I have lived and labored. Of course it is natural that you should look on them differently. Jack, can you tell me what it is that keeps young Keppel so long about Ridley? What interest has he in remaining here?”

“The hounds, I suppose,” said Jack, curtly, not caring to be questioned.

“Oh, the hounds!” repeated Mr. Hardcastle, with a dubious tone. “I suppose it must be that—and nothing particular to do in town. You were quite right, Jack, to stick to your father’s business. A briefless barrister is one of the most hopeless wretches in the world.”

“I don’t think you always thought so, sir,” said Jack; “but here is an opening and I’ll see you again.” He had not come there to talk to the parson. When he had gone flying across the Mere thinking of nothing at all but the pleasure of the motion, and had skirted it round and round and made figures of 8 and all the gambols common to a first outbreak, he stopped himself at a corner where Fanny Hardcastle, whom her father had been leading about, was standing with young Keppel looking very pretty, with her rose cheeks and downcast eyes. Keppel had been mooning about Sara the night before, was the thought that passed through Jack’s mind; and what right had he to give Fanny Hardcastle occasion to cast down her eyes? Perhaps it was purely on his friend’s account; perhaps because he thought that girls were very hardly dealt with in never being left alone to think of any thing but that confounded love-making; but the fact was that he disturbed them rather ruthlessly, and stood before them, balancing himself on his skates. “Get into this chair, Fanny, and I’ll give you a turn of the Mere,” he said; and the downcast eyes were immediately raised, and their fullest attention conferred upon him. All the humble maidens of Dewsbury at that moment cast glances of envy and yet awe at Fanny. Alice Stanmore, who was growing up, and thought herself quite old enough to receive attention in her own person, glowered at the rector’s daughter with horrible thoughts. The two young gentlemen, the envied of all observers, seemed for the moment, to the female population of the village, to have put themselves at Fanny’s feet. Even Mrs. Brightbank, the doctor’s little clever wife, was taken in for the moment. For the instant that energetic person balanced in her mind the respective merits of the two candidates, and considered which it would be best for Fanny to marry; never thinking that the whole matter involved was half-a-dozen words of nonsense on Mr. Keppel’s part, and on Jack Brownlow’s one turn on the ice in the skater’s chair.

For it was not until Fanny was seated, and being driven over the Mere, that she looked back with that little smile and saucy glance, and asked demurely, “Are you sure it is quite proper, Mr. John?”

“Not proper at all,” said Jack; “for we have nobody to take care of us—neither I nor you. My papa is in Masterton at the office, and yours is busy talking to the old women. But quite as proper as listening to all the nonsense Joe Keppel may please to say.”

“I listening to his nonsense!” said Fanny, as a pause occurred in their progress. “I don’t know why you should think so. He said nothing that every body might not hear. And besides, I don’t listen to any body’s nonsense, nor ever did since I was born,” added Fanny, with another little soft glance round into her companion’s face.

“Never do,” said Jack, seizing the chair with renewed vehemence, and rushing all round the Mere with it at a pace which took away Fanny’s breath. When they had reached the same spot again,

he came to a standstill to recover his own, and stood leaning upon the chair in which the girl sat, smiling and glowing with the unwonted whirl. “Just like a pair of lovers,” the people said on the Mere, though they were far enough from being lovers. Just at that moment the carrier’s cart came lumbering along noisily upon the hard frosty path. It was on its way then to the place where Sara met it on the road. Inside, under the arched cover, were to be seen the same two faces which Sara afterward saw—the mother’s elderly and gaunt, and full of lines and wrinkles; the sweet face of the girl, with its red lips, and pale cheeks, and lovely eyes. The hood of the red cloak had fallen back a little, and showed the short, curling, almost black hair. A little light came into the young face at the sight of all the people on the ice. As was natural, her eyes fixed first on the group so near the edge—pretty Fanny Hardcastle, and Jack, resting from his fatigue, leaning over her chair. The red lips opened with an innocent smile, and the girl pointed out the scene to her mother, whose face relaxed, too, into that momentary look of feigned interest with which an anxious watcher rewards every exertion or stir of reviving life. “What a pretty, pretty creature!” said Fanny Hardcastle, generously, yet with a little passing pang of annoyance at the interruption. Jack did not make any response. He gazed at the little traveler, without knowing it, as if she had been a creature of another sphere. Pretty! he did not know whether she was pretty or not. What he thought was that he had never before seen such a face; and all the while the wagon lumbered on, and kept going off, until the Mere and its group of people were left behind. And Jack Brownlow got to his post again, as if nothing had happened. He drove Fanny round and round until she grew dizzy, and then he rushed back to the field and cut all kinds of figures, and executed every possible gambol that skates will lend themselves to. But, oddly enough, all the while he could not get it out of his head how strange it must look to go through the world like that in a carrier’s cart. It seemed a sort of new view of life to Jack altogether, and no doubt that was why it attracted him. People who had so little sense of the importance of time, and so great a sense of the importance of money, as to jog along over the whole breadth of the parish in a frosty winter afternoon, by way of saving a few shillings—and one of them so delicate and fragile, with such a face, such soft little rings of dark hair on the forehead, such sweet eyes, such a soft little smile! Jack did not think he had much imagination, yet he could not help picturing to himself how the country must look as they passed through; all the long bare stretches of wood and the houses here and there, and how the Mere must have flashed upon them to brighten up the tedious panorama; and then the ring of the horses’ hoofs on the road, and their breath steaming up into the air, and the crack of the carrier’s whip as he walked beside them. Jack, who dashed along in his dog-cart the quickest way, or rode his horse still faster through the well-known lanes, could not but linger on this imagination with the most curious sense of interest and novelty. “It must be poverty,” he said to himself; and it was all he could do to keep the words from being spoken out loud.

As for Fanny, I am afraid she never thought again of the poor travelers in the carrier’s cart. When the red sunset clouds were gathering in the sky, her father, who was very tender of her, drew her hand within his arm, and took her home. “You have had enough of it,” he said, though she did not think so; and when they turned their backs on the village, and took the path toward the rectory under the bare elm-trees, which stood like pillars of ebony in a golden palace against the setting sun, Mr. Hardcastle added a little word of warning. “My love,” he said—for he too, like Mr. Brownlow, thought there was nobody like his child—“you must not put nonsense into these young fellows heads.”

“I put nonsense into their heads,” cried Fanny, feeling, with a slight thrill of self-abasement, that probably it was quite the other way.

“Not a doubt about it,” said the rector; “and so far as Jack Brownlow is concerned, I don’t know that I should object much; but I don’t want to lose my little girl yet awhile; I don’t know what I should do all alone in the house.”

“Oh papa, I will *never* leave you,” cried Fanny. She meant it, and even, which is more, believed it for the moment. Was he not more to her than all the young men that had ever been dreamed of? But yet it *was* rather agreeable to Fanny to think that she was suspected of putting nonsense into

their heads. She liked the imputation, as indeed most people do, both men and women; and she liked the position—the only lady, with all that was most attractive in the parish at her feet; for Sir Charles Hetherton was considered by most people as very far from bright. And then the recollection of her rapid whirl across the ice came over her like a warm glow of pleasant recollection as she dressed for the evening. It would be nice to have them come in, to talk it all over after dinner—very nice to have little parties, like the last night's party at Brownlows; and notwithstanding her devotion to her father, after they had dined, and she had gone alone into the drawing-room, Fanny could not but find it dull. There was neither girl to gossip with, nor man into whose head it would be any satisfaction to put nonsense, near the rectory, from whom a familiar visit might be expected; and after the day's amusement, the silent evening, with papa down stairs enjoying his after-dinner doze in his chair was far from lively. But it did not occur to Fanny to frame any conjectures upon the two travelers who had looked momentarily out upon her from the carrier's cart.

As for Jack Brownlow, he had a tolerably long walk before him. In summer he would have crossed the park, which much reduced the distance, but, in the dark and through the snow, he thought it expedient to keep the high-road, which was a long way round. He went off very briskly, with the straps of his skates over his shoulders, whistling occasionally, but not from want of thought. Indeed, he had a great many things to think of—the ice itself for one thing, and the pleasant run he had given little Fanny, and the contemptible vacillations of that fellow Keppel from one pretty girl to another, and the office and his work, and a rather curious case which had lately come under his hands. All this occupied him as he went home, while the sunset skies gradually faded. He passed from one thing to another with an unfettered mind, and more than once there just glanced across his thoughts a momentary wonder, where would the carrier's cart be now? Had it got home yet, delivered all its parcels, and deposited its passengers? Had it called at Brownlows to leave his cigars, which ought to have arrived a week ago? That poor little pale face—how tired the little creature must be! and how cold! and then the mother. He would never have thought of them again but for that curious way of moving about, of all ways in the world, among the parcels in the carrier's cart.

This speculation had returned to his mind as he came in sight of the park gates. It was quite dark by this time, but the moon was up overhead, and the road was very visible on either side of that little black block of Swayne's cottages which threw a shadow across almost to the frosted silver gates. Something, however, was going on in this bit of shadow. A large black movable object stood in the midst of it; and from Mrs. Swayne's door a lively ray of red light fell across the snow. Then by degrees Jack identified the horses, with their steaming breath, and the wagon wheel upon which the light fell. He said "by Jove" loud out as he stood at the gate and found out what it was. It was the very carrier's cart of which he had been thinking, and some mysterious transaction was going on in the darkness which he could only guess at vaguely. Something or somebody was being made to descend from the wagon, which some sudden swaying of the horses made difficult. Jack took his cigar from his lips to hear and see the better, and stood and gazed with the vulgarest curiosity. Even the carrier's cart was something to take note of on the road at Brownlows. But when that sudden cry followed, he tossed his cigar away and his skates with it, and crossed the road in two long steps, to the peril of his equilibrium. Somehow he had divined what was happening. He made a stride into the thick of it, and it was he who lifted up the little figure in the red cloak which had slipped and fallen on the snow. It was natural, for he was the only man about. The carrier was at his horses' heads to keep them steady; Mrs. Swayne stood on the door steps, afraid to move lest she too should slip; and as for the girl's mother, she was benumbed and stupefied, and could only raise her child up half-way from the ground, and beg somebody to help. Jack got her up in his arms, pushed Mrs. Swayne out of his way, and carried her in. "Is it here she is to go?" he cried over his shoulder as he took her into the parlor, where the card hung in the window, and the fire was burning. There was nothing in it but firelight, which cast a hue of life upon the poor little traveler's face. And then she had not fainted, but blushed and gasped with pain and confusion. "Oh, thank you, that will do," she cried—"that will

do.” And then the others fell upon her, who had come in a procession behind, when he set her down. He was so startled himself that he stood still, which was a thing he scarcely would have done had he known what he was about, and looked over their heads and gaped at her. He had put her down in a kind of easy-chair, and there she lay, her face changing from red to pale. Pale enough it was now, while Jack, made by his astonishment into a mere wondering, curious boy, stood with his mouth open and watched. He was not consciously thinking how pretty she was; he was wondering if she had hurt herself, which was a much more sensible thought; but still, of course, he perceived it, though he was not thinking of it. Curls are common enough, you know, but it is not often you see those soft rings, which are so much longer than they look; and the eyes so limpid and liquid all through, yet strained, and pathetic, and weary—a great deal too limpid, as any body who knew any thing about it might have known, at a glance. She made a little movement, and gave a cry, and grew red once more, this time with pain, and then as white as the snow. “Oh, my foot, my foot,” she cried, in a piteous voice. The sound of words brought Jack to himself. “I’ll wait outside, Mrs. Swayne,” he said, “and if the doctor’s wanted I’ll fetch him; let me know.” And then he went out and had a talk with the carrier, and waited. The carrier knew very little about his passenger. He reckoned the young un was delicate—it was along of this here brute swerving when he hadn’t ought to—but it couldn’t be no more than a sprain. Such was Hobson’s opinion. Jack waited, however, a little bewildered in his intellects, till Mrs. Swayne came out to say his services were not needed, and that it was a sprain, and could be mended by ordinary female remedies. Then young Mr. Brownlow got Hobson’s lantern, and searched for his skates and flung them over his shoulders. How queer they should have come here—how odd to think of that little face peeping out at Mrs. Swayne’s window—how droll that he should have been on the spot just at that moment; and yet it was neither queer nor droll to Jack, but confused his head somehow, and gave him a strange sort of half-commotion in the region of his heart. It is all very well to be sensible, but yet there is certainly something in it when an adventure like this happens, not to Keppel, or that sort of fellow, but actually to yourself.

CHAPTER VII. THE FATHER'S DAY AT THE OFFICE

While Sara and Jack were thus enjoying themselves, Mr. Brownlow went quietly in to his business—very quietly, in the dogcart, with his man driving, who was very steady, and looked as comfortable as his master. Mr. Brownlow was rather pleased not to have his son's company that morning; he had something to do which he could scarcely have done had Jack been there—business which was quite justifiable, and indeed right, but which it would have been a disagreeable matter to have explained to Jack. His mind was much more intent upon his own affairs than were those of either of his children on theirs. They had so much time in life to do all they meant to do, that they could afford to set out leisurely, and go forth upon the world with a sweet vacancy in their minds, ready for any thing that might turn up; but with Mr. Brownlow it was not so; his objects had grown to be very clear before him. He was not so old as to feel the pains or weariness or languor of age. He was almost as able to enjoy, and perhaps better able to do, in the way of his profession at least, than was young Jack. The difference was, that Mr. Brownlow lived only in the present; the future had gradually been cut off, as it were, before him. There was one certainty in his path somewhere a little in advance, but nothing else that could be counted upon, so that whatever he had to do, and anything he might have to enjoy, presented themselves with double clearness in the limited perspective. It was the only time in his life that he had felt the full meaning of the word "Now." The present was his possession, his day in which he lived and worked, with plenty of space behind to go back upon, but nothing reliable before. This gave not only a vividness and distinct character, but also a promptitude, to his actions, scarcely possible to a younger man. To-day was his, but not to-morrow; whereas to Jack and his contemporaries to-morrow was always the real day, never the moment in which they lived.

When Mr. Brownlow reached his office, the first thing he did was to send for a man who was a character in Masterton. He was called by various names, and it was not very certain which belonged to him, or indeed if any belonged to him. He was called Inspector Pollaky by many people who were in the habit of reading the papers; but of course he was not that distinguished man. He was called detective and thief-taker, and many other injurious epithets, and he was a man whom John Brownlow had had occasion to consult before now on matters of business. He was sent for that morning, and he had a long conversation with Mr. Brownlow in his private room. He was that sort of man that understands what people mean even when they do not speak very plainly, and naturally he took up at once the lawyer's object and pledged himself to pursue it. "You shall have some information on the subject probably this afternoon, sir," he said as he went away. After this visit Mr. Brownlow went about his own business with great steadiness and precision, and cast his eyes over his son's work, and was very particular with the clerks—more than ordinarily particular. It was his way, for he was an admirable business man at all times; but still he was unusually energetic that day. And they were all a little excited about Pollaky, as they called him, what commission he might have received, and which case he might be wanted about. At the time when he usually had his glass of sherry, Mr. Brownlow went out; he did not want his midday biscuit. He was a little out of sorts, and he thought a walk would do him good; but instead of going down to Barnes's Pool or across the river to the meadows, which had been lately flooded, and now were one sheet of ice, places which all the clerks supposed to be the most attractive spots for twenty miles round, he took the way of the town and went up into Masterton. He was going to pay a visit, and it was a most unusual one. He was going to see his wife's mother, old Mrs. Fennell, for whom he had no love. It was a thing he did not do for years together, but having been somehow in his own mind thoroughly worked up to it, he took the occasion of Jack's absence and went that day.

Mrs. Fennell was sitting in her drawing-room with only her second-best cap on, and with less than her second-best temper. If she had known he was coming she would have received him with a very different state, and she was mortified by her unpreparedness. Also her dinner was ready. As for Mr. Brownlow, he was not thinking of dinners. He had something on his mind, and it was his object to conceal that he had any thing on his mind—a matter less difficult to a man of his profession than to ordinary mortals. But what he said was that he was anxious chiefly to know if his mother-in-law was comfortable, and if she had every thing according to her desires.

Mrs. Fennell smiled at this inquiry. She smiled, but she rushed into a thousand grievances. Her lodgings were not to her mind, nor her position. Sara, the little puss, had carriages when she pleased, but her grandmamma never had any conveyance at her disposal to take the air in. And the people of the house were very inattentive, and Nancy—but here the old woman, who was clever, put a sudden stop to herself and drew up and said no more. She knew that to complain of Nancy would be of no particular advantage to her, for Mr. Brownlow was not fond of old Mrs. Thomson's maid, and was as likely as not to propose that she should be pensioned and sent away.

"I have told you before," said Mr. Brownlow, "that the brougham should be sent down for you when you want to go out if you will only let me know in time. What Sara has is nothing—or you can have a fly; but it is not fit weather for you to go out at your age."

"You are not so very young yourself, John Brownlow," said the old lady, with a little offense.

"No indeed—far from it—and that is what makes me think," he said abruptly; and then made a pause which she did not understand, referring evidently to something in his own mind. "Did you ever know any body of the name of Powys in the Isle of Man?" he resumed, with a certain nervous haste, and an effort which brought heat and color to his face.

"Powys!" said Mrs. Fennell. "I've heard the name; but I think it was Liverpool-ways and not in the Isle of Man. It's a Welsh name. No; I never knew any Powyses. Do you?"

"It was only some one I met," said Mr. Brownlow, "who had relations in the Isle of Man. Do you know of any body who married there and left? Knowing that you came from that quarter, somebody was asking me."

"I don't know of nobody but one," said the old woman—"one that would make a deal of difference if she were to come back now."

