# YONGE CHARLOTTE MARY

## LOVE AND LIFE: AN OLD STORY IN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY COSTUME

Charlotte Yonge

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**Yonge C.**

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# Содержание

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## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

The first edition of this tale was put forth without explaining the old fable on which it was founded—a fable recurring again and again in fairy myths, though not traceable in the classic world till a very late period, when it appeared among the tales of Apuleius, of the province of Africa, sometimes called the earliest novelist. There are, however, fragments of the same story in the popular tales of all countries, so that it is probable that Apuleius availed himself of an early form of one of these. They are to be found from India to Scandinavia, adapted to the manners and fancy of every country in turn, *Beauty and the Beast* and the *Black Bull of Norroway* are the most familiar forms of the tale, and it seemed to me one of those legends of such universal property that it was quite fair to put it into 18th century English costume.

Some have seen in it a remnant of the custom of some barbarous tribes, that the wife should not behold her husband for a year after marriage, and to this the Indian versions lend themselves; but Apuleius himself either found it, or adapted it to the idea of the Soul (the Life) awakened by Love, grasping too soon and impatiently, then losing it, and, unable to rest, struggling on through severe toils and labours till her hopes are crowned even at the gates of death. Psyche, the soul or life, whose emblem is the butterfly, thus even in heathen philosophy strained towards the higher Love, just glimpsed at for a while.

Christians gave a higher meaning to the fable, and saw in it the Soul, or the Church, to whom her Bridegroom has been for a while made known, striving after Him through many trials, to be made one with Him after passing through Death. The Spanish poet Calderon made it the theme of two sacred dramas, in which the lesson of Faith, not Sight, was taught, with special reference to the Holy Eucharist.

English poetry has, however, only taken up its simple classical aspect. In the early part of the century, Mrs. Tighe wrote a poem in Spenserian stanza, called *Psyche*, which was much admired at the time; and Mr. Morris has more lately sung the story in his *Earthly Paradise*. This must be my excuse for supposing the outline of the tale to be familiar to most readers.

The fable is briefly thus:—

Venus was jealous of the beauty of a maiden named Psyche, the youngest of three daughters of a king. She sent misery on the land and family, and caused an oracle to declare that the only remedy was to deck his youngest daughter as a bride, and leave her in a lonely place to become the prey of a monster. Cupid was commissioned by his mother to destroy her. He is here represented not as a child, but as a youth, who on seeing Psyche's charms, became enamoured of her, and resolved to save her from his mother and make her his own. He therefore caused Zephyr to transport her to a palace where everything delightful and valuable was at her service, feasts spread, music playing, all her wishes fulfilled, but all by invisible hands. At night in the dark, she was conscious of a presence who called himself her husband, showed the fondest affection for her, and promised her all sorts of glory and bliss, if she would be patient and obedient for a time.

This lasted till yearnings awoke to see her family. She obtained consent with much difficulty and many warnings. Then the splendour in which she lived excited the jealousy of her sisters, and they persuaded her that her visitor was really the monster who would deceive her and devour her. They thus induced her to accept a lamp with which to gaze on him when asleep. She obeyed them,

then beholding the exquisite beauty of the sleeping god of love, she hung over him in rapture till a drop of the hot oil fell on his shoulder and awoke him. He sprang up, sorrowfully reproached her with having ruined herself and him, and flew away, letting her fall as she clung to him.

The palace was broken up, the wrath of Venus pursued her; Ceres and all the other deities chased her from their temples; even when she would have drowned herself, the river god took her in his arms, and laid her on the bank. Only Pan had pity on her, and counselled her to submit to Venus, and do her bidding implicitly as the only hope of regaining her lost husband.

Venus spurned her at first, and then made her a slave, setting her first to sort a huge heap of every kind of grain in a single day. The ants, secretly commanded by Cupid, did this for her. Next, she was to get a lock of golden wool from a ram feeding in a valley closed in by inaccessible rocks; but this was procured for her by an eagle; and lastly, Venus, declaring that her own beauty had been impaired by attendance on her injured son, commanded Psyche to visit the Infernal Regions and obtain from Proserpine a closed box of cosmetic which was on no account to be opened. Psyche thought death alone could bring her to these realms, and was about to throw herself from a tower, when a voice instructed her how to enter a cavern, and propitiate Cerberus with cakes after the approved fashion.

She thus reached Proserpine's throne, and obtained the casket, but when she had again reached the earth, she reflected that if Venus's beauty were impaired by anxiety, her own must have suffered far more; and the prohibition having of course been only intended to stimulate her curiosity, she opened the casket, out of which came the baneful fumes of Death! Just, however, as she fell down overpowered, her husband, who had been shut up by Venus, came to the rescue, and finding himself unable to restore her, cried aloud to Jupiter, who heard his prayer, reanimated Psyche, and gave her a place among the gods.

# CHAPTER I. A SYLLABUB PARTY

Oft had I shadowed such a group
  Of beauties that were born
In teacup times of hood and hoop,
  And when the patch was worn;
And legs and arms with love-knots gay.
  About me leaped and laughed
The modish Cupid of the day,
  And shrilled his tinselled shaft.—Tennyson.

If times differ, human nature and national character vary but little; and thus, in looking back on former times, we are by turns startled by what is curiously like, and curiously unlike, our own sayings and doings.

The feelings of a retired officer of the nineteenth century expecting the return of his daughters from the first gaiety of the youngest darling, are probably not dissimilar to those of Major Delavie, in the earlier half of the seventeen hundreds, as he sat in the deep bay window of his bed-room; though he wore a green velvet nightcap; and his whole provision of mental food consisted of half a dozen worn numbers of the *Tatler*, and a *Gazette* a fortnight old. The chair on which he sat was elbowed, and made easy with cushions and pillows, but that on which his lame foot rested was stiff and angular. The cushion was exquisitely worked in chain-stich, as were the quilt and curtains of the great four-post bed, and the only carpeting consisted of three or four narrow strips of wool-work. The walls were plain plaster, white-washed, and wholly undecorated, except that the mantelpiece was carved with the hideous caryatides of the early Stewart days, and over it were suspended a long cavalry sabre, and the accompanying spurs and pistols; above them the miniature of an exquisitely lovely woman, with a white rose in her hair and a white favour on her breast.