"You mean the woman Phœbe Thomson?" said Mr. Brownlow, sternly. "It is a very strange thing to me that her relatives should know nothing about that woman—not even whom she married or what was her name."

"She married a soldier," said Mrs. Fennell, "as I always heard. She wasn't my relation—it was poor Fennell that was her cousin. As for us, we come of very different folks; and I don't doubt as her name might have been found out," said the old woman, nodding her spiteful old head. Mr. Brownlow kept his temper, but it was by a kind of miracle. This was the sort of thing which he was always subject to on his rare visits to his mother-in-law. "It's for some folks' good that her name couldn't be found out," added the old woman, with another significant nod.

"It would have been for some folks' good if they had never heard of her," said Mr. Brownlow. "I wish a hundred times in a year that I had never administered or taken any notice of the old hag's bequest. Then it would have gone to the crown, I suppose, and all this trouble would have been spared."

"Other things would have had to be spared as well," said Mrs. Fennell, in her taunting voice.

"I should have known what was my own and what was not, and my children would have been in no false position," said Mr. Brownlow, with energy: "but now—" Here he stopped short, and his looks alarmed his companion, unsympathetic as she was. She loved to have this means of taunting and keeping down his pride, as she said; but her grandchildren's advantage was to a certain extent her own, and the thought of injury to them was alarming, and turned her thoughts into another channel. She took fright at the idea of Phœbe Thomson when she saw Mr. Brownlow's face. It was the first time it

had ever occurred to her as possible that he, a gentleman, a lawyer, and a clever man, might possibly have after all to give up to Phoebe Thomson should that poor and despised woman ever turn up.

“But she couldn’t take the law of you?” Mrs. Fennell said, with a gasp. “She wouldn’t know any thing about it. I may talk disagreeable by times, and I own that we never were fond of each other, you and I, John Brownlow; but I’m not the woman that would ever let on to her, to harm my poor Bessie’s children—not I—not if she was to come back this very day.”

It is useless to deny that Mr. Brownlow’s face at that moment looked as if he would have liked to strangle the old woman; but he only made an indignant movement, and looked at her with rage and indignation, which did her no harm. And, poor man, in his excitement perhaps it was not quite true what he himself said—

“If she should come back this very day, it would be your duty to send her to me instantly, that I might give up her mother’s trust into her hands,” he said. “You may be sure I will never permit poor Bessie’s children to enjoy what belongs to another.” And then he made a pause and his voice changed. “After all, I suppose you know just as little of her as I do. Did you ever see her?” he said.

“Well, no; I can’t say I ever did,” said Mrs. Fennell, cowed for the moment.

“Nor Nancy?” said Mr. Brownlow; “you two would be safe guides certainly. And you know of nobody else who left the Isle of Man and married—no relation of Fennell’s or of yours?”

“Nobody I know of,” said the old woman after a pause. “There might be dozens; but us and the Thomsons and all belonging to us, we’ve been out of the Isle of Man for nigh upon fifty years.”

After that Mr. Brownlow went away. He had got no information, no satisfaction, and yet he had made no discovery, which was a kind of negative comfort in its way; but it was clear that his mother-in-law, though she made so much use of Phoebe Thomson’s name, was utterly unable to give him any assistance either in discovering the real Phoebe Thomson or in exposing any false pretender. He went across the market place over the crisp snow in the sunshine with all his faculties, as it were, crisped and sharpened like the air he breathed. This was all the effect as yet which the frosts of age had upon him. He had all his powers unimpaired, and more entirely serviceable and under command than ever they were. He could trust himself not to betray himself, to keep counsel, and act with deliberation, and do nothing hastily. Thus, though his enemies were as yet unknown and unrecognized, and consequently all the more dangerous, he had confidence in his own army of defense, which was a great matter. He returned to his office, and to his business, and was as clearheaded and self-possessed, and capable of paying attention to the affairs of his clients, as if he had nothing particular in his own to occupy him. And the only help he got from circumstances was that which was given him by the frost, which had happily interfered this day of all others to detain Jack. Jack was not his father’s favorite child; he was not, as Sara was, the apple of John Brownlow’s eye; and yet the lawyer appreciated, and did justice to, as well as loved, his son, in a just and natural way. He felt that Jack’s quick eye would have found out that there was something more than usual going on. He knew that his visit to Mrs. Fennell and his unexplained conference with the man of mystery would not have been passed over by Jack without notice; and at the young man’s hasty, impetuous time of life, prudence was not to be expected or even desired. If Jack thought it possible that Phoebe Thomson was to be found within a hundred miles, no doubt he would make off without a moment’s thought and hunt her up, and put his own fortune, and, what was more, Sara’s, eagerly into her hands. This was what Jack would do, and Mr. Brownlow was glad in his heart that Jack would be sure to do it; but yet it might be a very different course which he himself, after much thought and consideration, might think it best to take.

He was long in his office that night, and worked very hard—indeed he would have been almost alone before he left but that one of the clerks had some extra work to do, and another had stayed to keep him company; so that two of them were still there when Inspector Pollaky, as they called him, came back. It was quite late, too late for the ice, or the young men would not have waited—half an hour later at least than the usual time at which Mr. Brownlow left the office. And he closed his door

carefully behind his mysterious visitor, and made sure that it was securely shut before he began to talk to him, which naturally was a thing that excited much wondering between the young men.

“Young Jack been a naughty boy?” said one to the other; then they listened, but heard nothing. “More likely some fellow going in for Miss Brownlow, and he wants to pick holes in him,” said the second. But when half an hour passed and every thing continued very undisturbed, they betook themselves to their usual talk. “I suppose it’s about the Worsley case,” they said, and straightway Inspector Pollaky lost interest in their eyes. So long as it was only a client’s business it did not matter. Not for such common place concerns would the young heroes of John Brownlow’s office interrupt the even tenor of their way.

“I suppose you have brought me some news,” said Mr. Brownlow; “come near the fire. Take a chair, it is bitterly cold. I scarcely expected you so soon as to-day.”

“Bless you, sir, it’s as easy as easy,” said the mysterious man—“disgusting easy. If there’s any body that I despise in this world, it’s folks that have nothing to conceal. They’re all on the surface, them folks are. You can take and read them clear off, through and through.”

“Well?” said Mr. Brownlow. He turned his face a little away from the light that he might not be spied too closely, though there was not in reality any self-betrayal in his face. His lips were a little white and more compressed than usual, that was all.

“Well, sir, for the first thing, it’s all quite true,” said the man. “There’s seven of a family—the mother comely-like still, but older nor might be expected. Poor, awful poor, but making the best of it—keeping their hearts up as far as I could see. The young fellow helping too, and striving his best. I shouldn’t say as they had much of a dinner to-day; but cheerful as cheerful, and as far as I could see—”

“Was this all you discovered?” said Mr. Brownlow, severely.

“I am coming to the rest, sir,” said the detective, “and you’ll say as I’ve forgotten nothing. The father, which is dead, was once in the Life Guards. He was one of them sprigs as is to be met with there—run away out of a good family. He came from London first as far as she knows; and then they were ordered to Windsor, and then they went to Canada; but I’ve got the thread, Mr. Brownlow—I’ve got the thread. This poor fellow of a soldier got letters regular for a long time from Wales, she says—post-mark was St. Asaphs. Often and often she said as she’d go with him, and see who it was as wrote to him so often. I’ve been thereabouts myself in the way of my business, and I know there’s Powyses as thick as blackberries—that’s point number one. Second point was, he always called himself a Welshman and kept St. David’s Day. If he’d lived longer he’d have been sent up for promotion, and gone out of the ranks.”

“And then?—but go on in your own way, I want to hear it all,” said Mr. Brownlow. He was getting more and more excited; and yet somehow it was a kind of pleasure to him to feel that his informant was wasting time upon utterly insignificant details. Surely if the detective suspected nothing, it must be that there was nothing to suspect.

“Yes, sir,” he said, “that’s about where it is; he was one of the Powyses; naturally the children is Powyses too. But he died afore he went up for promotion; and now they’re come a-seeking of their friends. It ain’t no credit to me to be employed on such an easy case. The only thing that would put a little credit in it would be, if you’d give me just a bit of a hint what was wanted. If their friends want ’em I’ll engage to put ’em on the scent. If their friends don’t want ’em—as wouldn’t be no wonder; for folks may have a kindness for a brother or a son as is wild, and yet they mightn’t be best pleased to hear of a widow a-coming with seven children—if they ain’t wanted a word will do it, and no questions asked.”

John Brownlow gave the man a sharp glance, and then he fell a-musing, as if he was considering whether to give him this hint or not. In reality, he was contemplating, with a mixture of impatience and vexation and content, the total misconception of his object which his emissary had taken up. He was exasperated by his stupidity, and yet he felt a kind of gratitude to him, and relief, as if a danger had been escaped.

“And what of the woman herself?” he said, in a tone which, in spite of him trembled a little.

“Oh, the woman,” said the detective, carelessly; “some bit of a girl as he married, and as was pretty, I don’t doubt, in her day. There’s nothing particular about her. She’s very fond of her children, and very free in her talk, like most women when you take ’em the right way. Bless you, sir, when I started her talking of her husband, it was all that I could do to get her to leave off. She don’t think she’s got any thing to hide. He was a gentleman, that’s clear. He wouldn’t have been near so frank about himself, I’ll be bound. She ain’t a lady exactly, but there’s something about her—and awful open in her way, with them front teeth—”

“Has *she* got front teeth?” said Mr. Brownlow, with some eagerness. He pitched upon it as the first personal attribute he had yet heard of, and then he added, with a little confusion, “like the boy—”

“Yes sir—exactly like the young fellow,” said his companion; “but there ain’t nothing about her to interest *us*. She told me as she once had friends as lived in Masterton; but she’s the sort of woman as don’t mind much about friends as long as her children is well off; and I judge she was of well-to-do folks, that was awful put out about her marriage. A man like that, sir, might be far above her, and have friends that was far above her, and yet it’s far from the kind of marriage as would satisfy well-to-do folks.”

“I thought she came from the Isle of Man,” said Mr. Brownlow, in what he meant for an indifferent way.

“As a child, sir—as a child,” said the detective, with easy carelessness. “Her friends left there when she was but a child, and then they went where there was a garrison, where she met with her good gentleman. She was never in Masterton herself. It was after she was married and gone, and, I rather think, cast off by all belonging to her, that they came to live here.”

Mr. Brownlow sat leaning over the fire, and a heavy moisture began to rise on his forehead. The speaker was so careless, and yet these calm details seemed to him so terrible. Could it be that he was making terrors for himself—that the man experienced in mystery was right in being so certain that there was no mystery here—or must he accept the awful circumstantial evidence of these simple particulars? Could there be more than one family which had left the Isle of Man so long ago, and gone to live where there was a garrison, and abandoned its silly daughter when she married her soldier? Mr. Brownlow was stupefied, and did not know what to think. He sat and listened while this man whom he had called to his assistance went over again all the facts that seemed to point out that the connection of the family with the Powyses of North Wales was the one thing either to be brought forward or got rid of. This was how he had understood his instructions, and he had carried them out so fully that his employer, fully occupied with the incidental information which seemed to prove all he feared, heard his voice run on without remarking it, and would have told him to stop the babble to which he was giving vent, had his thoughts been sufficiently at leisure to care for what he was saying. When he fully perceived this mistake, Mr. Brownlow looked upon it as “providential,” as people say. But, in the mean time, he was not conscious of any thing, except of a possibility still more clear and possible, and of a ridiculous misconception which still it was not his interest to clear up. He let his detective talk, and then he let him go, but half satisfied, and inclined to think that no confidence was reposed in him. And though it was so late, and the brougham was at the door, and the servants very tired of their unusual detention, Mr. Brownlow went back again to the fire, and bent over it, and stretched out his hands to the blaze, and again tried to think. He went over the same ideas a hundred times, and yet they did not seem to grow any clearer to him. He tried to ask himself what was his duty, but duty slunk away, as it were to the very recesses of his soul, and gave no impulse to his mind, nor so much as showed itself in the darkness. If this should turn out to be true, no doubt there were certain things which he ought to do; and yet, if all this could but be banished for awhile, and the year got over which would bring safety—Mr. Brownlow had never in all his life before done what he knew to be a dishonorable action. He was not openly contemplating such a thing now; only somehow his possessions seemed so much more his than any body else’s; it seemed as if he had so much better

right to the good things he had been enjoying for four-and-twenty years than any woman could have who had never possessed them—who knew nothing about them. And then he did not know that it was this woman. He said to himself that he had really no reason to think so. The young man had said nothing about old Mrs. Thomson. The detective had never even suspected any mystery in that quarter, though he was a man of mystery, and it was his business to suspect every thing. This was what he was thinking when he went back to the fire in his office, and stretched his hands over the blaze. Emotion of any kind somehow chills the physical frame; but when one of the detained clerks came to inform him of the patient brougham which waited outside, and which Sara, by reason of the cold, had sent for him, it was the opinion of the young man that Mr. Brownlow was beginning to age rapidly, and that he looked quite old that evening. But he did not look old; he looked, if any one had been there with eyes to see it, like a man for the first time in his life driven to bay. Some men come to that moment in their lives sooner, some later, some never at all. John Brownlow had been more than five-and-fifty years in the world, and yet he had never been driven to bay before. And he was so now; and except to stand out and resist, and keep his face to his enemies, he did not, in the suddenness of the occurrence, see as yet what he was to do.

In the mean time, however, he had to stoop to ordinary necessities and get into his carriage and be driven home, through the white gleaming country which shone under the moonlight, carrying with him a curious perception of how different it would have been had the house in High Street been home—had he had nothing more to do than to go up to the old drawing-room, his mother's drawing-room, and find Sara there; and eat his dinner where his father had eaten his, instead of this long drive to the great country-house, which was so much more costly and magnificent than any thing his forefathers knew; but then his father, what would he have thought of this complication? What would he have advised, had it been any client of his; nay, what, if it was a client, would Mr. Brownlow himself advise? These thoughts kept turning over in his mind half against his will as he lay back in the corner of the carriage and saw the ghostly trees glimmer past in their coating of snow. He was very late, and Sara was anxious about him; nay, even Jack was anxious, and had come down to the park gates to look out for the carriage, and also to ask how the little invalid was at Mrs. Swayne's. Jack, having this curiosity in his mind, did not pay much attention to his father's looks; but Sara, with a girl's quick perception, saw there was something unusual in his face; and with her usual rapidity she leaped to the conclusion that the bank must have broken or the railway gone wrong of which she had dreamed in the morning. Thus they all met at the table with a great deal on their minds; and this day, which I have recorded with painstaking minuteness, in order that there may be no future doubt as to its importance in the history, came to an end with outward placidity but much internal perturbation—at least came to an end as much as any day can be said to come to an end which rises upon an unsuspecting family big with undeveloped fate.

CHAPTER VIII. YOUNG POWYS

Mr. Brownlow took his new clerk into his employment next morning. It is true that this was done to fill up a legitimate vacancy, but yet it took every body in the office a little by surprise. The junior clerk had generally been a very junior, taken in rather by way of training than for any positive use. The last one, indeed, whom this new-comer had been taken to replace, was an overgrown boy in jackets, very different, indeed, from the tall, well-developed Canadian whose appearance filled all Mr. Brownlow's clerks with amazement. All sorts of conjectures about him filled the minds of these young gentlemen. They all spied some unknown motive underneath, and their guesses at it were ludicrously far from the real case. The conveyancing clerk suggested that the young fellow was somebody's son "that old Brownlow has ruined, you know, in the way of business." Other suppositions fixed on the fact that he was the son of a widow by whom, perhaps, the governor might have been bewitched, an idea which was speedily adopted as the favorite and most probable explanation, and caused unbounded amusement in the office. They made so merry over it that once or twice awkward consequences had nearly ensued; for the new clerk had quick ears, and was by no means destitute of intelligence, and decidedly more than a match, physically, for the most of his fellows. As for the circumstances of his engagement, they were on this wise.

At the hour which Mr. Brownlow had appointed to see him again, young Powys presented himself punctually in the outer office, where he was made to wait a little, and heard some "chaffing" about the governor's singular proceedings on the previous day and his interviews with Inspector Pollaky, which probably conveyed a certain amount of information to the young man. When he was ushered into Mr. Brownlow's room, there was, notwithstanding his frank and open countenance, a certain cloud on his brow. He stood stiffly before his future employer, and heard with only a half-satisfied look that the lawyer, having made inquiries, was disposed to take advantage of his services. To this the young backwoodsman assented in a stilted way, very different from his previous frankness; and when all was concluded, he still stood doubtful, with the look upon his face of having something to say.

"I don't know what more there is to settle, except the time when you enter upon your duties," said Mr. Brownlow, a little surprised. "You need not begin to-day. Mr. Wrinkell, the head-clerk, will give you all the necessary information about hours, and show you all you will have to do—Is there any thing more you would like to say?"

"Why, yes, sir," said the youth abruptly, with a mixture of irritation and compunction. "Perhaps what I say may look very ungrateful; but—why did you send a policeman to my mother? That is not the way to inquire about a man if you mean to trust him. I don't say you have any call to trust me—"

"A policeman!" said Mr. Brownlow, in consternation.

"Well, sir, the fellows there," cried the energetic young savage, pointing behind him, "call him Inspector. I don't mean to say you were to take me on my own word; any inquiries you liked to make we were ready to answer; but a policeman—and to my mother?"

Mr. Brownlow laughed, but yet this explosion gave him a certain uneasiness. "Compose yourself," he said, "the man is not a policeman, but he is a confidential agent, whom when I can't see about any thing myself—but I hope he did not say any thing or ask any thing that annoyed Mrs.—your mother," Mr. Brownlow added, hurriedly; and if the jocular youths in the office had seen something like a shade of additional color rise on his elderly cheek, their amusement and their suspicions would have been equally confirmed.

"Well, no," said young Powys, the compunction gaining ground; "I beg your pardon, sir; you are very kind. I am sure you must think me ungrateful—but—"

“Nonsense!” said Mr. Brownlow; “it is quite right you should stand up for your mother. The man is not a policeman—and I never—intended him—to trouble—your mother,” he added, with hesitation. “He went to make inquiry, and these sort of people take their own way; but he did not annoy her, I hope?”

“Oh, no!” said the youth, recovering his temper altogether. “She took it up as being some inquiry about my father, and she was a little excited, thinking perhaps that his friends—but never mind. I told her it was best we should depend only on ourselves, and I am sure I am right. Thank you; I shall have good news to tell her to-day.”

“Stop a little,” said Mr. Brownlow, feeling a reaction upon himself of the compunction which had passed over his young companion. “She thought it was something about your father? Is there any thing mysterious, then, about your father? I told you there was a Lady Powys who had lived here.”

“I don’t think there is any thing mysterious about him,” said the young man. “I scarcely remember him, though I am the eldest. He died quite young—and my poor mother has always thought that his friends—But I never encouraged her in that idea, for my part.”

“That his friends could do something for you?” said Mr. Brownlow.

“Yes, that is what she thought. I don’t think myself there is any foundation for it; and seeing they have never found us out all these years—five-and-twenty years—”

“Five-and-twenty years!” Mr. Brownlow repeated, with a start—not that the coincidence was any thing, but only that the mere sound of the word startled him, excited as he was.

“Yes, I am as old as that,” said young Powys, with a smile, and then he recollected himself. “I beg your pardon, sir; I am taking up your time, and I hope you don’t think I am ungrateful. Getting this situation so soon is every thing in the world to us.”

“I am glad to hear it,” said Mr. Brownlow: and yet he could not but ask himself whether his young visitor laid an emphasis upon *this* situation. What was *this* situation more than another? “But the salary is not very large, you know—do you mean to take your mother and her family on your shoulders with sixty pounds a-year!”

“It is *my* family,” said the young man, growing red. “I have no interest separate from theirs.” Then he paused for a moment, feeling affronted; but he could not bear malice. Next minute he relapsed into the frank and confidential tone that was natural to him. “There are only five of us after all,” he said—“five altogether, and the little sisters don’t cost much; and we have a little money—I think we shall do very well.”

“I hope so,” said Mr. Brownlow; and somehow, notwithstanding that he intended in his heart to do this young fellow a deadly injury, a certain affectionate interest in the lad sprung up within him. He was so honest and open, and had such an innocent confidence in the interest of others. None of his ordinary clerks were thus garrulous to Mr. Brownlow. It never would have occurred to them to confide in the “guy’nor.” He knew them as they came and went, and had a certain knowledge of their belongings—which it was that would have old Robinson’s money, and which that had given his father so much uneasiness; but that was very different from a young fellow that would look into your face and make a confidant of you as to his way of spending his sixty pounds a-year. John Brownlow had possessed a heart ever since he was aware of his own individuality. It was that that made him raise his eyes always, years and years ago, when Bessie Fennell went past his windows. Perhaps it would have been just as well had he not been thus moved; and yet sometimes, when he was all by himself and looked up suddenly and saw any passing figure, the remembrance of those moments when Bessie passed would be as clear upon him as if he were young again. Influenced by this same organ, which had no particular business in the breast of a man of his profession at his years, Mr. Brownlow looked up with eyes that were almost tender upon the young man whom he had just taken into his employment—notwithstanding that, to tell the truth, he meant badly by him, and in one particular at least was far from intending to be his friend.

“I hope so,” he said; “and if you are steady and suit us, there may be means found of increasing a little. I don’t pledge myself to any thing, you know; but we shall see how you get on; and if you have any papers or any thing that may give a clue to your father’s family,” he continued, as he took up his pen, “bring them to me some day and I’ll look over them. That’s all in the way of business to us. We might satisfy your mother after all, and perhaps be of some use to you.”

This he said with an almost paternal smile, dismissing his new clerk, who went away in an enthusiasm of gratitude and satisfaction. It is so pleasant to be very kindly used, especially to young people who know no better. It throws a glow of comfort through the internal consciousness. It is so very, very good of your patron, and, in a smaller way, it is good of you too, who are patronized. You are understood, you are appreciated, you are liked. This was the feeling young Powys had. To think that Mr. Brownlow would have been as good to any body would not have been half so satisfactory, and he went off with ringing hasty steps, which in themselves were beating a measure of exhilaration, to tell his mother, who, though ready on the spot to worship Mr. Brownlow, would naturally set this wonderful success down to the score of her boy’s excellencies. As for the lawyer himself, he took his pen in his hand and wrote a few words of the letter which lay unfinished before him while the young man was going out, as if anxious to make up for the time lost in this interview; but as soon as the door was closed John Brownlow laid down his pen and leaned back in his chair. What was it he had done?—taken in a viper to his bosom that would sting him? or received a generous, open, confiding youth, in order to blind and hoodwink and rob him? These were strong—nay, rude and harsh words, and he did not say them even to himself; but a kind of shadow of them rolled through his mind, and gave him a momentary panic. Was this what he was about to do? With a pretense of kindness, even generosity, to take this open-hearted young fellow into his employment, in order to keep him in the dark, and prevent him from finding out that the fortune was his upon which Brownlows and all its grandeur was founded? Was this what he was doing? It seemed to John Brownlow for the moment as if the air of the room was suffocating, or rather as if there was no air at all to breathe, and he plucked at his cravat in the horror of the sensation. But then he came to himself. Perhaps, on the other hand, just as likely, he was taking into his house a secret enemy, who, once posted there, would search and find out every thing. Quite likely, very likely; for what did he mean by the emphasis with which he said *this* situation, and all that about his father, which was throwing dust into Mr. Brownlow’s cautious eyes? Perhaps his mind was a little biased by his profession—perhaps he was moved by something of the curious legal uncertainty which teaches a man to plead “never indebted” in the same breath with “already paid;” for amid the hurry and tumult of these thoughts came another which was of a more comforting tendency. After all, he had no evidence that the boy was that woman’s son. No evidence whatever—not a shadow. And it was not his duty to go out and hunt for her or her son over all the world. Nobody could expect it of him. He had done it once, but to do it over again would be simply absurd. Let them come and make their claim.

Thus the matter was decided, and there could be no doubt that it was with a thrill of very strange and mingled interest that Mr. Brownlow watched young Powys enter upon his duties. He had thought this would be a trouble to him—a constant shadow upon him—a kind of silent threat of misery to come; but the fact was that it did not turn out so. The young fellow was so frank and honest, so far at least as physiognomy went—his very step was so cheerful and active, and rang so lightly on the stones—he was so ready to do any thing, so quick and cordial and workman-like about his work—came in with such a bright face, spoke with such a pleasant respectful confidence, as knowing that some special link existed between his employer and himself; Mr. Brownlow grew absolutely attached to the new clerk, for whom he had so little use, to whom he was so kind and fatherly, and against whom—good heavens! was it possible? he was harboring such dark designs.

As for young Jack, when he came back to the office after a few days on the ice, there being nothing very important in the way of business going on just then, the sight of this new figure took him very much by surprise. He was not very friendly with his father’s clerks on the whole—perhaps

because they were too near himself to be looked upon with charitable eyes; too near, and yet as far off, he thought to himself, as if he had been a duke. Not that Jack had those attributes which distinguished the great family of snobs. When he was among educated men he was as unassuming as it is in the nature of a young man to be, and never dreamed of asking what their pedigree was, or what their balance at their banker's. But the clerks were different—they were natural enemies—fellows that might set themselves up for being as good as he, and yet were not as good as he, however you chose to look at the question. In short, they were cads. This was the all-expressive word in which Jack developed his sentiments. Any addition to the cads was irksome to him; and then he, the young prince, knew nothing about it, which was more irksome still.

"Who is that tall fellow?" he said to Mr. Wrinkell, who was his father's vizier. "What is he doing here? You don't mean to say he's *en permanence*? Who is he, and what is he doing there?"

"That's Mr. Powys, Mr. John," said Mr. Wrinkell, calmly, and with a complacent little nod. The vizier rather liked to snub the heir-apparent when he could, and somehow the Canadian had crept into his good graces too.

"By Jove! and who the deuce is Mr. Powys?" said Jack, with unbecoming impatience, almost loud enough to reach the stranger's ear.

"Hush," said Mr. Wrinkell, "he has come in young Jones's place, who left at Michaelmas, you know. I should say he was a decided addition; steady, very steady—punctual in the morning—clever at his work—always up to his hours—"

"Oh, I see, a piece of perfection," said Jack, with, it must be confessed, a slight sneer. "But I don't see that he was wanted. Brown was quite able for all the work. I should like to know where you picked that fellow up. It's very odd that something always happens when I am absent for a single day."

"The frost has lasted for ten days," said Mr. Wrinkell, with serious but mild reproof—"not that I think there is any thing in that. We are only young once in this life; and there is nothing particular doing. I am very glad you took advantage of it, Mr. John."

Now it was one of Jack's weak points that he hated being called Mr. John, and could not bear to be approved of—two peculiarities of which Mr. Wrinkell was very thoroughly aware. But the vizier had many privileges. He was serious and substantial, and not a man who could be called a cad, as Jack called his own contemporaries in the office. Howsoever tiresome or aggravating he might be, he had to be borne with; and he knew his advantages, and was not always generous in the use he made of them. When the young man went off into his own little private room, Mr. Wrinkell was tempted to give a little inward chuckle. He was a dissenter, and he rather liked to put the young autocrat down. "He has too much of his own way—too much of his own way," he said to himself, and went against Jack on principle, and for his good, which is a kind of conduct not always appreciated by those for whose good it is kept up.

And from that moment a kind of opposition, not to say enmity, crept up between Jack and the new clerk—a sort of feeling that they were rather too like each other, and were not practicable in the same hemisphere. Jack tried, but found it did not answer, to call the new-comer a cad. He did not, like the others, follow Jack's own ways at a woful distance, and copy those things for which Jack rather despised himself, as all cads have a way of doing; but had his own way, and was himself, Powys, not the least like the Browns and Robinsons. The very first evening, as they were driving home together, Jack, having spent the day in a close examination of the new-comer, thought it as well to let his father know his opinion on the subject, which he did as they flew along in their dogcart, with the wicked mare which Jack could scarcely hold in, and the sharp wind whizzing past their ears, that were icy cold with speed.

"I see you have got a new fellow in the office," said Jack. "I hope it's not my idleness that made it necessary. I should have gone back on Monday; but I thought you said—"

"I am glad you didn't come," said Mr. Brownlow, quietly. "I should have told you had there been any occasion. No, it was not for that. You know he came in young Jones's place."

“He’s not very much like young Jones,” said Jack—“as old as I am, I should think. How she pulls, to be sure! One would think, to see her go, she hadn’t been out for a week.”

“Older than you are,” said Mr. Brownlow—“five-and-twenty;” and he gave an unconscious sigh—for it was dark, and the wind was sharp, and the mare very fresh; and under such circumstances a man may relieve his mind, at least to the extent of a sigh, without being obliged to render a reason. So, at least, Mr. Brownlow thought.

But Jack heard it, somehow, notwithstanding the ring of the mare’s hoofs and the rush of the wind, and was confounded—as much confounded as he durst venture on being with such a slippery animal to deal with.

“Beg your pardon, sir,” said the groom, “keep her steady, sir; this here is the gate she’s always a-shying at.”

“Oh, confound her!” said Jack—or perhaps it was “confound you”—which would have been more natural; but the little waltz performed by Mrs. Bess at that moment, and the sharp crack of the whip, and the wind that whistled through all, made his adjuration less distinct than it might have been. When, however, the dangerous gate was past, and they were going on again with great speed and moderate steadiness, he resumed—

“I thought you did not mean to have another in young Jones’s place. I should have said Brown could do all the work. When these fellows have too little to do they get into all sorts of mischief.”

“Most fellows do,” said Mr. Brownlow, calmly. “I may as well tell you, Jack, that I wanted young Powys—I know his people; that is to say,” he added hastily, “I don’t know his people. Don’t take it into your head that I do—but still I’ve heard something about them—in a kind of a way; and it’s my special desire to have him there.”

“I said nothing against it, sir,” said Jack, displeased. “You are the head, to do whatever you like. I only asked you know.”

“Yes, I know you only asked,” said Mr. Brownlow, with quiet decision. “That is my business; but I’d rather you were civil to him, if it is the same to you.”

“By Jove, I believe she’ll break our necks some day,” said Jack, in his irritation, though the mare was doing nothing particular. “Going as quiet as a lamb,” the groom said afterward in amazement, “when he let out at her enough to make a saint contrary.” And “contrary” she was up to the very door of the house, which perhaps, under the circumstances, was just as well.

CHAPTER IX. NEW NEIGHBORS

Perhaps one of the reasons why Jack was out of temper at this particular moment was that Mrs. Swayne had been impertinent to him. Not that he cared in the least for Mrs. Swayne; but naturally he took a little interest in the—child—he supposed she was only a child—a little light thing that felt like a feather when he carried her in out of the snow. He *had* carried her in, and he “took an interest” in her; and why he should be met with impertinence when he asked how the little creature was, was more than Jack could understand. The very morning of the day on which he saw young Powys first, he had been answered by Mrs. Swayne standing in front of her door, and pulling it close behind her, as if she was afraid of thieves or something. “She’s a-going on as nicely as could be, and there ain’t no cause for anxiety, sir,” Mrs. Swayne said, which was not a very impertinent speech after all.

“Oh, I did not suppose there was,” said Jack. “It was only a sprain, I suppose; but she looked such a delicate little thing. That old woman with her was her mother, eh? What did she mean traveling with a fragile little creature like that in the carrier’s cart?”

“I don’t know about no old woman,” said Mrs. Swayne; “the good lady as has my front parlor is the only female as is here, and they’ve come for quiet, Mr. John, not meaning no offense; and when you’re a bit nervish, as I knows myself by experience, it goes to your heart every time as there comes a knock at the door.”

“You can’t have many knocks at the door here,” said Jack; “as for me, I only wanted to know how the little thing was.”

“Miss is a-doing nicely, sir,” Mrs. Swayne answered, with solemnity; and this was what Jack considered a very impertinent reception of his kind inquiries. He was amused by it, and yet it put him a little out of temper too. “As if I could possibly mean the child any harm,” he said to himself, with a laugh; rather, indeed, insisting on the point that she was a child in all his thoughts on the subject; and then, as has been seen, the sudden introduction of young Powys and Mr. Brownlow’s calm adoption of the sentiment that it was *his* business to decide who was to be in the office, came a little hard upon Jack, who, after all, notwithstanding his philosophical indifference as to his sister’s heiress-ship, liked to be consulted about matters of business, and did not approve of being put back into a secondary place.

Thus it was with a sense of having done her duty by her new lodgers, that Mrs. Swayne paid her periodical visit in the afternoon to the inmates of the parlor, where the object of Jack Brownlow’s inquiries lay very much covered up on the little horse-hair sofa. She was still suffering from her sprain, and was lying asleep on the narrow couch, wrapped in all the shawls her mother possessed, and with her own pretty red cloak thrown over the heap. It was rather a grim little apartment, with dark-green painted walls, and coarse white curtains drawn over the single window. But the inmates probably were used to no better, and certainly were quite content with their quarters. The girl lay asleep with a flush upon her cheeks, which the long eyelashes seemed to overshadow, and her soft rings of dark hair pushed back in pretty disorder off her soft, full, childlike forehead. She was sleeping that grateful sleep of convalescence, in which life itself seems to come back—a sleep deep and sound and dreamless, and quite undisturbed by the little murmur of voices which went on over the fire. Her mother was a tall, meagre woman, older than the mother of such a girl ought to have been. Save that subtle, indefinable resemblance which is called family likeness, the two did not resemble each other. The elder woman now sitting in the horsehair easy-chair over the fire, was very tall, with long features, and gray cheeks which had never known any roses. She had keen black passionate eyes, looking as young and full of life as if she had been sixteen instead of nearly sixty; and her hair was still as black as it had been in her youth. But somehow the dead darkness of the hair made the gray

face underneath look older than if it had been softened by the silvery tones of white that belong to the aged. She was dressed as poor women, who have ceased to care about their appearance, and have no natural instinct that way, so often dress, in every thing most suited to increase her personal deficiencies. She had a little black lace cap over her black hair, and a black gown with a rim of grayish white round the neck, badly made, and which took away any shape that might ever have been in her tall figure. Her hands were hard, and red, and thin, with no sort of softening between them and the harsh black sleeve which clasped her wrists. She was not a lady, that was evident; and yet you would not have said she was a common woman after you had looked into her eyes.

It was very cold, though the thaw had set in, and the snow was gone—raw and damp with a penetrating chill, which is as bad as frost—or worse, some people think. And the new-comer sat over the fire, leaning forward in the high-backed horse-hair chair, and spreading out her hands to the warmth. She had given Mrs. Swayne a general invitation to come in for a chat in the afternoon, not knowing as yet how serious a business that was; and was now making the best of it, interposing a few words now and then, and yet not altogether without comfort in the companionship, the very hum of human speech having something consolatory in it.

“If it’s been a fever, that’s a thing as will mend,” said Mrs. Swayne, “and well over too; and a thing as you don’t have more nor once. When it’s *here*, and there’s decline in the family—” she added, putting her hand significantly to her breast.