The window was a deep one projecting far into the narrow garden below, for in truth the place was one of those old manor houses which their wealthy owners were fast deserting in favour of new specimens of classical architecture as understood by Louis XIV., and the room in which the Major sat was one of the few kept in habitable repair. The garden was rich with white pinks, peonies, lilies of the valley, and early roses, and there was a flagged path down the centre, between the front door and a wicket-gate into a long lane bordered with hawthorn hedges, the blossoms beginning to blush with the advance of the season. Beyond, rose dimly the spires and towers of a cathedral town, one of those county capitals to which the provincial magnates were wont to resort during the winter, keeping a mansion there for the purpose, and providing entertainment for the gentry of the place and neighbourhood.

Twilight was setting in when the Major began to catch glimpses of the laced hats of coachman and footmen over the hedges, a lumbering made itself heard, and by and by the vehicle halted at the gate. Such a coach! It was only the second best, and the glories of its landscape—painted sides were somewhat dimmed, the green and silver of the fittings a little tarnished to a critical eye; yet it was a splendid article, commodious and capacious, though ill-provided with air and light. However, nobody cared for stuffiness, certainly not the three young ladies, who, fan in hand, came tripping down the steps that were unrolled for them. The eldest paused to administer a fee to their entertainer's servants who had brought them home, and the coach rolled on to dispose of the remainder of the freight.

The father waved greetings from one window, a rosy little audacious figure in a night-dress peeped out furtively from another, and the house-door was opened by a tall old soldier-servant, stiff

as a ramrod, with hair tightly tied and plastered up into a queue, and a blue and brown livery which sat like a uniform.

"Well, young ladies," he said, "I hope you enjoyed yourselves."

"Vastly, thank you, Corporal Palmer. And how has it been with my father in our absence?"

"Purely, Miss Harriet. He relished the Friar's chicken that Miss Delavie left for him, and he amused himself for an hour with Master Eugene, after which he did me the honour to play two plays at backgammon."

"I hope," said the eldest sister, coming up, "that the little rogue whom I saw peeping from the window has not been troublesome."

"He has been as good as gold, madam. He played in master's room till Nannerl called him to his bed, when he went at once, 'true to his orders,' says the master. 'A fine soldier he will make,' says I to my master."

Therewith the sisters mounted the uncarpeted but well-polished oak stair, knocked at the father's door, and entered one by one, each dropping her curtsey, and, though the eldest was five-and-twenty, neither speaking nor sitting till they were greeted with a hearty, "Come, my young maids, sit you down and tell your old father your gay doings."

The eldest took the only unoccupied chair, while the other two placed themselves on the window-seat, all bolt upright, with both little high heels on the floor, in none of the easy attitudes of damsels of later date, talking over a party. All three were complete gentlewomen in air and manners, though Betty had high cheek-bones, a large nose, rough complexion, and red hair, and her countenance was more loveable and trustworthy than symmetrical. The dainty decorations of youth looked grotesque upon her, and she was so well aware of the fact as to put on no more than was absolutely essential to a lady of birth and breeding. Harriet (pronounced Hawyot), the next in age, had a small well-set head, a pretty neck, and fine dark eyes, but the small-pox had made havoc of her bloom, and left its traces on cheek and brow. The wreck of her beauty had given her a discontented, fretful expression, which rendered her far less pleasing than honest, homely Betty, though she employed all the devices of the toilette to conceal the ravages of the malady and enhance her remaining advantages of shape and carriage.

There was an air of vexation about her as her father asked, "Well, how many conquests has my little Aurelia made?" She could not but recollect how triumphantly she had listened to the same inquiry after her own first appearance, scarcely three short years ago. Yet she grudged nothing to Aurelia, her junior by five years, who was for the first time arrayed as a full-grown belle, in a pale blue, tight-sleeved, long-waisted silk, open and looped up over a primrose skirt, embroidered by her own hands with tiny blue butterflies hovering over harebells. There were blue silk shoes, likewise home-made, with silver buckles, and the long mittens and deep lace ruffles were of Betty's fabrication. Even the dress itself had been cut by Harriet from old wedding hoards of their mother's, and made up after the last mode imported by Madam Churchill at the Deanery.

The only part of the equipment not of domestic handiwork was the structure on the head. The Carminster hairdresser had been making his rounds since daylight, taking his most distinguished customers last; and as the Misses Delavie were not high on the roll, Harriet and Aurelia had been under his hands at nine A.M. From that time till three, when the coach called for them, they had sat captive on low stools under a tent of table-cloth over tall chair-backs to keep the dust out of the frosted edifice constructed out of their rich dark hair, of the peculiar tint then called mouse-colour. Betty had refused to submit to this durance. "What sort of dinner would be on my father's table-cloth if I were to sit under one all day?" said she in answer to Harriet's representation of the fitness of things. "La, my dear, what matters it what an old scarecrow like me puts on?"

Old maidenhood set in much earlier in those days than at present; the sisters acquiesced, and Betty had run about as usual all the morning in her mob-cap, and chintz gown tucked through her

pocket-holes, and only at the last submitted her head to the manipulations of Corporal Palmer, who daily powdered his master's wig.

Strange and unnatural as was the whitening of the hair, it was effective in enhancing the beauty of Aurelia's dark arched brows, the soft brilliance of her large velvety brown eyes, and the exquisite carnation and white of her colouring. Her features were delicately chiselled, and her face had that peculiar fresh, innocent, soft, untouched bloom and undisturbed repose which form the special charm and glory of the first dawn of womanhood. Her little head was well poised on a slender neck, just now curving a little to one side with the fatigue of the hours during which it had sustained her headgear. This consisted of a tiny flat hat, fastened on by long pins, and adorned by a cluster of campanulas like those on her dress, with a similar blue butterfly on an invisible wire above them, the dainty handiwork of Harriet.

The inquiry about conquests was a matter of course after a young lady's first party, but Aurelia looked too childish for it, and Betty made haste to reply.

"Aurelia was a very good girl. No one could have curtsied or bridled more prettily when we paid our respects to my Lady Herries and Mrs. Churchill, and the Dean highly commended her dancing."

"You danced? Fine doings! I thought you were merely invited to look on at the game at bowls. Who had the best of the match?"

"The first game was won by Canon Boltby, the second by the Dean," said Betty; "but when they would have played the conqueror, Lady Herries interfered and said the gentlemen had kept the field long enough, and now it was our turn. So a cow was driven on the bowling-green, with a bell round her neck and pink ribbons on her horns."

"A cow! What will they have next?"

"They say 'tis all the mode in London," interposed Harriet.

"Pray was the cow to instruct you in dancing?" continued the Major.

"No, sir," said Aurelia, whom he had addressed; "she was to be milked into the bowl of syllabub."

This was received with a great "Ho! ho!" and a demand who was to act as milker.