“There’s no decline in my family,” said the lodger, quickly. “It was downright sickness always. No, she’s quite strong in her chest. I’ve always said it was a great blessing that they were all strong in their chests.”

“And yet you have but this one left,” said Mrs. Swayne. “Dear, dear!—when it’s decline, it comes kind of natural, and you get used to it like. An aunt o’ mine had nine, all took one after the other, and she got that used to it, she’d tell you how it would be as soon as e’er a one o’ them began to droop; but when it’s them sort of masterful sicknesses as you can’t do nothing for—Deary me! all strong in their chests, and yet you have had so many and but this one left.”

“Ay,” said the mother, wringing her thin hands with a momentary yet habitual action, “it’s hard when you’ve reared them so far, but you said it was good air here?”

“Beautiful air, that’s what it is,” said Mrs. Swayne, enthusiastically; “and when she gets a bit stronger, and the weather gets milder, and he mends of his rheumatics, Swayne shall drive her out in his spring-cart. It’s a fine way of seeing the country—a deal finer, *I* think, than the gentry in their carriages with a coachman on his box perched up afore them. I ain’t one as holds by much doctoring. Doctors and parsons, they’re all alike; and I don’t care if I never saw one o’ them more.”

“Isn’t there a nice clergyman?” said the lodger—“it’s a nice church, for we saw it passing in the cart, and the child took a fancy to it. In the country like this, it’s nice to have a nice clergyman—that’s to say, if you’re church folks.”

“There was nothing but church folks heard tell of where I came from,” said Mrs. Swayne, with a little heat. “Them as says I wasn’t born and bred and confirmed in the church don’t know what they’re talking of; but since we come here, you know, along of Swayne being a Dissenter, and the rector a man as has no sympathy, I’ve give up. It’s the same with the doctors. There ain’t one as I haven’t tried, exceptin’ the homepathic; and I was turning it over in my mind as soon as Swayne had another bad turn to send for him.”

“I hope we shan’t want any more doctors,” said the mother, once more softly wringing her hands. “But for Pamela’s sake—”

“Is that her name?” said Mrs. Swayne; “I never knew one of that name afore; but folks is all for new-fashioned names nowadays. The Pollys and Betsys as used to be in my young days, I never hear tell of them now; but the girls ain’t no nicer nor no better behaved as I can see. It’s along o’ the story-books and things. There’s Miss Sairah as is always a-lending books—”

“Is Miss Sairah the young lady in the great house?” asked the stranger, looking up.

Mrs. Swayne assented with a little reluctance. "Oh! yes, sure enough; but they ain't the real old Squires. Not as the old Squires was much to brag of; they was awful poor, and there never was nothing to be made out of them, neither by honest trade-folks nor cottagers, nor nobody; but him as has it now is nothing but a lawyer out of Masterton. He's made it all, I shouldn't wonder, by cheating poor folks out of their own; but there he is as grand as a prince, and Miss Sairah dressed up like a little peacock, and her carriage and her riding-horse, and her school, as if she was real old gentry. It was Mr. John as carried your girl indoors that time when she fell; and a rare troublesome one he can be when he gets it in his head, a-calling at my house, and knocking at the knocker when, for any thing he could tell, Swayne might ha' been in one of his bad turns, or your little maid a-snatching a bit of sleep."

"But why does he come?" said the lodger, once more looking up; "is it to ask after Mr. Swayne?"

Mr. Swayne's spouse gave a great many shakes of her head over this question. "To tell you the truth," she said, "there's a deal of folks thinks if Swayne hadn't a good wife behind him as kept all straight, his bad turns would come very different. That's all as a woman gets for slaving and toiling and understanding the business as well as e'er a man. No; it was not for my husband. I haven't got nothing to say against Mr. John. He's not one of the sort as leads poor girls astray and breaks their hearts; but I wouldn't have him about here, not too often, if I was you. He was a-asking after your girl."

"Pamela?" said the mother, with surprise and almost amusement in her tone, and she looked back to the sofa where her daughter was lying with a flush too pink and roselike for health upon her cheek. "Poor little thing; it is too early for that—she is only a child."

"I don't put no faith in them being only children," said Mrs. Swayne. "It comes terrible soon, does that sort of thing; and a gentleman has nice ways with him. When she's once had one of that sort a-running after her, a girl don't take to an honest man as talks plain and straightforward. That's my opinion; and, thank Providence, I've been in the way of temptation myself, and I know what it all means."

Mrs. Swayne's lodger did not seem at all delighted by these commentaries. A little flush of pride or pain came over her colorless cheek; and she kept glancing back at the sofa on which her daughter lay. "My Pamela is a little lady, if ever there was a lady," she said, in a nervous undertone; but it was evidently a question she did not mean to discuss with her landlady; and thus the conversation came to a pause.

Mrs. Swayne, however, was not easily subdued; and curiosity urged her even beyond her wont. "I think you said as you had friends here?" she said, making a new start.

"No, no friends. We're alone in the world, she and I," said the woman, hastily. "We've been long away, and every body is dead that ever belonged to us. She hasn't a soul but me, poor dear, and I'm old. It's dreadful to be old and have a young child. If I was to die—but we're not badly off," she continued, with a faint smile in answer to an alarmed glance all around the room from Mrs. Swayne, "and I'm saving up every penny for her. If I could only see her as well and rosy as she used to be!"

"That will come in time," said the landlady. "Don't you be afeard. It's beautiful air; and what with fresh milk and new-laid eggs, she'll come round as fast as the grass grows. You'll see she will—they always does here. Miss Sairah herself was as puny a bit of a child as ever you set eyes on, and she's a fine tall lass with a color like a rose—I will say that for her—now."

"And I think you said she was about my child's age," said the mother, with a certain wistful glance out of the window. "Perhaps she and my Pamela—But of course a young lady like that has plenty of friends. Pamela will never be tall—she's done growing. She takes after her father's side, you see," the poor woman added, with a sigh, looking round once more to the sofa where her child lay.

"And it ain't long, perhaps, since you lost your good gentleman?" said Mrs. Swayne, curiosity giving a certain brevity to her speech.

"He was in the army," said the lodger, passing by the direct question, "and it's a wandering sort of life. Now I've come back, all are gone that ever belonged to me, or so much as knew me. It feels dreary like. I don't mind for myself, if I could but find some kind friends for my child."

“Don’t you fret,” said Mrs. Swayne, rising. “She’ll find friends, no fear; and its ridiklus to hear you talk like an old woman, and not a gray hair on your head—But I hear Swayne a-grumbling, Mrs. Preston. He’s no better nor an old washerwoman, that man isn’t, for his tea.”

When the conversation ended thus, the lodger rose, partly in civility, and stood before the fire, looking into the dark little mirror over the mantle-shelf when her visitor was gone. It was not vanity that moved her to look at herself. “Threescore and ten!” she was saying softly—“threescore and ten! She’d be near thirty by then, and able to take care of herself.” It was a sombre thought enough, but it was all the comfort she could take. “The child” all this time had to all appearance lain fast asleep under her wraps, with the red cloak laid over her, a childlike, fragile creature. She began to stir at this moment, and her mother’s face cleared as if by magic. She went up to the little hard couch, and murmured her inquiries over it with that indescribable voice which belongs only to doves, and mothers croodling over their sick children. Pamela considered it the most ordinary utterance in the world, and never found out that it was totally unlike the usually almost harsh tones of the same voice when addressing other people. The girl threw off her coverings with a little impatience, and came with tottering steps to the big black easy-chair. The limpid eyes which had struck Jack Brownlow when they gazed wistfully out of the carrier’s cart, were almost too bright, as her color was almost too warm, for the moment; but it was the flush of weakness and sleep, not of fever. She too, like her mother, wore rusty black; but neither that poor and melancholy garb, nor any other disadvantageous circumstance, could impair the sweetness of the young tender face. It was lovely with the sweetness of spring as are the primroses and anemones; dew, and fragrance, and growth, and all the possibilities of expansion, were in her lovely looks. You could not have told what she might not grow to. Seeing her, it was possible to understand the eagerness with which the poor old mother, verging on threescore, counted her chances of a dozen years longer in this life. These dozen years might make all the difference to Pamela; and Pamela was all that she had in the world.

“You have had a long sleep, my darling. I am sure you feel better,” she said.

“I feel quite well, mamma,” said the girl; and she sat down and held out her hands to the fire. Then the mother began to talk, and give an account of the conversation she had been holding. She altered it a little, it must be acknowledged. She omitted all Mrs. Swayne’s anxieties about Jack Brownlow, and put various orthodox sentiments into her mouth instead. When she had gone on so for some ten minutes, Pamela, who had been making evident efforts to restrain herself, suddenly opened her red lips with a burst of soft ringing laughter, so that the mother stopped confused.

“I am afraid it was very naughty,” said the girl; “but I woke up, and I did not want to disturb you, and I could not help listening. Oh, mamma, how clever you are to make up conversation like that. When you know Mrs. Swayne was talking of Mr. John, and was such fun! Why shouldn’t I hear about Mr. John? Because one has been ill, is one never to have any more fun? You don’t expect me to die now?”

“God forbid!” said the mother. “But what do you know about Mr. John? Mrs. Swayne said nothing—”

“She said he came a-knocking at the knocker,” Pamela said, with a merry little conscious laugh; “and you asked if he came to ask for Mr. Swayne. I thought I should have laughed out and betrayed myself then.”

“But, my dear,” said Mrs. Preston, steadily, “why shouldn’t he have come to ask for Mr. Swayne?”

“Yes, why indeed?” said Pamela, with another merry peal of laughter, which made her mother’s face relax, though she was not herself very sensible wherein the joke lay.

“Well,” she said, “if he did, or if he didn’t, it does not matter very much to us. We know nothing about Mr. John.”

“Oh, but I do,” said Pamela; “it was he that was standing by that lady’s chair on the ice—I saw him as plain as possible. I knew him in a minute when he carried me in. Wasn’t it nice and kind of

him? and he knew—us;—I am sure he did. Why shouldn't he come and ask for me? I think it is the most natural thing in the world.”

“How could he know us?” said Mrs. Preston, wondering. “My darling, now you are growing older you must not think so much about fun. I don't say it is wrong, but—For you see, you have grown quite a woman now. It would be nice if you could know Miss Sara,” she added, melting; “but she is a little great lady, and you are but a poor little girl—”

“I must know Miss Sara,” cried Pamela. “We shall see her every day. I want to know them both. We shall be always seeing them any time they go out. I wonder if she is pretty. The lady was, that was in the chair.”

“How can you see every thing like that, Pamela?” said her mother, with mild reproof. “I don't remember any lady in a chair.”

“But *I've* got a pair of eyes,” said Pamela, with a laugh. She was not thinking that they were pretty eyes, but she certainly had a pleasant feeling that they were clear and sharp, and saw every thing and every body within her range of vision. “I like traveling in that cart,” she said, after a moment, “if it were not so cold. It would be pleasant in summer to go jogging along and see every thing—but then, to be sure, in summer there's no ice, and no nice bright fires shining through the windows. But mamma, please,” the little thing added, with a doubtful look that might be saucy or sad as occasion required, “why are you so dreadfully anxious to find me kind friends?”

This was said with a little laugh, though her eyes were not laughing; but when she saw the serious look her mother cast upon her, she got up hastily and threw herself down, weak as she was, at the old woman's knee.

“Don't you think if we were to live both as long as we could and then to die both together!” cried the changeable girl, with a sudden sob. “Oh, mamma, why didn't you have me when you were young, when you had Florry, that we might have lived ever so long, ever so long together? Would it be wrong for me to die when you die? why should it be wrong? God would know what we meant by it. He would know it wasn't for wickedness. And it would make your mind easy whatever should happen,” cried the child, burying her pretty face in her mother's lap. Thus the two desolate creatures clung together, the old woman yearning to live, the young creature quite ready at any word of command that might reach her to give up her short existence. They had nobody in the world belonging to them that they knew of, and in the course of nature their companionship could only be so short, so short! And it was not as if God saw only the outside like men. He would know what they meant by it; that was what poor little Pamela thought.

But she was as lively as a little bird half an hour after, being a creature of a variable mind. Not a magnificent little princess, self-possessed and reflective, like Sara over the way—a little soul full of fancies, and passions, and sudden impulses of every kind—a kitten for fun, a heroine for any thing tragic, such as she, not feared, but hoped, might perhaps fall in her way. And the mother, who understood the passion, did not know very much about either the fun or the fancy, and was puzzled by times, and even vexed when she had no need to be vexed. Mrs. Preston was greatly perplexed even that night after this embrace and the wild suggestion that accompanied it to see how swiftly and fully Pamela's light heart came back to her. She could not comprehend such a proposal of despair; but how the despair should suddenly flit off and leave the sweetest fair skies of delight and hope below was more than the poor woman could understand. However, the fact was that hope and despair were quite capable of living next door in Pamela's fully occupied mind, and that despair itself was but another kind of hope when it got into those soft quarters where the air was full of the chirping of birds and the odors of the spring. She could not sing, to call singing, but yet she went on singing all the evening long over her bits of work, and planned drives in Mr. Swayne's spring-cart, and even in the carrier's wagon, much more joyfully than Sara ever anticipated the use of her grays. Yet she had but one life, one worn existence, old and shattered by much suffering, between her and utter solitude

and destitution. No wonder her mother looked at her with silent wonder, she who could never get this woful possibility out of her mind.

CHAPTER X. AT THE GATE

It was not to be expected that Sara could be long unconscious of her humble neighbors. She, too, as well as Jack, had seen them in the carrier's cart; and though Jack had kept his little adventure to himself, Sara had no reason to omit due notice of her encounter. It was quite a new sensation to her when she saw for the first time the little face with its dewy eyes peeping out at Mrs. Swayne's window. And the ticket which offended Sara's sight had been promptly taken down, not by Mrs. Swayne, but by her lodgers themselves. Sara's impulse was to go over immediately and thank them for this good office; but, on second thoughts, she decided to wait another opportunity. They might not be "nice,"—or they might be ladies, and require more ceremonious treatment, notwithstanding the carrier's wagon. The face that peeped from Mrs. Swayne's window might have belonged to a little princess in disguise for any thing that could be said to the contrary. And Sara was still of the age which believes in disguised princesses, at least in theory. She talked about them, however, continually; putting Jack to many hypocritical devices to conceal that he too had seen the little stranger. Though why he should keep that fact secret, nobody, not even himself could tell. And he had confided it to young Keppel, though he did not think of telling the story at home. "I don't know if you would call her pretty, but her eyes are like two stars," was what Jack said; and he was more angry at Keppel's jocular response than was at all needful. But, as for Sara, she was far more eloquent. "She is not pretty," that authority said; "all girls are pretty, I suppose, in a kind of a way—I and Fanny Hardcastle and every body—I despise that. She's *lovely*; one would like to take and kiss her. I don't in the least care whether I am speaking grammar or not; but I want to know her, and I've made up my mind I'll have her here."

"Softly, Sara," said Mr. Brownlow, with that indulgent look which Sara alone called into his eyes.

"Oh yes, papa, as softly as you please; but I shall never be like her if I were to live a hundred years. I'd like to cut all my hair off, and wear it like that; but what's the use, with this odious light hair?"

"I thought it was golden and Titianesque, and all sorts of fine things," said Jack, "besides being fashionable. I've heard Keppel say—"

"Don't, please; Mr. Keppel is so stupid," and she took in her hand a certain curl she had, which was her favorite curl in a general way, and looked at it with something like disgust.

"It isn't even the right color for the fashion," she said, contemptuously. This was at breakfast, before the gentlemen went to business, which was a favorite hour with all of them, when their minds were free, and the day had not as yet produced its vexations. Mr. Brownlow, for his part, had quite got over any symptoms of discomposure that his children might have perceived on his face. Every thing was going on well again. Young Powys was safely settled in the office, and his employer already had got used to him, and nothing seemed to be coming of it: and every day was helping on the year, the one remaining year of uncertainty. He was very anxious, but still he was not such a novice in life but that he could keep his anxiety to himself.

"Don't forget to make every thing comfortable for your visitors," was what he said, as he drove away; and the fact was, that even Mr. Brownlow cast a glance over at Mrs. Swayne's windows; and that Jack brought the mare almost on her haunches, by way of showing his skill, as she dashed out at the gates. And poor little Pamela had limped to the window, for she had not much to amuse her, and the passing of Mr. Brownlow's dog-cart was an event. "Is that the girl?" said Mr. Brownlow; "why she is like your sister, Jack."

"Like Sara!" Jack gasped in dismay. He was so amazed that he could say nothing more for a full minute. "I suppose you think every thing that's pretty is like Sara," he said, when he had recovered his breath.

“Well, perhaps,” said the father; “but there’s something more there—and yet she’s not like Sara either for the matter of that.”

“Not the least bit in the world,” said Jack, decisively; at which Mr. Brownlow only smiled, making no other reply.

Sara, of course, knew nothing of this; and notwithstanding her admiration for the stranger, it is doubtful whether she would have been flattered by the suggestion. She made great preparations for her visitors. There was to be a dinner-party, and old Lady Motherwell and her son Sir Charles were to stay for a day or two—partly because it was too far for the old lady to drive back that night, and partly, perhaps, for other reasons, which nobody was supposed to know any thing about. In her own mind, however, Sara was not quite unaware of these other reasons. The girl was so unfortunate as to be aware that she was considered a good match in the county, and she knew very well what Sir Charles meant when he came and mounted guard over her at county gatherings. It was commonly reported of Sir Charles Motherwell that he was not bright—but he was utterly opaque to Sara when he came and stood over her and shut out other people who might have been amusing; though, to tell the truth, Miss Brownlow was in a cynical state of mind altogether about amusing people. She thought they were an extinct species, like mastodons, and the other sort of brutes that lived before the creation. Fanny Hardcastle began to unfold her dress as soon as breakfast was over, and to look out her gloves and her shoes and all her little ornaments, and was in a flutter all day about the dinner at Brownlows. But as for Sara, she was not excited. By way of making up to herself for what she might have to suffer in the evening, she went out for a ride, a pleasure of which she had been debarred for some time by the frost; and little Pamela came again to the window and watched—oh, with what delight and envy and admiration!—the slender-limbed chestnut and the pretty creature he carried, as they came down all the length of the avenue.

“Oh, mamma, make haste—make haste! it is a prettier sight than Mr. John,” cried the little girl at Mrs. Swayne’s window, her cheeks glowing and her eyes shining; “what fun it is to live here and see them all passing!” Probably she enjoyed it quite as much as Sara did. When she had watched the pretty rider as far as that was possible, she sat down by the window to wait till she came back—wondering where she was going—following her as she went cantering along the sunny long stretches of road which Pamela remembered watching from the carrier’s cart. What a strange kind of celestial life it must be to be always riding down stately avenues and playing golden-stringed harps, and walking about in glorious silken robes that swept the ground! Pamela laughed to herself at those splendid images—she enjoyed it more than Sara did, though Sara found all these good things wonderfully pleasant too.

“What are you laughing at?” said her mother, who was working at a table at the other end of the room.

“What fun it is to live here!” repeated Pamela. “It is as good as a play; don’t you like to see them all riding out and in, and the horses prancing, and the shadows coming down the avenue?—it was the greatest luck in the world to come here.”

“Put up your foot, my dear,” said her mother, “and don’t catch cold at that window. I’ve seen somebody very like that young lady, but I can’t remember where.”

“That was Miss Sara, I suppose,” said Pamela, with a little awe; and she put up her weak foot, and kept her post till the chestnut and his mistress came back, when the excitement was renewed; and Mrs. Preston herself took another look, and wondered where she had seen some one like that. Thus the life of Brownlows became entangled, as it were, in that of the humble dwellers at their gate, before either were aware.

Lady Motherwell arrived in a very solid family coach, just as the winter twilight set in; and undoubtedly, on this occasion at least, it was Pamela who had the best of it. Sara awaited the old lady in the drawing-room, ready to administer to her the indispensable cup of tea; and Sir Charles followed his mother, a tall fellow with a mustache which looked like a respirator. As for Lady Motherwell, she

was not a pleasant visitor to Sara; but that was for reasons which I have already stated. In herself she was not a disagreeable old woman. She had even a certain *esprit du corps* which made it evident to her that thus to come in force upon a girl who was alone, was a violent proceeding, and apt to drive the quarry prematurely to bay. So she did her best to conciliate the young mistress of the house, even before she had received her cup of tea.

“Charley doesn’t take tea,” she said. “I think we’ll send him off, my dear, to look at the stables, or something. I hate to have a man poking about the room when I want a comfortable chat; and in this nice cozy firelight, too, when they look like tall ghosts about a place. You may go and have your cigar, Charley. Sara and I have a hundred things to say.”

Sir Charles was understood to murmur through his respirator that it was awful hard upon a fellow to be banished like this; but nevertheless, being in excellent training, and knowing it to be for his good, he went. Then Lady Motherwell took Sara in her arms for the second time, and gave her a maternal kiss.

“My love, you’re looking lovely,” she said. “I’m sorry for poor Charley, to tell the truth; but I knew you’d have enough of him to-night. Now tell me how you are, and all about yourself. I have not seen you for an age.”

“Oh, thank you, I’m just as well as ever,” said Sara. “Sit down in this nice low chair, and let me give you some tea.”

“Thank you,” said Lady Motherwell. “And how is Jack and the good papa? Jack is a gay deceiver; he is not like my boy. You should have seen him driving the girls about the ice in that chair. I am not sure that I think it very nice, do you know, unless it was a very old friend or—somebody *very* particular. I was so sorry I could not come for you—”

“Oh, it did not matter,” said Sara; “I was there three days. I got on very well; and then I have more things to do than most girls have. I don’t care so very much for amusements. I have a great many things to do.”

“Quite a little housekeeper,” said Lady Motherwell. “You girls don’t like to have such things said to you nowadays; but I’m an old-fashioned old woman, and I must say what I think. What a nice little wife you will make one of these days! That used to be the highest compliment that could be paid to us when I was your age.”

“Oh, I don’t mind it at all,” said Sara; “I suppose that is what one must come to. It is no good worrying one’s self about it. I am rather fond of housekeeping. Are you going to be one of the patronesses for the Masterton ball, Lady Motherwell? Do you think one should go?”

“No, I don’t think one should go,” said the old lady, not without a very clear recollection that she was speaking to John Brownlow the solicitor’s daughter; “but I think a dozen may go, and you shall come with me. I am going to make up a party—yourself and the two Keppels—”

“No,” said Sara, “I am a Masterton girl, and I ought not to go with you grand county folks—oh no, papa must take me; but thank you very much all the same.”

“You are an odd girl,” said Lady Motherwell. “You forget your papa is one of the very richest of the county folks, as you call us. I think Brownlows is the finest place within twenty miles, and you that have all the charge of it—”

“Don’t laugh at me, please—I don’t like being laughed at. It makes me feel like a cat,” said Sara; and she clasped her soft hands together, and sat back in her soft velvet chair out of the firelight, and sheathed her claws as it were; not feeling sure any moment that she might not be tempted to make a spring upon her flattering foe.

“Well, my dear, if you want to spit and scratch, let Charley be the victim, please,” said the old lady. “I think he would rather like it. And I am not laughing in the least, I assure you. I think a great deal of good housekeeping. We used to be brought up to see after every thing when I was young; and really, you know, when you have a large establishment, and feel that your husband looks to you for every thing—”

“We have not all husbands, thank heaven,” said Sara, spitefully; “and I am sure I don’t want a situation as a man’s housekeeper. It is all very well when it’s papa.”

“You will not always think so,” said Lady Motherwell, laughing; “that is a thing a girl always changes her mind about. Of course you will marry some day, as every body does.”

“I don’t see,” said Sara, very decidedly, “why it should be of course. If there was any body that papa had set his heart on, and wanted me to marry—or any *good* reason—of course I would do what ever was my duty. But I don’t think papa is a likely sort of man to stake me at cards, or get into any body’s power, or any thing of that sort.”

“Sara, you are the most frightful little cynic,” cried Lady Motherwell, laughing; “don’t you believe that girls sometimes fall in love?”

“Oh yes, all the silly ones,” said Sara, calmly, out of her corner. She was not saying any thing that she did not to a certain extent feel; but there is no doubt that she had a special intention at the moment in what she said.

Lady Motherwell had another laugh, for she was amused, and not nearly so much alarmed for the consequences as the young speaker intended she should be. “If all girls had such sentiments, what would become of the world?” she said. “The world would come to an end.”

“I wish it would,” said Sara. “Why shouldn’t it come to an end? It would be easy to make a nicer world. People are very aggravating in this one. I am sure I don’t see why we should make ourselves unhappy about its coming to an end. It would always be a change if it did. And some of the poor people might have better luck. Do *you* think it is such a very nice world?”

“My dear, don’t be profane,” said Lady Motherwell. “I never did think Mr. Hardcastle was very settled in his principles. I declare you frighten me, Sara, sitting and talking in that sceptical way, in the dark.”

“Oh, I can ring for lights,” said Sara; “but that isn’t sceptical. It’s sceptical to go on wishing to live forever, and to make the world last forever, as if we mightn’t have something better. At least so I think. And as for Mr. Hardcastle, I don’t know what he has to do with it—he never said a word on the subject to me.”

“Yes, my dear, but there is a general looseness,” said the old lady. “I know the sort of thing. He lets you think whatever you like, and never impresses any doctrines on you as he ought. We are not in Dewsbury parish, you know, and I feel I ought to speak. There are such differences in clergymen. Our vicar is very pointed, and makes you really feel as if you knew what you believed. And that is such a comfort, my dear. Though, to be sure, you are very young, and you don’t feel it now.”

“No, I don’t feel it at all,” said Sara; “but, Lady Motherwell, perhaps you would like to go to your room. I think I hear papa’s cart coming up the avenue—will you wait and see him before you go?”

Thus the conversation came to an end, though Lady Motherwell elected to wait, and was as gracious to Mr. Brownlow as if he had been twenty county people. Even if Sara did not have Brownlows, as everybody supposed, still she would be rich and bring money enough with her to do a vast deal of good at Motherwell, where the family for a long time had not been rich. Sir Charles’s father, old Sir Charles, had not done his duty by the property. Instead of marrying somebody with a fortune, which was clearly the object for which he had been brought into the world, he had married to please a fancy of his own in a very reprehensible way. His wife herself felt that he had failed to do his duty, though it was for her sake; and she was naturally all the more anxious that her son should fulfill this natural responsibility. Sir Charles was not handsome, nor was he bright, nor even so young as he might have been; but all this, if it made the sacrifice less, made the necessity more, and accordingly Lady Motherwell was extremely friendly to Mr. Brownlow. When she came down for dinner she took a sort of natural protecting place, as if she had been Sara’s aunt, or bland, flattering, uninterfering mother-in-law. She called the young mistress of the house to her side, and held her hand, and patted it and caressed it. She told Mr. Brownlow how pleased she was to see how the dear child had developed. “You will not be allowed to keep her long,” she said, with tender meaning; “I think if she were mine

I would go and hide her up so that nobody might see her. But one has to make up one's mind to part with them all the same."

"Not sooner than one can help," said Mr. Brownlow, looking not at Lady Motherwell, but at his child, who was the subject of discourse. He knew what the old lady meant as well as Sara did, and he had been in the way of smiling at it, wondering how any body could imagine he would give his child to a good-tempered idiot; but this night another kind of idea came into his mind. The man was stupid, but he was a gentleman of long-established lineage, and he could secure to Sara all the advantages of which she had so precarious a tenure here. He could give her even a kind of title, so far as that went, though Mr. Brownlow was not much moved by a baronet's title; and if any thing should happen to endanger Brownlows, it would not matter much to Jack or himself. They could return to the house in Masterton, and make themselves as comfortable as life, without Sara, could be anywhere. This was the thought that was passing through Mr. Brownlow's mind when he said, "Not sooner than one can help." He was thinking for the first time that such a bestowal of his child might not be so impossible after all.

Beside her, in the seat she had taken when she escaped from Lady Motherwell, Sir Charles had already taken up his position. He was talking to her through his hard little black mustache—not that he said a great deal. He was a tall man, and she was seated in a low chair, with the usual billows of white on the carpet all round her, so that he could not even approach very near; and she had to look up at him and strain her ear when he spoke, if she wanted to hear—which was a trouble Sara did not choose to take. So she said, "What?" in her indifferent way, playing with her fan, and secretly doing all she could to extend the white billows round her; while he, poor man, bent forward at a right angle till he was extremely uncomfortable, and repeated his very trivial observations with a vain attempt to reach her ear.

"I think I am growing deaf," said Sara; "perhaps it was that dreadful frost—I don't think I have ever got quite thawed yet. When I do, all you have been saying will peal out of the trumpet like Baron Munchausen, you know. So you didn't go to the stables? Wasn't that rather naughty? I am sure it was to the stables your mamma sent you when you went away."

"Tell you what, Miss Brownlow," said Sir Charles, "you are making game of me."

"Oh, no," said Sara; "or did you go to the gate and see such a pretty girl in the cottage opposite? I don't know whether you would fall in love with her, but I have; I never saw any one look so sweet. She has such pretty dark little curls, and yet not curls—something prettier—and such eyes—"

"Little women with black hair are frights," said Sir Charles—"always thought so, and more than ever now."

"Why more than ever now?" said Sara, with the precision of contempt; and then she went on—"If you don't care either for pretty horses or pretty girls, we shan't know how to amuse you. Perhaps you are fond of reading; I think we have a good many nice books."

Sir Charles said something to his mustache, which was evidently an expletive of some kind. He was not the sort of man to swear by Jove, or even by George, much less by any thing more tangible; but still he did utter something in an inarticulate exclamatory way. "A man would be difficult to please if he didn't get plenty to amuse him here," was how it ended. "I'm not afraid—"

"It is very kind of you to say so," said Sara, so very politely that Sir Charles did not venture upon any more efforts, but stood bending down uneasily, looking at her, and pulling at his respirator in an embarrassed way; not that he was remarkable in this, for certainly the moment before dinner is not favorable to animated or genial conversation. And it was not much better at dinner. Sara had Mr. Keppel of Ridley, the eldest brother, at her other side, who talked better than Sir Charles did. His mother kept her eye upon them as well as that was possible from the other end of the table, and she was rather hard upon him afterward for the small share he had taken in the conversation. "You should have amused her and made her talk, and drawn her out," said the old lady. "Oh, she talked plenty," Sir Charles said, in a discomfited tone; and he did not make much more of it in the evening,

when young Mrs. Keppel and her sister-in-law, and Fanny Hardcastle, all gathered in a knot round the young mistress of the house. It was a pretty group, and the hum of talk that issued from it attracted even the old people to linger and listen, though doubtless their own conversation would have been much more worth listening to. There was Sara reclining upon the cushions of a great round ottoman, with Fanny Hardcastle by her, making one mass of the white billows; and opposite, Mrs. Keppel, who was a pretty little woman, lay back in a low deep round chair, and Mary Keppel, who was a little fond of attitudes, sat on a stool, leaning her head upon her hands, in the centre. Sometimes they talked all together, so that you could not tell what they said; and they discussed every thing that ought to be discussed in heaven and earth, and occasionally something that ought not; and there was a dark fringe of men round about them, joining in the babble. But as for Sir Charles, he knew his *consigne*, and stood at his post, and did not attempt to talk. It was an exercise that was seldom delightful to him; and then he was puzzled, and could not make out whether, as he himself said, it was chaff or serious. But he could always stand over the mistress of his affections, and do a sentinel's duty, and keep other people away from her. That was a *métier* he understood.

"Has it been a pleasant evening, Sara?" said Mr. Brownlow when the guests had all gone, and Sir Charles had disappeared with Jack, and Lady Motherwell had retired to think it all over and invent some way of pushing her son on. The father and daughter were left alone in the room, which was still very bright with lights and fire, and did not suggest any of the tawdry ideas supposed to hang about in the air after an entertainment is over. They were both standing by the fire, lingering before they said good-night.

"Oh, yes," said Sara, "if that odious man would not mount guard over me. What have I done that he should always stand at my elbow like that, with his hideous mustache?"

"You mean Sir Charles?" said Mr. Brownlow. "I thought girls liked that sort of thing. He means it for a great compliment to you."

"Then I wish he would compliment somebody else," said Sara; "I think it is very hard, papa. A girl lives at home with her father, and is very happy and doesn't want any change; but any man that pleases—any tall creature with neither brains nor sense, nor any thing but a mustache—thinks he has a right to come and worry her; and people think she should be pleased. It is awfully hard. No woman ever attempts to treat Jack like that."

Mr. Brownlow smiled, but it was not so frankly as usual. "Are you really quite sure about this matter?" he said. "I wish you would think it over, my darling. He is not bright—but he's a very good fellow in his way—stop a little. And you know I am only Brownlow the solicitor, and if any thing should happen to our money, all this position of ours in the county would be lost. Now Sir Charles could give you a better position—"

"Oh, papa! could you ever bear to hear me called Lady Motherwell?" cried Sara—"young Lady Motherwell! I should hate myself and every body belonging to me. But look here; I have wanted to speak to you for a long time. If you were to lose your money, I don't see why you should mind so very much. I should not mind. We would go away to the country, and get a cottage somewhere, and be very comfortable. After all, money don't matter so much. We could walk instead of driving, which is often far pleasanter, and do things for ourselves."

"What do you know about my money?" said Mr. Brownlow, with a bitter momentary pang. He thought something must have betrayed the true state of affairs to Sara, which would be an almost incredible addition to the calamity.

"Well, not much," said Sara, lightly; "but I know merchants and people are often losing money, and you have an office like a merchant. I should not mind *that*; but I do mind never being able to turn my head even at home in our very own house, without seeing that man with his horrid mustache."

"Poor Sir Charles!" said Mr. Brownlow, and the anxiety on his face lightened a little. She could not know any thing about it. It must be merely accidental, he thought. Then he lighted her candle for her, and kissed her soft cheek. "You said you would marry any one I asked you to marry," he said,

with a smile; but it was not a smile that went deep. Strangely enough he was a little anxious about the answer, as if he had really some plan in his mind.

“And so I should, and never would hesitate,” said Sara, promptly, holding his hand, “but not Sir Charles, please, papa.”

This was the easy way in which the girl played on what might possibly turn out to be the very verge of the precipice.

CHAPTER XI. THE YOUNG PEOPLE

After all, no doubt it is the young people who are the kings and queens of this world. They don't have it in their own hands, nor their own way in it, which would not be good for them, but all our plots and plans are for their advantage whether they know it or not. For their sakes a great deal of harm is done in this world, which the doers hold excused, sometimes sanctified, by its motive, and the young creatures themselves have a great many things to bear which, no doubt, is for their advantage too. It is the least invidious title of rank which can exist in any community, for we have all been young—all had a great many things done for us which we would much rather had been let alone—and all suffered or profited by the plans of our progenitors. But if they are important in the actual universe, they are still more important in the world of fiction. Here we can not do without these young heroes and heroines. To make a middle-aged man or woman interesting demands genius, the highest concentration of human power and skill; whereas almost any of us can frame our innocent little tale about Edwin and Angelina, and tempt a little circle to listen notwithstanding the familiarity of the subject. Such is the fact, let us account for it as we may. The youths and maidens, and their encounters, and their quarrels, and their makings-up, their walks and talks and simple doings, are the one subject that never fails; so, though it is a wonder how it should be so, let us go back to them and consider their young prospects and their relations to each other before we go farther on in the real progress of our tale.