"That was the best of it," said Aurelia. "Soon came Miss Herries in a straw hat, and the prettiest green petticoat under a white gown and apron, as a dairy-maid, but the cow would not stand still, for all the man who led her kept scolding her and saying 'Coop! coop!' No sooner had Miss Herries seated herself on the stool than Moolly swerved away, and it was a mercy that the fine china bowl escaped. Every one was laughing, and poor Miss Herries was ready to cry, when forth steps my sister, coaxes the cow, bids the man lend his apron, sits down on the stool, and has the bowl frothing in a moment."

"I would not have done so for worlds," said Harriet; "I dreaded every moment to be asked where Miss Delavie learnt to be a milk-maid."

"You were welcome to reply, in her own yard," said Betty. "You may thank me for your syllabub."

"Which, after all, you forbade poor Aura to taste!"

"Assuredly. I was not going to have her turn sick on my hands. She may think herself beholden to me for her dance with that fine young beau. Who was he, Aura?"

"How now!" said the Major, in a tone of banter, while Harriet indulged in a suppressed giggle. "You let Aura dance with a stranger! Where was your circumspection, Mrs. Betty?" Aurelia coloured to the roots of her hair and faltered, "It was Lady Herries who presented him."

"Yes, the child is not to blame," said Betty; "I left her in charge of Mrs. Churchill while I went to wash my hands after milking the cow, which these fine folk seemed to suppose could be done without soiling a finger."

"That's the way with Chloe and Phyllida in Arcadia," said her father.

"But not here," said Betty. "In the house, I was detained a little while, for the housekeeper wanted me to explain my recipe for taking out the grease spots."

"A little while, sister?" said Harriet. "It was through the dancing of three minuets, and the country dance had long been begun."

"I was too busy to heed the time," said Betty, "for I obtained the recipe for those delicious almond-cakes, and showed Mrs. Waldron the Vienna mode of clearing coffee. When I came back the fiddles were playing, and Aurelia going down the middle with a young gentleman in a scarlet coat. Poor little Robert Rowe was too bashful to find a partner, though he longed to dance; so I made another couple with him, and thus missed further speech, save that as we took our leave, both Sir George and the Dean complimented me, and said what there is no occasion to repeat just now, sir, when I ought to be fetching your supper."

"Ha! Is it too flattering for little Aura?" asked her father. "Come, never spare. She will hear worse than that in her day, I'll warrant."

"It was merely," said Betty, reluctantly, "that the Dean called her the star of the evening, and declared that her dancing equalled her face."

"Well said of his reverence! And his honour the baronet, what said he?"

"He said, sir, that so comely and debonnaire a couple had not been seen in these parts since you came home from Flanders and led off the assize ball with Mistress Urania Delavie."

"There, Aura, 'tis my turn to blush!" cried the Major, comically hiding his face behind Betty's fan. "But all this time you have never told me who was this young spark."

"That I cannot tell, sir," returned Betty. "We were sent home in the coach with Mistress Duckworth and her daughters, who talked so incessantly that we could not open our lips. Who was he, Aura?"

"My Lady Herries only presented him as Sir Amyas, sister," replied Aurelia.

"Sir Amyas!" cried her auditors, all together.

"Nothing more," said Aurelia. "Indeed she made as though he and I must be acquainted, and I suppose that she took me for Harriet, but I knew not how to explain."

"No doubt," said Harriet. "I was sick of the music and folly, and had retired to the summerhouse with Peggy Duckworth, who had brought a sweet sonnet of Mr. Ambrose Phillips, 'Defying Cupid.'"

Her father burst into a chuckling laugh, much to her mortification, though she would not seem to understand it, and Betty took up the moral.

"Sir Amyas! Are you positive that you caught the name, child?"

"I thought so, sister," said Aurelia, with the insecurity produced by such cross-questioning; "but I may have been mistaken, since, of course, the true Sir Amyas Belamour would never be here without my father's knowledge."

"Nor is there any other of the name," said her father, "except that melancholic uncle of his who never leaves his dark chamber."

"Depend upon it," said Harriet, "Lady Herries said Sir Ambrose. No doubt it was Sir Ambrose Watford."

"Nay, Harriet, I demur to that," said her father drolly. "I flatter myself I was a more personable youth than to be likened to Watford with his swollen nose. What like was your cavalier, Aura?"

"Indeed, sir, I cannot describe him. I was so much terrified lest he should speak to me that I had much ado to mind my steps. I know he had white gloves and diamond shoe-buckles, and that his feet moved by no means like those of Sir Ambrose."

"Aura is a modest child, and does credit to her breeding," said Betty. "Thus much I saw, that the young gentleman was tall and personable enough to bear comparison even to you, sir, not more than nineteen or twenty years of age, in a laced scarlet uniform, as I think, of the Dragoon Guards, and with a little powder, but not enough to disguise that his hair was entire gold."

"That all points to his being indeed young Belamour," said her father; "age, military appearance, and all—I wonder what this portends!"

"What a disaster!" exclaimed Harriet, "that my sister and I should have been out of the way, and only a chit like Aura be there to be presented to him."

"If young ladies *will* defy Cupid," began her father;—but at that moment Corporal Palmer knocked at the door, bringing a basin of soup for his master, and announcing "Supper is served, young ladies."

Each of the three bent her knee to receive her father's blessing and kiss, then curtseying at the door, departed, Betty lingering behind her two juniors to see her father taste his soup and to make sure that he relished it.

# CHAPTER II. THE HOUSE OF DELAVIE

All his Paphian mother fear;
Empress! all thy sway revere!

*EURIPEDES (Anstice).*

The parlour where the supper was laid was oak panelled, but painted white. Like a little island in the vast polished slippery floor lay a square much-worn carpet, just big enough to accommodate a moderate-sized table and the surrounding high-backed chairs. There was a tent-stitch rug before the Dutch-tiled fireplace, and on the walls hung two framed prints,—one representing the stately and graceful Duke of Marlborough; the other, the small, dark, pinched, but fiery Prince Eugene. On the spotless white cloth was spread a frugal meal of bread, butter, cheese, and lettuce; a jug of milk, another of water, and a bottle of cowslip wine; for the habits of the family were more than usually frugal and abstemious.

Frugality and health alike obliged Major Delavie to observe a careful regimen. He had served in all Marlborough's campaigns, and had afterwards entered the Austrian army, and fought in the Turkish war, until he had been disabled before Belgrade by a terrible wound, of which he still felt the effects. Returning home with his wife, the daughter of a Jacobite exile, he had become a kind of agent in managing the family estate for his cousin the heiress, Lady Belamour, who allowed him to live rent-free in this ruinous old Manor-house, the cradle of the family.

This was all that Harriet and Aurelia knew. The latter had been born at the Manor, and young girls, if not brought extremely forward, were treated like children; but Elizabeth, the eldest of the family, who could remember Vienna, was so much the companion and confidante of her father, that she was more on the level of a mother than a sister to her juniors.

"Then you think Aurelia's beau was really Sir Amyas Belamour," said Harriet, as they sat down to supper.

"So it appears," said Betty, gravely.

"Do you think he will come hither, sister? I would give the world to see him," continued Harriet.

"He said something of hoping for better acquaintance," softly put in Aurelia.

"Oh, did he so?" cried Harriet. "For demure as you are, Miss Aura, I fancy you looked a little above the diamond shoe-buckles!"

"Fie, Harriet!" exclaimed Betty; "I will not have the child tormented. He ought to come and pay his respects to my father."

"Have you ever seen my Lady?" asked Aurelia.

"That have I, Miss Aurelia," interposed Corporal Palmer, "and a rare piece of beauty she would be, if one could forget the saying 'handsome is as handsome does.'"

"I never knew what she has done," said Aurelia.

"'Tis a long story," hastily said Betty, "too long to tell at table. I must make haste to prepare the poultice for my father."

She quickly broke up the supper party, and the two younger sisters repaired to their chamber, both conscious of having been repressed; the one feeling injured, the other rebuked for forwardness and curiosity. The three sisters shared one long low room with a large light closet at each end. One of these was sacred to powder, the other was Betty's private property. Harriet had a little white bed to herself, Betty and Aurelia nightly climbed into a lofty and solemn structure curtained with ancient figured damask. Each had her own toilette-table and a press for her clothes, where she contrived to stow them in a wonderfully small space.

Harriet and Aurelia had divested themselves of their finery before Betty came in, and they assisted her operations, Harriet preferring a complaint that she never would tell them anything.

"I have no objection to tell you at fitting times," said Betty, "but not with Palmer putting in his word. You should have discretion, Harriet."

"The Dean's servants never speak when they are waiting at table," said Harriet with a pout.

"But I'll warrant them to hear!" retorted Betty.

"And I had rather have our dear old honest corporal than a dozen of those fine lackeys," said Aurelia. "But you will tell us the story like a good sister, while we brush the powder out of our hair."

They put on powdering gowns, after releasing themselves from the armour of their stays, and were at last at ease, each seated on a wooden chair in the powdering closet, brush in hand, with a cloud of white dust flying round, and the true colour of the hair beginning to appear.

"Then it is indeed true that My Lady is one of the greatest beauties of Queen Caroline's Court, if not the greatest?" said Harriet.

"Truly she is," said Betty, "and though in full maturity, she preserves the splendour of her prime."

"Tell us more particularly," said Aurelia; "can she be more lovely than our dear mamma?"

"No, indeed! lovely was never the word for her, to my mind," said Betty; "her face always seemed to me more like that of one of the marble statues I remember at Vienna; perfect, but clear, cold, and hard. But I am no judge, for I did not love her, and in a child, admiration accompanies affection."

"What did Palmer mean by 'handsome is that handsome does'? Surely my father never was ill-treated by Lady Belamour?"

"Let me explain," said the elder sister. "The ancient custom and precedent of our family have always transmitted the estates to the male heir. But when Charles II. granted the patent of nobility to the first Baron Delavie, the barony was limited to the heirs male of his body, and out grandfather was only his brother. The last Lord had three sons, and one daughter, Urania, who alone survived him."

"I know all that from the monument," said Aurelia; "one was drowned while bathing, one died of spotted fever, and one was killed at the battle of Ramillies. How dreadful for the poor old father!"

"And there is no Lord Delavie now," said Harriet. "Why, since my Lady could not have the title, did it not come to our papa?"

"Because his father was not in the patent," said Betty. "However, it was thought that if he were married to Mistress Urania, there would be a fresh creation in their favour. So as soon as the last campaign was over, our father, who had always been a favourite at the great house, was sent for from the army, and given to understand that he was to conduct his courtship, with the cousin he had petted as a little child, as speedily as was decorous. However, in winter quarters at Tournai he had already pledged his faith to the daughter of a Scottish gentleman in the Austrian service. This engagement was viewed by the old Lord as a trifling folly, which might be set aside by the head of the family. He hinted that the proposed match was by no means disagreeable to his daughter, and scarcely credited his ears when his young kinsman declared his honour forbade him to break with Miss Murray."

"Dear father," ejaculated Aurelia, "so he gave up everything for her sake?"

"And never repented it!" said Betty.

"Now," said Harriet, "I understand why he entered the army."

"It was all he had to depend on," said Betty, "and he had been favourably noticed by Prince Eugene at the siege of Lisle, so that he easily obtained a commission. He believed that though it was in the power of the old Lord to dispose of part of his estates by will, yet that some of the land was entailed in the male line, so that there need not be many years of campaigning or poverty for his bride, even if her father never were restored to his Scottish property. As you know, our grandfather, Sir Archibald Murray, died for his loyalty in the rising of '15, and two years later our father received at Belgrade that terrible wound which closed his military career. Meantime, Urania had married Sir

Jovian Belamour, and Lord Delavie seemed to have forgotten my father's offence, and gave him the management of the estate, with this old house to live in, showing himself glad of the neighbourhood of a kinsman whom he could thoroughly trust. All went well till my Lady came to visit her father. Then all old offences were renewed. Lady Belamour treated my mother as a poor dependant. She, daughter to a noble line of pedigree far higher than that of the Delavies, might well return her haughty looks, and would not yield an inch, nor join in the general adulation. There were disputes about us children. Poor Archie was a most beautiful boy, and though you might not suppose it, I was a very pretty little girl, this nose of mine being then much more shapely than the little buttons which grow to fair proportions. On the other hand, the little Belamours were puny and sickly; indeed, as you know, this young Sir Amyas, who was not then born, is the only one of the whole family who has been reared. Then we had been carefully bred, could chatter French, recite poetry, make our bow and curtsey, bridle, and said Sir and Madam, while the poor little cousins who had been put out to nurse had no more manners than the calves and pigs. People were the more flattering to us because they expected soon to see my father in his Lordship's place; and on the other hand, officious tongues were not wanting to tell my Lady how Mrs. Delavie contrasted the two sets of children. Very bitter offence was taken; nor has my Lady ever truly forgiven, whatever our dear good father may believe. When the old Lord died, a will was found, bequeathing all his unentailed estates to his daughter, and this was of course strong presumption that he believed in the existence of a deed of entail; but none could ever be found, and the precedents were not held to establish the right."