The way that Sara made acquaintance with the little dweller at her gate was in this wise. It was the day after the dinner-party, when the Motherwells were still at Brownlows. Sara had gone out to convey some consolation to old Betty at the gate, who was a rheumatical old woman. And she thought she had managed to escape very cleverly out of Lady Motherwell's clutches, when, to her horror, Sir Charles overtook her in the avenue. He carried in his manner and appearance all the dignity of a man whose mind is made up. He talked very little, certainly, to begin with—but that was his way; and he caressed his abrupt little black mustache as men do caress any physical adjunct which is a comfort to them in a crisis. Sara could not conceal it from herself that something was coming, and there was no apparent escape for her. The avenue was long; there was nobody visible coming or going. Had the two been on a desert island, Sir Charles could scarcely have had less fear of interruption. I do not pretend to say that Sara was entirely inexperienced in this sort of thing, and did not know how to snub an incipient lover or get out of such a dilemma in ordinary cases; but Sir Charles Motherwell's was not an ordinary case. In the first place, he was staying in the house, and would have to continue there till to-morrow at least, whatever might happen to him now; and in the second, he was obtuse, and might not understand what any thing short of absolute refusal meant. He was not a man to be snubbed graciously or ungraciously, and made to comprehend without words that his suit was not to be offered. Such a point of understanding was too high for him. He was meditating between himself and his mustache what he had to say, and he was impervious to all Sara's delicate indications of an indisposition to listen. How could he tell what people meant unless they said it? Thus he was a man with whom only such solid instruments as Yes and No were of any use; and it would have been very embarrassing if Sara, with at least twenty-four hours of his society to look forward to, had been obliged to say No. She did the very best she could under the emergency. She talked with all her might and tried to amuse him, and if possible lead him off his grand intention. She chatted incessantly with something of the same feelings that inspired Scherazade, speaking against time, though not precisely for her life, and altogether unaware that, in so far as her companion could abstract his thought from the words he was about to say, when he could find them, his complacent consciousness of the trouble she took to please him was rising higher and higher. Poor dear little thing! he was saying to himself,

how pleased she will be! But yet, notwithstanding this comfortable thought, it was a difficult matter to Sir Charles in broad daylight, and with the eyes of the world, as it were, upon him, to prevail upon the right words to come.

They were only half way down the avenue when he cleared his throat. Sara was in despair. She knew by that sound and by the last convulsive twitch of his mustache that it was just coming. A pause of awful suspense ensued. She was so frightened that even her own endeavor to ward off extremities failed her. She could not go on talking in the horror of the moment. Should she pretend to have forgotten something in the house and rush back? or should she make believe somebody was calling her and fly forward? She had thrown herself forward on one foot, ready for a run, when that blessed diversion came for which she could never be sufficiently thankful. She gave a start of delightful relief when they came to that break in the trees. "Who can that be?" she said, much as, had she been a man, she would have uttered a cheer. It would not have done for Miss Brownlow to burst forth into an unlooked-for hurrah, so she gave vent to this question instead, and made a little rush on to the grass where that figure was visible. It was a pretty little figure in a red cloak; and it was bending forward, anxiously examining some herbage about the root of a tree. At the sound of Sara's exclamation the stranger raised herself hurriedly, blushed, looked confused, and finally, with a certain shy promptitude, came forward, as if, Sara said afterward, she was a perfect little angel out of heaven.

"I beg your pardon," she said; "perhaps I ought not to be here. I am so sorry; but—it was for old Betty I came."

"You are very welcome to come," said Sara, eagerly—"if you don't mind the damp grass. It is you who live at Mrs. Swayne's? Oh, yes, I know you quite well. Pray, come whenever you please. There are a great many pretty walks in the park."

"Oh, thank you!" said little Pamela. It was the first time she had seen the young great lady so near, and she took a mental inventory of her, all that she was like and all that she had on. Seeing Miss Sara on foot, like any other human creature, was not a thing that occurred every day; and she took to examining her with a double, or rather triple, interest—first, because it *was* Miss Sara, and something very new; second, to be able to describe minutely the glorious vision to her mother; and thirdly out of genuine admiration. How beautiful she was! and how beautifully dressed! and then the tall gentleman by her side, so unlike any thing Pamela ever saw, who took off his hat to her—actually to *her*! No doubt, though he was not so handsome as might have been desired, they were going to be married. He must be very good, gallant, and noble, as he was not so *very* good looking. Pamela's bright eyes danced with eagerness and excitement as she looked at them. It was as good as a play or a story-book. It was a romance being performed for her benefit, actually occurring under her very eyes.

"I know what you were doing," said Sara, "but it is too early yet. 'Round the ashen roots the violets blow'—I know that is what you were thinking of."

Pamela, who knew very little about violets, and nothing about poetry, opened her eyes very wide. "Indeed," she said, anxiously, "I was only looking for some plantain for Betty's bird—that was all. I did not mean to take any—flowers. I would not do any thing so—so—ungrateful."

"But you shall have as many violets as ever you like," said Sara, who was eager to find any pretense for prolonging the conversation. "Do come and walk here by me. I am going to see old Betty. Do you know how she is to-day? Don't you think she is a nice old woman? I am going to tell her she ought to have her grandchild to live with her, and open the gate, now that her rheumatism has come on. It always lasts three months when it comes on. Your Mr. Swayne's, you know, goes on and off. I always hear all about it from my maid."

When she paused for breath, Pamela felt that as the tall gentleman took no part in the conversation, it was incumbent upon her to say something. She was much flattered by the unexpected grandeur of walking by Miss Brownlow's side, and being taken into her confidence; but the emergency drove every idea out of her head, as was natural. She could not think of any thing that it would be nice to say, and in desperation hazarded a question. "Is there much rheumatism about here?" poor Pamela

said, looking up as if her life depended on the answer she received; and then she grew burning red, and hot all over, and felt as if life itself was no longer worth having, after thus making a fool of herself. As if Miss Brownlow knew any thing about the rheumatism here! “What an idiot she will think me!” said she to herself, longing that the earth would open and swallow her up. But Miss Brownlow was by no means critical. On the contrary, Sara rushed into the subject with enthusiasm.

“There is always rheumatism where there are so many trees,” she said, with decision—“from the damp, you know. Don’t you find it so at Motherwell, Sir Charles? You have such heaps of trees in that part of the county. Half my poor people have it here. And the dreadful thing is that one doesn’t know any cure for it, except flannel. You never can give them too much flannel,” said Sara, raising her eyes gravely to her tall companion. “They think flannel is good for every thing under the skies.”

“Don’t know, I’m sure,” said Sir Charles. “Sure it’s very good of you. Don’t know much about rheumatism myself. Always see lots about in our place; flannel petticoat—hem—oh—beg your pardon. I’m sure—”

When he uttered that unfortunate remark, poor Sir Charles brought himself up with a sudden start, and turned very red. It was his horror and embarrassment, poor man, and fear of having shocked his companion’s delicacy. But Sara took the meanest advantage of him. She held out her hand, with a sweet smile. “Are you going?” she said; “it is so kind of you to have come so far with me. I hope you will have a pleasant ride. Please make Jack call at the Rectory, and ask if Fanny’s cold is better. Shall you be back to luncheon? But you never are, you gentlemen. Are you never hungry in the middle of the day as we are? Till dinner, then,” she said, waving her hand. Perhaps there was something mesmeric in it. The disappointed wooer was so startled that he stood still as under a spell.

“Didn’t mean to leave you,” he said: “don’t care for riding. I’d like to see old Betty too.”

“Oh, but that would be much too polite,” cried Sara. “Please, never mind *me*. It is so kind of you to have come so far. Good-bye just now. I hope you will have a pleasant ride.” She was gone before he could move or recover from his consternation. He stood in dumb amaze for a full minute looking after her; and then poor Sir Charles turned away with the obedience of despair. He had been too well brought up on the whole. His mother had brought him to such a pitch of discipline that he could not choose but obey the helm, whosoever hand might touch it. “It was all those confounded petticoats,” he said to himself. “How could I be such an ass?” which was the most vigorous speech he had made even to himself for ages. As for Sara, she relaxed from her usual dignity, and went along skipping and tripping in the exhilaration of her heart. “Oh, what a blessing he is gone! oh, what a little angel you were to appear just when you did!” said Sara; and then she gave a glance at her new companion’s bewildered face, and composed herself. “But don’t let us think of him any more,” she continued. “Tell me about yourself—I want to know all about yourself. Wasn’t it lucky we met? Please tell me your name, and how old you are, and how you like living here. Of course, you know I am Sara Brownlow. And oh, to be sure, first of all, why did you say ungrateful? Have I ever done any thing to make you grateful to me?”

“Oh, yes, please,” said Pamela. “It is so pretty to see you always when you ride, and when you drive out. I am not quite strong yet, and I don’t know any body here; but I have only to sit down at the window, and there is always something going on. Last night you can’t think how pretty it was. The carriage lamps kept walking up and down like giants with two big eyes. And I can see all up the avenue from my window; and when I looked very close, just as they passed Betty’s door, I could see a little glimpse of the ladies inside. I saw one lovely pink dress; and then in the next there was a scarlet cloak all trimmed with swan’s down. I could tell it was swan’s down, it was so fluffy. Oh, I beg your pardon, I didn’t mean to talk so much; but it is such fun living there, just opposite the gate. And that is why I am so grateful to you.”

Sara, it was impossible to deny, was much staggered by this speech. Its frankness amazed and yet attracted her. It drove her into deep bewilderment as to the rank of her little companion. Was she *a lady*? She would scarcely have taken so much pleasure in the sight, had it been within the range

of possibility that she could herself join such a party; but then her voice was a refined voice, and her lovely looks might, as Sara had thought before, have belonged to a princess. The young mistress of Brownlows looked very curiously at Pamela, but she could not fathom her. The red cloak was a little the worse for wear, but still it was such a garb as any one might have worn. There was no sort of finery, no sort of pretension, about the little personage. And then Sara had already made up her mind in any case to take her pretty neighbor under her protection. The end of the matter was, that in turning it over in her mind, the amusing side of the question at last caught her eye. How strange it was! While the awful moment before dinner was being got through at the great house, this little creature at the gate was clapping her hands over the sounds and sights out-of-doors. To her it was not heavy people coming to dinner, to be entertained in body and mind for three or four mortal hours; but prancing horses and rolling wheels, and the lamps making their shining progress two and two, and all the cheerful commotion. How odd it was! She must be (whatever her “position”) an original little thing, to see so tedious a business in such a novel light.

“It is very odd,” said Sara, “that I never thought of that before. I almost think I shouldn’t mind having stupid people now and then if I had thought of that. And so you think it fun? You wouldn’t think it fun if you had to watch them eating their dinner, and amuse them all the evening. It *is* such hard work; and then to ask them to sing when you know they can’t sing, no more than peacocks, and to stand and say Thank you when it is all over! I wonder what made you think of looking at the lamps. It is very clever of you, you know, to describe them like that. Do you read a great deal? Are you fond of it? Do you play, or do you draw, or what do you like best?”

This question staggered Pamela as much as her description had done Sara. She grew pale and then she grew red. “I am—not in the least clever,” she said, “nor—nor accomplished—nor—I am not a great lady like you, Miss Brownlow,” the little girl added, with a sudden pang of mortification. She had not been in the least envious of Sara, nor desirous of claiming equality with her. And yet when she thus suddenly perceived the difference, it went to her heart so sharply that she had hard ado not to cry.

As for Sara, she laughed softly, not knowing of any bitterness beneath that reply. She laughed, knowing she was not a great lady, and yet a little disposed to think she was, and pleased to appear so in her companion’s eyes. “If you were to speak like that to Lady Motherwell, I wonder what she would say,” said Sara; “but I don’t want you to be a great lady. I think you are the prettiest little thing I ever saw in my life. There now—I suppose it is wrong to say it, but it is quite true. It is a pleasure just to look at you. If you are not nice and good, it is a great shame, and very ungrateful of you, when God has made you so pretty; but I think you must be nice. Don’t blush and tremble like that, as if I were a gentleman. I am just nineteen. How old are you?”

“Seventeen last midsummer,” said Pamela, under her breath.

“I knew you were quite a child,” said Sara, with dignity. “Don’t look so frightened. I mean to come and see you almost every day. And you shall come home with me, and see the flowers, and the pictures, and all my pretty things. I have quantities of pretty things. Papa is so very kind. *I* have no mother; but that—that—old—lady—is your mother, is she? or your grandmother? Look, there is old Betty at the door. Wicked old woman! what business has she to come out to the door and make her rheumatism worse? Come along a little quicker; but, you poor little dear, what is the matter? Can’t you run?”

“I sprained my ankle,” said Pamela, blushing more and more, and wondering if Mr. John had perhaps kept that little incident to himself.

“And I trying to make you run!” cried the penitent Sara. “Never mind, take my arm. I am not in the least in a hurry. Lean upon me—there’s a good child. They should not let you come so far alone.”

Thus it was that the two arrived at Betty’s cottage, to the old woman’s intense amazement. Pamela herself was flattered by the kind help afforded her, but it is doubtful whether she enjoyed it; and in the exciting novelty of the position, she was glad to sit down in a corner and collect herself while her brilliant young patroness fulfilled her benevolent mission. Betty’s lodge was a creation of

Miss Brownlow's from beginning to end. It was Sara's design, and Sara had furnished it, up to the pictures on the wall, which were carefully chosen in accordance with what might be supposed to be an old woman's taste, and the little book-shelf, which was filled on the same principles. The fact was, however, that Betty had somewhat mortified Sara by pinning up a glorious colored picture out of the "Illustrated News," and by taking in a tale of love and mystery in penny numbers, showing illegitimate tastes both in literature and art. But she was suffering, and eventually at such a moment her offenses ought to be forgiven.

"You should not stand at the door like that, and go opening the gate in such weather," said Sara. "I came to say you must have one of your son's children to help you,—that one you had last year."

"She's gone to service, Miss," said Betty, with a bob.

"Then one of your daughter's,—the daughter you have at Masterton—she has dozens and dozens of children. Why can not one of them come out and take care of you?"

"Please, Miss," said Betty, "a poor man's childer is his fortune—leastways in a place where there's mills and things. They're all a-doing of something, them little things. I'm awful comfortable, Miss, thanks to you and your good papa"—at this and all other intervals of her speech, Betty made a courtesy—"but I ain't got money like to pay 'em wages, and saving when one's a bit delicate, or that—"

"Betty, sit down, please, and don't make so many courtesies. I don't understand that. If I had a nice old grandmother like you"—said Sara; and then she paused and blushed, and bethought herself—perhaps it might be as well not to enter upon that question.

"Anyhow it is very easy to pay them something," she said. "I will pay it for you till your rheumatism is better. And then there is your other son, who was a tailor or something—where is he?"

"Oh, if I could but tell!" said Betty. "Oh, Miss, he's one o' them as brings down gray hairs wi' sorrow—not as I have a many to lose, though when I was a young lass, the likes o' me for a 'ead of 'air wasn't in all Dewsbury. But Tom, I'm afeard, I'm afeard, has tooken to terrible bad ways."

"Drinking or something?" asked Sara, in the tone of a woman experienced in such inevitable miseries.

"Worse than that, Miss. I don't say as it ain't bad enough when a man takes to drinking. Many a sore heart it's giv' me, but it always comes kind o' natural like," said Betty, with her apron at her eyes. "But poor Tom, he's gone and come out for a Radical, Miss, and sets hisself up a-making speeches and things. It's that as brought it on me so bad. I've not been so bad before, not sin' his poor father died."

"Then don't stand and courtesy like that, please," said Sara. "A Radical—is that all? I am a little of a Radical myself, and so is papa."

"Ah, the like of you don't know," said Betty. "Mr. John wouldn't say nothing for him. He said, 'That's very bad, very bad, Betty,' when I went and told him; and a young gentleman like that is the one to know."

"He knows nothing about it," said Sara; "he's a University man, and Eton, you know; he is all in the old world way; but papa and I are Radicals, like Tom. Are you?—but I suppose you are too young to know. And oh, here it is just time for luncheon, and you have never told me your name. Betty, make haste and send for Tom or somebody to help you. And there's something coming in a basket; and if you want any thing you must send up to the house."

"You're very kind, Miss," said Betty, "and the neighbors is real kind, and Mrs. Swayne, though she has queer ways—And as for Miss Pammly here—"

"Pamela," said the little girl, softly, from her chair.

"Is that your name?" said Sara. "Pamela—I never knew any one called Pamela before. What a pretty name! Sara is horrible. Every soul calls me Sairah. Look here, you are a little darling; and you don't know what you saved me from this morning; and I'll come to see you the moment Lady Motherwell goes away."

Upon which Sara dropped a rapid kiss upon her new friend's cheek and rushed forth, passing the window like an arrow, rushing up the long avenue like a winged creature, with the wind in her hair and in her dress. The little lodge grew darker to Pamela's dazzled eyes when she was gone.

"Is that really Miss Brownlow, Betty?" she said, after the first pause.

"Who could it be else, I would like to know?" said Betty; "a-leaving her orders like that, and never giving no time to answer or nothing. I wonder what's coming in the basket. Not as I'm one o' the greedy ones as is always looking for something; but what's the good o' serving them rich common folks if you don't get no good out of them? Oh for certain sure it's Miss Sara; and she taken a fancy to you."

"What do you mean by common folks?" asked Pamela, already disposed, as was natural, to take up the cudgels for her new friend. "She is a lady, oh, all down to the very tips of her shoes."