"Did he leave my father nothing?" asked Harriet.

"He left him three hundred pounds and made him joint executor with Sir Jovian. There was no mention of this house, which was the original house of the family, the first Lord having built the Great House; and both my father and Sir Jovian were sure the Lord Delavie believed it would come to him; but no proofs were extant, and my Lady would only consent to his occupying it, as before, as her agent."

"I always knew we were victims to an injustice," said Harriet, "though I never understood the matter exactly."

"You were a mere child, and my father does not love to talk of it. He ceased to care much about the loss after our dear Archie died."

"Not for Eugene's sake?"

"Eugene was not born for two years after Archie's death. My dear mother had drooped from the time of the disappointment, blaming herself for having ruined my father, and scarce accepting comfort when he vowed that all was well lost for her sake. She reproached herself with having been proud and unconciliatory, though I doubt whether it made much difference. Then her spirit was altogether crushed by the loss of Archie, she never had another day's health. Eugene came to her like Ichabod to Phinehas' wife, and she was soon gone from us," said Betty, wiping away a tear.

"Leaving us a dear sister to be a mother to us," said Aurelia, raising her sweet face for a kiss.

Harriet pondered a little, and said, "My Lady is not at enmity with us, since my father keeps the house and agency."

"We should be reduced to poverty indeed without them," said Betty; "and Sir Jovian, an upright honourable man, the only person whom my Lady truly respected, insisted on his continuance. As long as my Lady regards his memory we are safe, but no one can trust to her caprice."

"She never comes here, nor disturbs my father."

"No, but she makes heavy calls on the estate, and is displeased if he refuses to overpress the tenants or hesitates to cut the timber."

"I have heard say," added Harriet, "that her debts in town and her losses at play drove her to accept her present husband, Mr. Wayland, a hideous old fellow, who had become vastly rich through some discovery about cannon."

"He is an honourable and upright man," said Betty. "I should have fewer anxieties if he had not been sent out to Gibraltar and Minorca to superintend the fortifications."

"Meantime my Lady makes the money fly, by the help of the gallant Colonel Mar," said Harriet lightly.

"Fie! Harriet!" returned the elder sister; "I have allowed you too far. My father calls Lady Belamour his commanding officer, and permits no scandal to be spoken of her."

"Any more than of Prince Eugene?" said Harriet, laughing.

"But oh! sister!" cried Aurelia, "let us stay a little longer. I have not half braided my hair, and I long to hear who is the gentleman of whom my father spoke as living in the dark."

"Mr. Amyas Belamour! Sir Jovian's brother! Ah! that is a sad story," replied Betty, "though I am not certain that I have it correctly, having only heard it discussed between my father and mother when I was a growing girl, sitting at my sampler. I think he was a barrister; I know he was a very fine gentleman and a man of parts, who had made the Grand Tour; for when he was staying at the Great House, he said my mother was the only person he met who could converse with him on the Old Masters, or any other subject of *virtu*, and that, being reported to my Lady, increased her bitterness all the more because Mr. Belamour was a friend of Mr. Addison and Sir Richard Steele, and had contributed some papers to the *Spectator*. He was making a good fortune in his profession, and had formed an engagement with a young lady in Hertfordshire, of a good old family, but one which had always been disliked by Lady Belamour. It is said, too, that Miss Sedhurst had been thought to have attracted one of my Lady's many admirers, and that the latter was determined not to see her rival become her sister-in-law, and probably with the same title, since Mr. Belamour was on the verge of obtaining knighthood. So, if she be not greatly belied, Lady Belamour plied all parties with her confidences, till she contrived to breed suspicion and jealousy on all sides, until finally Miss Sedhurst's brother, a crack-brained youth, offered such an insult to Mr. Belamour, that honour required a challenge. It was thought that as Mr. Belamour was the superior in age and position, the matter might have been composed, but the young man was fiery and hot tempered, and would neither retract nor apologise; and Mr. Belamour had been stung in his tenderest feeling. They fought with pistols, an innovation that, as you know, my father hates, as far more deadly and unskilful than the noble practice of fencing; and the result was that Mr. Sedhurst was shot dead, and Mr. Belamour received a severe wound in the head. The poor young lady, being always of a delicate constitution, fell into fits on hearing the news, an died in a few weeks. The unfortunate Mr. Belamour survives, but whether from injury to the brain, or from grief and remorse, he has never been able to endure either light or company, but has remained ever since in utter darkness and seclusion."

"Utter darkness! How dreadful!" cried Aurelia, shuddering.

"How long has this been, sister?" inquired Harriet.

"About nine years," said Betty. "The lamentable affair took place just before Sir Jovian's death, and the shock may have hastened it, for he had long been in a languishing state. It was the more unfortunate, since he had made Mr. Belamour sole personal guardian to his only surviving son, and appointed him, together with my father and another gentleman, trustee for the Belamour property; and there has been much difficulty in consequence of his being unable to act, or to do more than give his signature."

"Ah! sister, I wish you had not told me," said Aurelia. "I shall dream of the unfortunate gentleman all night. Nine years of utter darkness!"

"We know who is still child enough to hate darkness," said Harriet.

"Take care," said Betty. "You must make haste, or I shall leave you to it."

# CHAPTER III. AMONG THE COWSLIPS

The insect youth are on the wing,
Eager to taste the honeyed spring,
  And float amid the liquid noon,
Some lightly on the torrent skim,
Some show their gaily gilded trim,
  Quick glancing to the sun.—GRAY

Though hours were early, the morning meal was not served till so late as really to deserve the title of breakfast.

When the three sisters sat down at nine-o'clock, in mob caps, and the two younger in white dresses, all had been up at least two hours. Aurelia led forward little Eugene in a tailed red coat, long-breasted buff waistcoat, buff tights and knitted stockings, with a deep frilled collar under the flowing locks on his shoulders, in curls which emulated a wig. She had been helping him to prepare "his tasks" from the well-thumbed but strongly-bound books which had served poor Archie before him. They were deposited on the window-seat to wait till the bowls of bread and milk were discussed, since tea and coffee were only a special afternoon treat not considered as wholesome for children; so that Aurelia had only just been promoted to them, along with powder and fan.

Harriet wore her favourite pistachio ribbon round her cap and as a breast-knot, and her cheeks bore token of one of the various washes with which she was always striving to regain the smoothness of her complexion. Knowing what this betokened, an elder-sisterly instinct of caution actuated Betty to remind her juniors of an engagement made with Dame Jewel of the upland farm for the exchange of a setting of white duck's eggs for one of five-toed fowls, and to request them to carry the basket.

Eugene danced on his chair and begged to be of the party; but Harriet pouted, and asked why the "odd boy" could not be sent.

"Because, as you very well know, if he did not break, he would addle, every egg in the basket.

"There can be no need to go to-day."

"The speckled hen is clocking to brood, and she is the best mother in the yard. Besides, it is time that the cowslip wine were made, and I will give you some bread and cheese and gingerbread for noonchin, so that you may fill your baskets in the meadows before they are laid up for grass. Mrs. Jewel will give you a drink of milk."

"O let me go, sister!" pleaded Eugene. "She gives us bread and honey! And I want to hear the lapwings in the meadows cry pee-wit."

"We shall have you falling into the river," said Harriet, rather fretfully.

"No, indeed! If you fall in, I will pull you out. Young maids should not run about the country without a gentleman to take care of them. Should they, sister?" cried the doughty seven years' old champion.

"Who taught you that, sir?" asked Betty, trying to keep her countenance.

"I heard Mrs. Churchill say so to my papa," returned the boy. "So now, there's a good sister. Do pray let me go!"

"If you say your tasks well, and will promise to be obedient to Harriet and to keep away from the river, and not touch the basket of eggs."

Eugene was ready for any number of promises; and Harriet, seeing there was no escape for her, went off with Aurelia to put on their little three-cornered muslin handkerchiefs and broad-brimmed straw hats, while Eugene repeated his tasks, namely, a fragment of the catechism, half a column of spelling from the *Universal Spelling-Book*, and (Betty's special pride) his portion of the *Orbis*

*Sensualium Pictus* of Johannes Amos Comenius, the wonderful vocabulary, with still more wonderful "cuts," that was then the small boys path to Latinity.

The Eagle, *Aquila*, the King of Birds, *Rex Avium*, looketh at the Sun, *intuetur Solem*, as indeed he could hardly avoid doing, since in the "cut" the sun was within a hairsbreath of his beak, while his claws were almost touching a crow (*Corvus*) perched on a dead horse, to exemplify how *Aves Raptores* fed on carrion.

Thanks to Aurelia's private assistance, Eugene knew his lessons well enough for his excitement not to make him stumble so often as to prevent Betty's pronouncing him a good boy, and dispensing with his copy, sum, piece, and reading, until the evening. These last were very tough affairs, the recitation being from Shakespeare, and the reading from the *Spectator*. There were no children's books, properly so called, except the ballads, chap-books brought round by pedlers, often far from edifying, and the plunge from the horn-book into general literature was, to say the least of it, bracing.

The Delavie family was cultivated for the time. French had been brought home as a familiar tongue, though *Telemaque*, Racine, and *Le Grand Cyrus* were the whole library in that language; and there was not another within thirty miles. On two days in the week the sisters became Mesdemoiselles Elisabeth, Henriette, and Aurelie, and conversed in French over their spinning, seams, lace, or embroidery; nor was Aurelia yet emancipated from reciting Racine on alternate days with Milton and Shakespeare.

Betty could likewise talk German with the old Austrian maid, Nannerl, who had followed the family from Vienna; but the accomplishment was not esteemed, and the dialect was barbarous. From the time of her mother's death, Betty had been a strict and careful, though kind, ruler to her sisters; and the long walk was a greater holiday to Aurelia than to Eugene, releasing her from her book and work, whereas he would soon have been trundling his hoop, and haunting the steps of Palmer, who was gardener as well as valet, butler, and a good deal besides, and moreover drilled his young master. Thus Eugene carried his head as erect as any Grenadier in the service, and was a thorough little gentleman in miniature; a perfect little beau, as his sisters loved to call the darling of their hearts and hopes.

Even Harriet could not be cross to him, though she made Aurelia carry the eggs, and indulged in sundry petulant whisks of the fan which she carried by way of parasol. "Now, why does Betty do this?" she exclaimed, as soon as they were out of hearing. "Is it to secure to herself the whole enjoyment of your beau?"

"You forget," said Aurelia. "You promised to fetch the eggs, when we met Mrs. Jewel jogging home from market on her old blind white horse last Saturday, because you said no eggs so shaken could ever be hatched."

"You demure chit!" exclaimed Harriet; "would you make me believe that you have no regrets for so charming a young gentleman, my Lady's son and our kinsman."

"If he spoke to me I should not know how to answer. And then you would blame my rudeness. Besides," she added, with childish sagacity, "he can be nothing but a fine London macaroni. Only think of the cowslips! A whole morning to make cowslip balls," she added with a little frisk. "I would not give one for all the macaronies in England, with their powder and their snuff-boxes. Faugh!"

"Ah, child, you will sing another note perhaps when it is too late," said her sister, with a sigh between envy and compassion.

It floated past Aurelia unheeded, as she danced up one side of a stile, and sprang clear down into a green park, jumped Eugene down after her by both hands, and exclaimed, "Harriet is in her vapours; come, let us have a race!"

She was instantly careering along like a white butterfly in the sunshine, flitting on as the child tried to catch her, among the snowy hawthorn bushes, or sinking down for very joy and delight among the bank of wild hyacinths. Life and free motion were joy and delight enough for that happy being with her childish heart, and the serious business of the day was all delight. There lay the rich meadows basking in the sun, and covered with short grass just beginning its summer growth, but with the

cowslips standing high above it; hanging down their rich clusters of soft, pure, delicately-scented bells, from their pinky stems over their pale crinkled leaves, interspersed here and there with the deep purple of the fool's orchis, and the pale brown quiver-grass shaking out its trembling awns on their invisible stems. No flower is more delightful to gather than the cowslip, fragrant as the breath of a cow. And Aurelia darted about, piling the golden heap in her basket with untiring enjoyment; then, producing a tape, called on Harriet, who had been working in a more leisurely fashion, to join her in making a cowslip ball, and charged Eugene not to nip off the heads too short.

The sweet, soft, golden globe was made, and even Harriet felt the delicious intoxication. The young things tossed it aloft, flung from one to the other, caught it, caressed it, buried their faces in it, and threw it back with shrieks of glee.