"May be as far as you knows," said Betty, "but I've been here off and on for forty years, and I mind the old Squires; not saying no harm of Miss Sara, as is very open-handed; but you mind my words, you'll see plenty of her for a bit—she's took a fancy to you."

"Do you think so, *really*, Betty?" said Pamela, with brightening eyes.

"What I says is for a bit," said Betty; "don't you take up as I'm meaning more—for a bit, Miss Pammy; that's how them sort does. She's one as 'ill come every day, and then, when she's other things in hand, like, or other folks, or feels a bit tired—"

"Yes, perhaps," said Pamela, who had grown very red; "but that need not have any effect on me. If I was fond of any one, I would never, never change, whatever they might do—not if they were to be cruel and unkind—not if they were to forget me—"

Here the little girl started, and became very silent all in a moment. And the blush of indignation on her cheek passed and was followed by a softer sweeter color, and her words died away on her lips. And her eyes, which had been shining on old Betty with all the magnanimity of youth, went down, and were covered up under the blue-veined, long-fringed eyelids. The fact was, some one else had come into the lodge—had come without knocking, in a very noiseless, stealthy sort of way—"as if he meant it." And this new-comer was no less a person than Mr. John.

"My sister says you are ill, Betty," said Jack; "what do you mean by being ill? I am to send in one of your grandchildren from Masterton. What do you say? Shall I? or should you rather be alone?"

"It's allays you for the thoughtful one, Mr. John," said Betty, gratefully; "though you're a gentleman, and it don't stand to reason. But Miss Sara's a-going to pay; and if there's a little as is to be arned honest, I'm not one as would send it past my own. There's little Betsy, as is a tidy bit of a thing. But I ain't ill, not to say ill, no more nor Miss Pammy here is ill—her as had her ankle sprained in that awful snow."

Mr. John made what Pamela thought a very grand bow at this point of Betty's speech. He had taken his hat off when he came in. Betty's doctor, when he came to see her, did not take off his hat, not even when Pamela was present. The little girl had very quick eyes, and she did not fail to mark the difference. After he had made his bow, Mr. John somehow seemed to forget Betty. It was to the little stranger his words, his eyes, his looks, were addressed. "I hope you are better?" he said. "I took the liberty of going to your house to ask, but Mrs. Swayne used to turn me away."

"Oh, thank you; you are very kind," said Pamela; and then she added, "Mrs. Swayne is very funny. Mamma would have liked to have thanked you, I am sure."

"And I am sure I did not want any thanks," said Jack; "only to know. You are sure you are better now?"

"Oh, much better," said Pamela; and then there came a pause. It was more than a pause. It was a dead stop, with no apparent possibility of revival. Pamela, for her part, like an inexperienced little girl, fidgeted on her chair, and wrapped herself close in her cloak. Was that all? His sister had a great deal more to say. Jack, though he was not inexperienced, was almost for the moment as awkward as Pamela. He went across the room to look at the picture out of the "Illustrated News;" and he spoke

to Betty's bird, which had just been regaled with the bit of plantain Pamela had brought; and, at last, when all those little exercises had been gone through, he came back.

"I hope you like living here," he said. "It is cold and bleak now, but in summer it is very pretty. You came at the worst time of the year; but I hope you mean to stay?"

"Oh yes, we like it," said Pamela; and then there came another pause.

"My sister is quite pleased to think of having you for a neighbor," said Jack. It was quite extraordinary how stupid he was. He could talk well enough sometimes; but at this present moment he had not a syllable to say. "Except Miss Hardcastle at the Rectory, she has nobody near, and my father and I are so much away."

Pamela looked up at him with a certain sweet surprise in her eyes. Could he too really think her a fit friend for his sister? "It is very kind of Miss Brownlow," she said, "but I am only—I mean I don't think I am—I—I am always with my mother."

"But your mother would not like you to be shut up," said Jack, coming a little nearer. "I always look over the way now when I pass. To see bright faces instead of blank windows is quite pleasant. I dare say you never notice us."

"Oh yes," cried Pamela. "And that pretty horse! It is such fun to live there and see you all passing." She said this forgetting herself, and then she met old Betty's gaze and grew conscious again. "I mean we are always so quiet," she said, and began once more to examine the binding of her cloak.

At this moment the bell from the great house began to tinkle pleasantly in the wintry air: it was another of Pamela's amusements. And it marked the dinner hour at which her mother would look for her; but how was she to move with this young man behind her chair? Betty, however, was not so delicate. "I always set my clock by the luncheon-bell," said old Betty. "There it's a-going, bless it! I has my dinner by it regular, and I sets my clock. Don't you go for to stir, Miss Pammly. Bless you, I don't mind you! And Mr. John, he's a-going to his lunch. Don't you mind. I'll set my little bit of a table ready; but I has it afore the fire in this cold weather, and it don't come a-nigh of you."

"Oh, mamma will want me," said Pamela. "I shall come back another time and see you." She made Jack a little curtsy as she got up, but to her confusion he came out with her and opened the gate for her, and sauntered across the road by her side.

"I am not going to lunch—I am going to ride. So you have noticed the mare?" said Jack. "I am rather proud of her. She *is* a beauty. You should see how she goes when the road is clear. I suppose I shall have to go now, for here come the horses and Motherwell. He is one of those men who always turn up just when they're not wanted," Jack continued, opening the gate of Mrs. Swayne's little garden for Pamela. Mrs. Swayne herself was at the window up stairs, and Mrs. Preston was at the parlor window looking out for her child. They both saw that wonderful sight. Young Mr. Brownlow with his hat off holding open the little gate, and looking down into the little face, which was so flushed with pleasure and pride, and embarrassment and innocent shame. As for Pamela herself, she did not know if she were walking on solid ground or on air. When the door closed behind her, and she found herself in the dingy little passage with nothing but her dinner before her, and the dusky afternoon, and her work, her heart gave a little cry of impatience. But she was in the parlor time enough to see Jack spring on his horse and trot off into the sunshine with his tall companion. They went off into the sunshine, but in the parlor it was deepest shade, for Mr. Swayne had so cleverly contrived his house that the sunshine never entered. Its shadow hung across the road, stretching to the gate of Brownlows, almost the whole day, which made every thing dingier than it was naturally. This was what Pamela experienced when she came in out of the bright air, out of sight of those young faces and young voices. Could she ever have any thing to do with them? Or was it only a kind of dream, too pleasant, too sweet to come to any thing? It was her very first outset in life, and she was aware that she was not much of a heroine. Perhaps it was only the accident of an hour; but even that was pleasant if it should be no more. This, when she had told all about it, and filled the afternoon with the reflected glory, was the philosophical conclusion to which Pamela came at last.

CHAPTER XII. NEWS OF FRIENDS

“But you must not set your heart upon it, my darling,” said Mrs. Preston. “It may be or it mayn’t be—nobody can say. And you must not get to blame the young lady if she thinks better of it. They are very rich, and they have all the best people in the county coming and going. And you are but my poor little girl, with no grand friends; and you mustn’t take it to heart and be disappointed. If you were doing that, though it’s such good air and so quiet, I’d have to take my darling away.”

“I won’t, mamma,” said Pamela; “I’ll be good. But you say yourself that it *may* be—”

“Yes,” said the mother; “young creatures like that are not so worldly-minded—at least, sometimes they’re not. She might take a fancy to you; but you mustn’t build on it, Pamela. That’s all, my dear. We’re humble folks, and the like of us don’t go visiting at great houses. And even you’ve not got the education, my darling; and nothing but your black frocks—”

“Oh, mamma, do you think I want to visit at great houses?” cried Pamela. “I should not know what to say nor how to behave. What I should like would be to go and see her in the mornings when nobody was there, and be her little companion, and listen to her talking, and to see her dressed when she was going out. I know we are poor; but she might get fond of me for all that—”

“Yes, dear,” said Mrs. Preston, “I think she is a very nice young lady. I wish her mamma had been living, Pamela. If there had been a good woman that had children of her own, living at that great house, I think it would have been a comfort to me.”

“Mamma, I can’t think why you should always be speaking like that,” said Pamela, with a cloud on her brow.

“You would soon know why if you were as old as me,” said the mother. “I can’t forget I’m old, and how little strength I’ve got left. And I shouldn’t like my pet to get disappointed,” she said, rising and drawing Pamela’s pretty head to her, as she stood behind her chair; “don’t you build upon it, dear. And now I’m going into the kitchen for five minutes to ask for poor Mr. Swayne.”

It was a thing she did almost every night, and Pamela was not surprised; perhaps it was even a relief to her to have a few minutes all to herself to think over the wonderful events of the day. To be sure, it had been about Sara alone, and her overtures of friendship, that the mother and daughter had been talking. But when Pamela was by herself, she recollected, naturally, that there had been another actor on the scene. She did not think of asking her mother, or even herself, if Mr. John was to be depended on, or if there was any danger of disappointment in respect to him. Indeed, Pamela was so wise that she did not, as she said to herself, think at all about this branch of the subject; for, of course, it was not likely she would ever make great friends with a young gentleman. The peculiarity of the matter was that, though she was not thinking of Mr. John, she seemed to see him standing before her, holding the gate open, looking into her face, and saying that Motherwell was one of the men that always turned up when they were least wanted. She was not thinking of Jack; and was it her fault if this picture had fixed itself on her retina, if that is the name of it? She went and sat down on the rug before the fire, and gazed into the glow, and thought it all over. After a while she even put her hands over her eyes, that she might think over it the more perfectly. And it is astonishing how often this picture came between her and her thoughts; but, thank heaven, it was only a picture! Whatever Pamela might be thinking of, it was certainly not of Mr. John.

Mrs. Swayne’s kitchen was by far the most cheerful place in the house. It had a brick floor, which was as red as the hearth was white, and a great array of shining things about the walls. There was a comfortable cat dozing and blinking before the fire, which was reflected out of so many glowing surfaces, copper, pewter, and tin, that the walls were hung with a perfect gallery of cats. Mrs. Swayne herself had a wickerwork chair at one side, which she very seldom occupied; for there was a great

multiplicity of meals in the house, and there was always something just coming to perfection in the oven or on the fire. But opposite, in a high-backed chair covered with blue and white checked linen, was Mr. Swayne, who was the object of so much care, and was subject to the rheumatics, like Betty. The difference of his rheumatics was, that they went off and on. One day he would be well—so well as to go out and see after his business; and the next day he would be fixed in his easy-chair. Perhaps, on the whole, it was more aggravating than if he had gone in steadily for a good long bout when he was at it, and saved his wife's time. But then that was the nature of the man. There was a visitor in the kitchen when Mrs. Preston went in—no less a personage than old Betty, who, with a daring disregard for her rheumatics, had come across the road, wrapped in an old cloak, to talk over the news of the day. It was a rash proceeding, no doubt; but yet rheumatics were very ordinary affairs, and it was seldom—very seldom—that any thing so exciting came in Betty's way. Mrs. Swayne, for her part, had been very eloquent about it before her lodger appeared.

"*I'd* make short work with him," she said, "if it was me. *I'd* send him about his business, you take my word. It ain't me as would trust one of 'em a step farther than I could see 'em. Coming a-raging and a-roaring round of a house, as soon as they found out as there was a poor little tender bit of a lamb to devour."

"What is that you say about a bit o' lamb, Nancy?" cried Mr. Swayne; "that's an awful treat, that is, at this time of the year. I reckon it's for the new lodgers and not for us. I'll devour it, and welcome, my lass, if you'll set it afore me."

Mrs. Swayne gave no direct answer to this question. She cast a glance of mild despair at Betty, who answered by lifting up her hands in sympathy and commiseration. "That's just like the men," said Mrs. Swayne. "Talk o' something to put into them, and that's all as they care for. It's what a poor woman has to put up with late and early. Always a-craving and a-craving, and you ne'er out of a mess, dinner and supper—dinner and supper. But as I was a-saying, if it was me, he should never have the chance of a word in her ear again."

"It's my opinion, Mrs. Swayne," said Betty, unwinding her shawl a little, "as in those sort of cases it's mostly the mother's fault."

"I don't know what you mean by the mother's fault," said Mrs. Swayne, who was contradictory, and liked to take the initiative. "She never set eyes on him, as I can tell, poor soul. And how was she to know as they were all about in the avenue? It's none o' the mother's fault; but if it was me, now as they've took the first step—"

"That was all as I meant," said Betty humbly; "now as it's come to that, I would take her off, as it were, this very day."

"And a deal of good you'd do with that," said Mrs. Swayne, with natural indignation; "take her off! and leave my parlor empty, and have him a-running after her from one place to another. I thought you was one as knew better; I'd brave it out if it was me—he shouldn't get no advantages in my way o' working. Husht both of you, and hold your tongues; I never see the like of you for talk, Swayne—when here's the poor lady out o' the parlor as can't abide a noise. Better? ay, a deal better, Mrs. Preston: if he wasn't one as adored a good easy-chair afore the fire—"

"And a very good place, too, this cold weather," said Mr. Swayne with a feeble chuckle. "Nancy, you tell the lady about the lamb."

Mrs. Swayne and Betty once more exchanged looks of plaintive comment. "That's him all over," she said; "but you're one as understands what men is, Mrs. Preston, and I've no mind to explain. I hear as Miss Sara took awful to our young Miss, meeting of her promiscuous in the avenue. Betty here, she says as it was wonderful; but I always thought myself as that was how it would be."

"Yes," said the gratified mother; "not that I would have my Pamela build upon it. A young lady like that might change her mind; but I don't deny that it would be very nice. Whatever is a pleasure to Pamela is twice a pleasure to me."

“And a sweet young lady as ever I set eyes on,” said Betty, seizing the opportunity, and making Mrs. Preston one of her usual bobs.

Pamela’s mother was not a lady born; the two women, who were in their way respectful to her, saw this with lynx eyes. She was not even rich enough, poor soul, to have the appearance of a lady; and it would have been a little difficult for them to have explained why they were so civil. No doubt principally it was because they knew so little of her, and her appearance had the semi-dignity of preoccupation—a thing very difficult to be comprehended in that region of society which is wont to express all its sentiments freely. She had something on her mind, and she did not relieve herself by talking, and she lived in the parlor, while Mrs. Swayne contented herself with the kitchen. That was about the extent of her claim on their respect.

“I suppose you are all very fond of Miss Sara, knowing her all her life,” Mrs. Preston said, after she had received very graciously Betty’s tribute to her own child. Though she warned Pamela against building on it, it would be hard to describe the fairy structures which had already sprung in her own mind on these slight foundations; and though she would not have breathed his name for worlds, it is possible that Pamela’s mother, in her visions, found a place for Mr. John too.

“Fond! I don’t know as we’re so fond of her neither,” said Mrs. Swayne. “She’s well, and well enough, but I can’t say as she’s my sort. She’s too kind of familiar like—and it ain’t like a real county lady neither. But it’s Betty as sees her most. And awful good they are, I will say that for them, to every creature about the place.”

“Ah, mum, they ain’t the real old gentry,” said Betty, with a touch of pathos. “If I was one as had come with ’em, or that—but I’m real old Dewsbury, me, and was at the Hall, coming and going, for twenty years afore their time. I ain’t got nothing to say again’ Miss Sara. She comed there, that’s all—she wasn’t *born*. It makes a difference when folks have been forty years and more about a place. To see them pass away as has the right,” said Betty growing sentimental, “and them come in as has only a bag o’ money!”

“Little enough money the old Squire had,” said Mrs. Swayne, turning her head, “nor manners neither. Don’t you be ungrateful, Betty Caley. You was as poor as a church-mouse all along o’ your old Squires, and got as fat as fat when the new folks come and put you all comfortable. Deny it, if you can. I would worship the very ground Miss Sara sets foot on, if I was you.”

“Ah, she ain’t the real old gentry,” said Betty, with a sigh.

Perhaps Mrs. Preston had a weakness for real old gentry too, and she had a dull life, poor woman, and was glad of a little gossip. She had heard the story before, but she asked to hear it again, hoping for a little amusement; for a woman, however bowed down to the level of her fortune, gets tired sometimes, even of such a resource as needlework. She would not sit down, for she felt that might be considered lowering herself to their level. But she stood with her hand upon the back of an old high wooden chair, and asked questions. If they were not the real old gentry, and were such upstarts, why was it that the place was called by their name, and how did they come there?

“Some say as it was a poor old creature in Masterton as give him the money,” said Mrs. Swayne, “away from her own child as was gone off a-soldiering. I wouldn’t say it was money that would thrive. He was called to make the will for her, or something; an old miser, that was what she was; and with that he bought the place. And the folks laughed and said it was Brownlow’s. But he ain’t a man to laugh at, ain’t Mr. Brownlow hisself. A body may have their opinion about the young folks. Young folks ain’t nothing much to build upon, as you was a-saying, Mrs. Preston, at their best; but I wouldn’t be the one as would cross him hisself. He’s terrible deep, and terrible close, like all them lawyers. And he has a way of talking as is dreadful deceiving. Them as tries to fight honest and open with the likes of him hasn’t no chance. He ain’t a hard neighbor, like, nor unkind to poor folk; but I wouldn’t go again’ him, not for all the world, if it was me.”

“That’s all you know, you women,” said Mr. Swayne; “he’s the easiest-minded gentleman going, is Mr. Brownlow. He’s one as pays your little bits o’ bills like a prince, and don’t ask no bothering

questions—what’s this for, and what’s that for, and all them niggle-naggles. He’s as free with his money—What are you two women a-shaking of your heads off for, as if I was a-saying what isn’t true?”

“It’s true, and it ain’t true,” said Mrs. Swayne; “and if you ever was any way in trouble along of the young folks, Mrs. Preston, or had him to do with, I give you my warning you’ll have to mind.”