Suddenly Harriet checked her sister with a peremptory sign. She heard horse-hoofs in the lane, divided from the field by a hedge of pollard willows, so high that she had never thought of being overlooked, till the cessation of the trotting sound struck her; and looking round she saw that a horseman had halted at the gate, and was gazing at their sports. It was from the distance of a field, but this was enough to fill Harriet with dismay. She drew herself up in a moment, signing peremptorily to Aurelia, who was flying about, her hat off, her one long curl streaming behind as she darted hither and thither, evading Eugene who was pursuing her.

As she paused, and Eugene clutched her dress with a shout of ecstasy, Harriet came up, glancing severely toward the gate, and saying, as she handed her sister the hat, "This comes of childishness! That we should be seen thus! What a hoyden he will think you!" as the hoofs went on and the red coat vanished.

"He! Who? Not the farmer?" said Aurelia. "This is not laid up for hay."

"No indeed. I believe it is he," said Harriet, mysteriously.

"He?" repeated Aurelia. "Not Mr. Arden, for he would be in black," and at Harriet's disgusted gesture, "I beg your pardon, but I did not know you had a new *he*. Oh! surely you are not thinking of the young baronet?"

"I am sure it was his figure."

"You did not see him yesterday?"

"No, but his air had too much distinction for any one from these parts."

"Could you see what his air was from this distance? I should never have guessed it, but you have more experience, being older. Come, Eugene, another race!"

"No, I will have no more folly. I was too good-natured to allow it. I am vexed beyond measure that he should have seen such rusticity."

"Never mind, dear Harriet. Most likely it was no such person, for it was not well-bred to sit staring at us; and if it were he, you were not known to him."

"You were."

"Then he must have eyes as sharp as yours are for an air of distinction. Having only seen me in my blue and primrose suit, how should he know me in my present trim? Besides, I believe it was only young Dick Jewel in a cast coat of Squire Humphrey's."

The charm of the cowslip gathering was broken. Eugene found himself very hungry, and the noonchin was produced, after which the walk was continued to the farm-house, where the young people were made very welcome.

Farmers were, as a rule, more rustic than the present labourer, but they lived a life of far less care, if of more toil, than their successors, having ample means for their simple needs, and enjoying jocund plenty. The clean kitchen, with the stone floor, the beaupot of maythorn on the empty hearth, the shining walnut-wood table, the spinning-wheel, wooden chairs, and forms, all looked cool and inviting, and the visitors were regaled with home-made brown bread, delicious butter and honey, and a choice of new milk, mead, and currant wine.

Dame Jewel, in a white frill under a black silken hood, a buff turnover kerchief, stout stuff gown and white apron, was delighted to wait on them; and Eugene's bliss was complete among the young kittens and puppies in baskets on opposite sides of the window, the chickens before their coops, the ducklings like yellow balls on the grass, and the huge family of little spotted piglings which, to the scandal of his sisters, he declared the most delightful of all.

Their hostess knew nothing of the young baronet being in the neighbourhood, and was by no means gratified by the intelligence.

"Lack-a-day! Miss Harriet, you don't mean that the family is coming down here! I don't want none of them. 'Tis bad times for the farmer when any of that sort is nigh. They make nothing of galloping their horses a hunting right through the crops, ay, and horsewhipping the farmer if he do but say a word for the sweat of his brow."

"O Mrs. Jewel!" cried Aurelia, in whose ear lingered the courteous accents of her partner, "they would never behave themselves so."

"Bless you, Miss Orreely, I'll tell you what I've seen with my own eyes. My own good man, the master here, with the horsewhip laid about his shoulders at that very thornbush, by one of the fine gentlefolks, just because he had mended the gap in the hedge they was used to ride through, and my Lady sitting by in her laced scarlet habit on her fine horse, smiling like a painted picture, and saying, 'Thank you, sir, the rascals need to learn not to interfere with our sport,' all in that gentle sounding low voice of hers, enough to drive one mad."

"I thought Sir Jovian had been a kind master," said Harriet.

"This was not Sir Jovian. Poor gentleman, he was not often out a-hunting. This was one of the fine young rakish fellows from Lunnun as were always swarming about my Lady, like bees over that maybush. Sir Thomas Donne, I think they called him. They said he got killed by a wild boar, hunting in foreign parts, afterwards, and serve him right! But there! They would all do her bidding, whether for bad or good, so maybe it was less his fault than hers. She is a bitter one, is my Lady, for all she looks so sweet. And this her young barrowknight will be his own mother's son, and I don't want none of 'em down here. 'Tis a good job we have your good papa, the Major, to stand between her and us; I only wish he had his own, for a rare good landlord he would be."

The Dame's vain wishes were cut short by shrieks from the poultry-yard, where Eugene was discovered up to his ankles in the black ooze of the horse-pond, waving a little stick in defiance of an angry gander, who with white outspread wings, snake-like neck, bent and protruded, and frightful screams and hisses, was no bad representation of his namesake the dragon, especially to a child not much exceeding him in height.

The monster was put to rout, the champion dragged out of the pond, breathlessly explaining that he only wanted to look at the goslings when the stupid geese cackled and the gander wanted to fly at his eyes. "And I didn't see where I was going, for I had to keep him off, so I got into the mud. Will sister be angry?" he concluded, ruefully surveying the dainty little stockings and shoes coated with black mud.

But before the buckled shoon had been scraped, or the hosen washed and dried, the cheerful memory of boyhood had convinced itself that the enemy had been put to flight by his manful resistance; and he turned a deaf ear to Aurelia's suggestion that the affair had been retribution for his constant oblivion of Comenius' assertion that *auser gingrit,* "the goose gagleth."

They went home more soberly, having been directed by Mrs. Jewel to a field bordered by a copse, where grew the most magnificent of Titania's pensioners tall, wearing splendid rubies in their coats; and in due time the trio presented themselves at home, weary, but glowing with the innocent excitement of their adventures. Harriet was the first to proclaim that they had seen a horseman who must be Sir Amyas. "Had sister seen him?"

"Only through the window of the kitchen where I was making puff paste."

"He called then! Did my papa see him?"

"My father was in no condition to see any one, being under the hands and razor of Palmer."

"La! what a sad pity. Did he leave no message?"

"He left his compliments, and hoped his late partner was not fatigued."

"Is he at the Great House? Will he call again?"

"He is on his way to make a visit in Monmouthshire, together with a brother office, who is related to my Lady Herries, and finding that their road led them within twenty miles of our town, the decided on making a diversion to see her. It was only from her that Sir Amyas understood how close he was to his mother's property, for my Lady is extremely jealous of her prerogative."

"How did you hear all this, sister?"

"Sir George Herries rode over this afternoon and sat an hour with my father, delighting him by averring that the young gentleman has his mother's charms of person, together with his father's solidity of principle and character, and that he will do honour to his name."