“I shall never have any thing to do with Mr. Brownlow,” said the lodger, with a half-frightened smile. “I’m independent. He can’t have any thing to say to me.”

Mrs. Swayne shook her head, and so did Betty, following her lead. The landlady did not very well know why, and neither did the old woman. It was always a practicable way of holding up the beacon before the eyes of Pamela’s mother. And that poor soul, who was not very courageous, grew frightened, she could not tell why.

“But there was something to-day as made me laugh,” said old Betty—“not as I was in spirits for laughing—what with my back, as was like to split, and my bad knee, and them noises in my ears. But just to see how folks forget! Miss Sara she came in. She was along of your young miss, mum, and a-making a fuss over her; and she says, ‘Betty,’ says she, ‘we ain’t a-going to let you open the gate, and your rheumatics so bad; send for one of them grandchildren o’ yours.’ Atween oursels, I was just a-thinking o’ that; for what’s enough for one is enough for two, and it’s allays a saving for Polly. My Polly has seven on ’em, mum, and hard work a-keeping all straight. So I up and says, ‘A poor man’s childer is his fortin’, Miss,’ says I; ‘they’re all on ’em a-working at summat, and I can’t have ’em without paying.’ And no more I oughtn’t to, serving rich folks. ‘What! not for their grandmother?’ says she. ‘If I had a nice old grandmother like you—”

“Law!” said Mrs. Swayne, “and her own grandmother living in a poky bit of a place in Masterton, as every body knows—never brought out here for a breath of fresh air, nor none of them going a-nigh of her! To think how little folks is sensible when it’s themselves as is to blame!”

“That’s what it is,” said the triumphant Betty. “When she said that, it was her conscience as spoke. She went as red as red, and stopped there and then. It was along of old Mrs. Fennell, poor old soul! Why ain’t she a-living out here, and her own flesh and blood to make her comfortable? It was on my lips to say, Law! Miss, there’s old Mrs. Fennell is older nor me.”

“Fennell?” said Mrs. Preston; “I ought to know that name.”

“It was her own mamma’s name,” said Betty, “and I’ve met wi’ them as seen the old lady with their own eyes. Hobson, the carrier, he goes and sees her regularly with game and things; but what’s game in comparison with your own flesh and blood?”

“Perhaps the mother died young,” said Mrs. Preston with some anxiety—“that breaks the link, like. Fennell? I wonder what Fennells she belongs to. I once knew that name well. I wish the old lady was living here.”

“You take my word, she’ll never live here,” said Mrs. Swayne. “She ain’t grand enough. Old grandmothers is in the way when young folks sets up for lords and ladies. And it ain’t that far to Masterton but you could go and see her. There’s Hobson, he knows; he’d take you safe, never fear.”

Mrs. Preston shrunk back a little from the suggestion. “I’m not one to pay visits,” she said. “But I’ll say good-night to you all, now. I hope you’ll soon be better, Mr. Swayne. And, Betty, you should not be out-of-doors on such a cold night. My child will be dull, all by herself.” So saying, she left them; but she did not that moment return to Pamela. She went up stairs by herself in the dark, with her heart beating quick in her ears. “Fennell!” she was saying to herself—“I ought to know that name.” It was very dark on the road, and there was nothing visible from the window but the red glow from Betty’s lodge, where the door stood innocently open; but notwithstanding, Mrs. Preston went and looked out, as if the scene could have thrown any enlightenment upon her thoughts. She was excited about it, unimportant though the matter seemed. What if perhaps she might be on the trace of friends—people who would be good to Pamela? There was once a Fennell—Tom Fennell—who ages ago—No doubt he was dead and gone, with every body who had belonged to her far-off early life. But standing there in the darkness, pressing her withered cheek close to the window, as if there was something to be

seen outside, it went through the old woman's mind how, perhaps, if she had chosen Tom Fennell instead of the other one, things might have been different. If any life could ever have been real to the liver of it, surely her hard life, her many toils and sufferings, must have been such sure fact as to leave no room for fancy. Yet so truly, even to an unimaginative woman, was this fantastic existence such stuff as dreams are made of, that she stopped to think what the difference might have been if—She was nearly sixty, worn even beyond her years, incapable of very much thinking; and yet she took a moment to herself ere she could join her child, and permitted herself this strange indulgence. When she descended the stairs again, still in the dark, going softly, and with a certain thrill of excitement, Mrs. Preston's mind was full of dreams more unreal than those which Pamela pondered before the fire. She was forming visions of a sweet, kind, fair old lady who would be good to Pamela. Already her heart was lighter for the thought. If she should be ill or feel any signs of breaking up, what a comfort to mount into the carrier's cart and go and commend her child to such a protector! If she had conceived at once the plan of marrying Pamela to Mr. John, and making her at one sweep mistress of Brownlows, the idea would have been wisdom itself in comparison; but she did not know that, poor soul! She came down with a visionary glow about her heart, the secret of which she told to no one, and roused up Pamela, who looked half dazed and dazzled as she drew her hands from before her face and rose from the rug she had been seated on. Pamela had been dreaming, but not more than her mother. She almost looked as if she had been sleeping as she opened her dazzled eyes. There are times when one sees clearer with one's eyes closed. The child had been looking at that picture of hers so long that she felt guilty when her mother woke her up. She had a kind of shamefaced consciousness, Mr. John having been so long about, that her mother must find his presence out—not knowing that her mother was preoccupied and full of her own imaginations too. But they did not say any thing to each other about their dreams. They dropped into silence, each over her work, as people are so ready to do who have something to think of. Pamela's little field of imagination was limited, and did not carry her much beyond the encounters of to-day; but Mrs. Preston bent her head over her sewing with many an old scene coming up in her mind. She remembered the day when Tom Fennell "spoke" to her first, as vividly in all its particulars as Pamela recollected Jack Brownlow's looks as he stood at the door. How strange if it should be the same Fennells! if Pamela's new friends should be related to her old one—if this lady at Masterton should be the woman in all the world pointed out by Providence to succor her darling. Poor Mrs. Preston uttered praises to Providence unawares—she seemed to see the blessed yet crooked ways by which she had been drawn to such a discovery. Her heart accepted it as a plan long ago concerted in heaven for her help when she was most helpless, to surprise her, as it were, with the infinite thought taken for her, and tender kindness. These were the feelings that rose and swelled in her mind and went on from step to step of farther certainty. One thing was very confusing, it is true; but still when a woman is in such a state of mind, she can swallow a good many confusing particulars. It was to make out what could be the special relationship (taking it for granted that there was a relationship) between Tom Fennell and this old lady. She could not well have been his mother; perhaps his wife—his widow! This was scarcely a palatable thought, but still she swallowed it—swallowed it, and preferred to think of something else, and permitted the matter to fall back into its former uncertainty. What did it matter about particulars when Providence had been so good to her? Dying itself would be little if she could but make sure of friends for Pamela. She sang, as it were, a "Nunc dimittis" in her soul.

Thus the acquaintance began between the young people at the great house and little Pamela in Mrs. Swayne's cottage. It was not an acquaintance which was likely to arise in the ordinary course of affairs, and naturally it called forth a little comment. Probably, had the mother been living, as Mrs. Preston wished, Sara would never have formed so unequal a friendship; but it was immaterial to Mr. Brownlow, who heard his child talk of her companion, and was pleased to think she was pleased: prepossessed as he was by the pretty face at the window which so often gleamed out upon him, he himself, though he scarcely saw any more of her than that passing glimpse in the morning, was taken

with a certain fondness for the lovely little girl. He no longer said she was like Sara; she was like a face he had seen somewhere, he said, and he never failed to look out for her, and after a while gave her a friendly nod as he passed. It was more difficult to find out what were Jack's sentiments. He too saw a great deal of the little stranger, but it was in, of course, an accidental way. He used to happen to be in the avenue when she was coming or going. He happened to be in the park now and then when the spring brightened, and Pamela was able to take long walks. These things of course were pure accident, and he made no particular mention of them. As for Pamela herself, she would say, "I met Mr. John," in her innocent way, but that was about all. It is true that Mrs. Swayne in the cottage and Betty at the lodge both kept very close watch on the young people's proceedings. If these two had met at the other end of the parish, Betty, notwithstanding her rheumatics, would have managed to know it. But the only one who was aware of this scrutiny was Jack. Thus the spring came on, and the days grew pleasant. It was pleasant for them all, as the buds opened and the great chestnut-blossoms began to rise in milky spires among the big half folded leaves. Even Mrs. Preston opened and smoothed out, and took to white caps and collars, and felt as if she might live till Pamela was five-and-twenty. Five-and-twenty is not a great age, but it is less helpless than seventeen, and in a last extremity there was always Mrs. Fennell in Masterton who could be appealed to. Sometimes even the two homely sentinels who watched over Pamela would relax in those lingering spring nights. Old Betty, though she was worldly-minded, was yet a motherly kind of old woman; her heart smote her when she looked in Pamela's face. "And why shouldn't he be honest and true, and marry a pretty lass if it was his fancy?" Betty would say. But as for Mrs. Swayne, she thanked Providence she had been in temptation herself, and knew what that sort meant; which was much more than any of the others did, up to this moment—Jack, probably, least of all.

CHAPTER XIII. A CRISIS

All this time affairs had been going on very quietly in the office. Mr. Brownlow came and went every day, and Jack when it suited him, and business went on as usual. As for young Powys, he had turned out an admirable clerk. Nothing could be more punctual, more painstaking than he was. Mr. Wrinkell, the head-clerk, was so pleased, that he invited him to tea and chapel on Sunday, which was an offer the stranger had not despised. And it was known that he had taken a little tiny house in the outskirts, not the Dewsbury way, but at the other side of the town—a little house with a garden, where he had been seen planting primroses, to the great amusement of the other clerks. They had tried jeers, but the jeers were not witty, and Powys's patience was found to have limits. And he was so big and strong, and looked so completely as if he meant it, that the merriment soon came to an end and he was allowed to take his own way. They said he was currying favor with old Wrinkell; they said he was trying to humbug the governor; they said he had his pleasures his own way, and kept close about them. But all these arrows did not touch the junior clerk. Mr. Brownlow watched the young man out of his private office with the most anxious mixture of feelings. Wrinkell himself, though he was of thirty years' standing in the office, and his employer and he had been youths together, did not occupy nearly so much room in Mr. Brownlow's favor as this "new fellow." He took a livelier interest even in the papers that had come through his *protégé's* hands. "This is Powys's work, is it?" he would say, as he looked at the fair sheets which cost other people so much trouble. Powys did his work very well for one thing, but that did not explain it. Mr. Brownlow got into a way of drawing back the curtain which covered the glass partition between his own room and the outer office. He would draw back this curtain, accidentally as it were, the least in the world, and cast his eyes now and then on the desk at which the young man sat. He thought sometimes it was a pity to keep him there, a broad-shouldered, deep-chested fellow like that, at a desk, and consulted with himself whether he could not make some partial explanation to him, and advance him some money and send him off to a farm in his native Canada. It would be better for Powys, and it would be better for Brownlows. But he had not the courage to take such a direct step. Many a thought was in his mind as he sat glancing by turns from the side of the curtain—compunctions and self-reproaches now and then, but chiefly, it must be confessed, more selfish thoughts. Business went on just the same, but yet it cannot be denied that an occasional terror seized Mr. Wrinkell's spirit that his principal's mind was "beginning to go." "And young John never was fit to hold the candle to him," Mr. Wrinkell said, in those moments of privacy when he confided his cares to the wife of his bosom. "When our Mr. Brownlow goes, the business will go, you'll see that. His opinion on that Waterworks case was not so clear as it used to be—not near so clear as it used to be; he'll sit for an hour at a time and never put pen to paper. He is but a young man yet, for his time of life, but I'm afraid he's beginning to go; and when he goes, the business will go. You'll see young John, with his fine notions, will never keep it up for a year."

"Well, Thomas, never mind," said Mrs. Wrinkell; "It's sure to last out our time."

"Ah! that's just like women," said her husband—"after me the deluge; but I can tell you I do mind." He had the same opinion of women as Mrs. Swayne had of men, and it sprung from personal superiority in both cases, which is stronger than theory. But still he did let himself be comforted by the feminine suggestion. "There will be peace in my time;" this was the judgment formed by his head clerk, who knew so well of Mr. Brownlow's altered ways.

All this went on for some months after the admission of young Powys, and then all at once there was a change. The change made itself apparent in the Canadian, to begin with. At first it was only like a shadow creeping over the young man; then by degrees the difference grew more and more marked. He ceased to be held up as a model by the sorrowing Wrinkell; he ceased to be an example

of the punctual and accurate. His eyes began to be red and bloodshot in the mornings; he looked weary, heavy, languid—sick of work, and sick of every thing. Evidently he had taken to bad ways. So all his companions in the office concluded, not without satisfaction. Mr. Wrinkell made up his mind to it sorrowing. “I’ve seen many go, but I thought the root of the matter was in him,” he said to his domestic counselor. “Well, Thomas, we did our best for him,” that sympathetic woman replied. It was not every body that Mr. Wrinkell would have asked to chapel and tea. And this was how his kindness was to be rewarded. As for Mr. Brownlow, when he awoke to a sense of the change, it had a very strange effect upon him. He had a distinct impression of pain, for he liked the lad, about whom he knew so much more than any body else knew. And in the midst of his pain there came a guilty throb of satisfaction, which woke him thoroughly up, and made him ask himself sternly what this all meant. Was he glad to see the young man go wrong because he stood in his own miserable selfish way? This was what a few months of such a secret had brought him to. It was now April, and in November the year would be out, and all the danger over. Once more, and always with a deeper impatience, he longed for this moment. It seemed to him, notwithstanding his matured and steady intellect, that if that day had but come, if that hour were but attained, his natural freedom would come back to him. If he had been consulted about his own case, he would have seen through this vain supposition; but it *was* his own case, and he did not see through it. Meanwhile, in the interval, what was he to do? He drew his curtain aside, and sat and watched the changed looks of this unfortunate boy. He had begun so innocently and well, was he to be allowed to end badly, like so many? Had not he himself, in receiving the lad, and trading as it were on his ignorance, taken on himself something of the responsibility? He sat thinking of this when he ought to have been thinking of other people’s business. There was not one of all his clients whose affairs were so complicated and engrossing as his own. He was more perplexed and beaten about in his own mind than any of the people who came to ask him for his advice. Oh, the sounding nothings they would bring before him; he who was engaged in personal conflict with the very first principles of honor and rectitude. Was he to let the lad perish? was he to interfere? What was he to do?

At the very height of his perplexity, one of those April days, Mr. Brownlow was very late at the office. Not exactly on account of the confusion of mind he was in, and yet because the intrusion of this personal subject had retarded him in his business. He was there after all the clerks were gone—even Mr. Wrinkell. He had watched young Powys go away from that very window where he had once watched Bessie Fennell passing in her thin cloak. The young man went off by himself, taking the contrary road, as Mr. Brownlow knew, from that which led to his home. He looked ill—he looked unhappy; and his employer watched him with a sickening at his heart. Was it his fault? and could he mend it or stop the evil, even were he to make up his mind to try? After that he had more than an hour’s work, and sent off the dogcart to wait for him at the Green Man in the market-place. It was very quiet in the office when all his people were gone. As he sat working, there came over him memories of other times when he had worked like this, when his mother would come stealing down to him from the rooms above; when Bessie would come with her work to sit by him as he finished his. Strange to think that neither Bessie nor his mother were up stairs now; strange to believe, when you came to think of it, that there was nobody there—that the house was vacant and his home elsewhere, and all his own generation, his own contemporaries, cut off from his side. These ideas floated through his mind as he worked, but they did not impair the soundness of the work, as some other thoughts did. His mind was not beginning to go, though Mr. Wrinkell thought so. It was even a wonder to himself how quickly, how clearly he got through it; how fit he was for work yet, though the world was so changed. He had finished while it was still good daylight, and put away his papers and buttoned his coat, and set out in an easy way. There was nothing particular to hurry him. There was Jack’s mare, which flew rather than trotted, to take him home. Thus thinking, he went out, drawing on his gloves. Opposite him, as he opened the door, the sky was glowing in the west after the sunset, and he could see a woman’s figure against it passing slowly, as if waiting for some one. Before he could

shut the door, it became evident that it was for himself that she was waiting. Somehow he divined who she was before she said a word. A comely, elderly, motherly woman, dressed like a farmer's or a shopkeeper's wife, in the days when people dressed like their condition. She had a large figured shawl on, and a bonnet with black ribbons. And he knew she was Powys's mother—the woman on earth he most dreaded, come to speak to him about her son.

"Mr. Brownlow," she said, coming up to him with a nervous movement of her hands, "I've been waiting about this hour not to be troublesome. Oh! could you let me speak to you ten minutes? I won't keep you. Oh, please, if I might speak to you five minutes *now*."

"Surely," he said; he was not quite sure if it was audible, but he said it with his lips. And he went in and held the door open for her. Then, though he never could tell why, he took her up stairs—not to the office which he had just closed, but up to the long silent drawing-room which he had not entered for years. There came upon his mind an impression that Bessie was surely about somewhere, to come and stand by him, if he could only call her. But in the first place he had to do with his guest. He gave her a chair and made her sit down, and stood before her. "Tell me how I can serve you," he said. It seemed to him like a dream, and he could not understand it. Would she tell her fatal name and make her claim, and end it all at once? That was folly. But still it seemed somehow natural to think that this was why she had come. The woman he had hunted for far and wide—whom he had then neglected and thought no more of—whom lately he had woke up to such horror and fear of, his greatest danger, his worst enemy—was it she who was sitting so humbly before him now?

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