"O, I hope he will come back by this route!" cried Harriet.

"Of that there is small likelihood," said Betty. "His mother is nearly certain to prevent it since she is sure to take umbrage at his having visited the Great House without her permission."

# CHAPTER IV. MY LADY'S MISSIVE

To the next coffee-house he speeds,
Takes up the news, some scraps he reads.—GAY.

Though Carminster was a cathedral city, the Special General Post only came in once a week, and was liable to delay through storms, snows, mire and highwaymen, so that its arrival was as great an event as is now the coming in of a mail steamer to a colonial harbour. The "post" was a stout countryman, with a red coat, tall jackboots and a huge hat. He rode a strong horse, which carried, *en croupe*, an immense pack, covered with oiled canvas, rising high enough to support his back, while he blew a long horn to announce his arrival.

Letters were rare and very expensive articles unless franked by a Member of Parliament, but gazettes and newsletters formed a large portion of his freight. No private gentleman except the Dean and Sir George Herries went to the extravagance of taking in a newspaper on his own account, but there was a club who subscribed for the *Daily Gazetteer*, the *Tatler*, and one or two other infant forms of periodical literature. These were hastily skimmed on their first arrival at the club-room at the White Dragon, lay on the table to be more deliberately conned for a week, and finally were divided among the members to be handed about among the families and dependants as long as they would hold together.

Major Delavie never willingly missed the coming of the mail, for his foreign experiences gave him keen interest in the war between France and Austria, and he watched the campaigns of his beloved Prince Eugene with untiring enthusiasm, being, moreover, in the flattering position of general interpreter and guide to his neighbours through the scanty articles on foreign intelligence.

It was about ten days after the syllabub party, when he had quite recovered his ordinary health, that he mounted his stout pony in his military undress, his cocked hat perched on his well-powdered bob-wig, with a queue half-way down his dark green gold-laced coat, and with his long jack-boots carefully settle by Palmer over the knee that would never cease to give him trouble.

Thus he slowly ambled into the town, catching on his way distant toots of the postman's horn. In due time he made his way into the High Street, broad and unpaved, with rows of lime or poplar trees before the principal houses, the most modern of which were of red brick, with heavy sash-windows, large stone quoins, and steps up to the doors.

The White Dragon, dating from the times of the Mortimer badge, was built of creamy stone, and had an archway conducting the traveller into a courtyard worthy of Chaucer, with ranges of galleries running round it, the balustrades of dark carved oak suiting with the timbers of the latticed window and gables, and with the noble outside stair at one angle, by which they communicated with one another. To these beauties the good Major was entirely insensible. He only sighed at the trouble it gave his lame knee to mount the stair to the first storey, and desired the execution of the landlord's barbarous design of knocking down the street front to replace it with a plain, oblong assembly room, red brick outside, and within, blue plaster, adorned with wreaths and bullocks' faces in stucco.

Such were the sentiments of most of the burly squires who had ridden in on the same errand, and throwing the reins to their grooms, likewise climbed the stair to the club-room with its oriel looking over the street. There too were several of the cathedral clergy, the rubicund double-chinned face of the Canon in residence set off by a white, cauliflower wig under a shovel hat, while the humbler minor canons (who served likewise as curates to all the country round) only powdered their own hair, and wore gowns and cassocks of quality very inferior to that which adorned the portly person of their superior. His white bands were of fine cambric, theirs of coarser linen; his stockings were of ribbed silk, theirs of black worsted; his buckles of silver, theirs of steel; and the line of demarcation was as

strongly marked as that between the neat, deferential tradesman, and the lawyer in his spruce snuff-coloured coat, or the doctor, as black in hue as the clergy, though with a secular cut, a smaller wig, and a gold-headed cane. Each had, as in duty bound, ordered his pint of port or claret for the good of the house, and it was well if these were not in the end greatly exceeded; and some had lighted long clay pipes; but these were mostly of the secondary rank, who sat at the table farthest from the window, and whose drink was a measure of ale.

The letters had not yet been sorted, but the newspaper had been brought in, and the Canon Boltby had possessed himself of it, and was proclaiming scraps of intelligence about the King, Queen, and Sir Robert Walpole, the character of Marshal Berwick, recently slain at Philipsburg, an account of Spanish outrages at sea, or mayhap the story of a marvelous beast, half-tiger, half-wolf, reported to be running wild in France. The other gentlemen, waiting till the mail-bags were opened, listened and commented; while one or two of the squires, and a shabby, disreputable-looking minor canon made each notable name the occasion of a toast, whether of health to his majesty's friends or confusion to his foes. A squabble, as to whether the gallant Berwick should be reckoned as an honest Frenchman or as a traitor Englishman, was interrupted by the Major's entrance, and the congratulations on his recovery.

One of the squires inquired after his daughters, and pronounced the little one with the outlandish name was becoming a belle, and would be the toast of the neighbourhood, a hint of which the topers were not slow to take advantage, while one of the guests at the recent party observed, "Young Belamour seemed to be of that opinion."

"May it be so," said the Canon, "that were a step to the undoing of a great wrong."

"Mr. Scrivener will tell you, sir, that there was no justice in the eye of the law," said the Major.

"*Summum jus, summa injuria*," quoted, *sotto voce*, Mr. Arden, a minor canon who, being well born, scholarly, scientific and gentlemanly, occupied a middle place between his colleagues and the grandees. He was not listened to. Each knot of speakers was becoming louder in debate, and Dr. Boltby's voice was hardly heard when he announced that a rain of blood had fallen on the Macgillicuddy mountains in Ireland, testified to by numerous respectable Protestant witnesses, and attributable, either to the late comet, or to the Pretender.

At that moment the letters were brought in by the postman, and each recipient had—not without murmurs—to produce his purse and pay heavily for them. There were not many. The Doctor had two, Mr. Arden one, Mr. Scrivener no less than five, but of them two were franked, and a franked letter was likewise handed over to Major DeLavie, with the word "Aresfield" written in the corner.

"From my Lady," said an unoccupied neighbour.

"Aye, aye," said the Major, putting it into his pocket, being by no means inclined to submit the letter to the general gaze.

"A good omen," said Canon Boltby, looking up from his paper. And the Major smiled in return, put a word or two into the discussion on affairs, and then, as soon as he thought he could take leave without betraying anxiety, he limped down stairs, and called for his horse. Lady Belamour's letters were wont to be calls for money, not easily answered, and were never welcome sights, and this hung heavy in the laced pocket of his coat.

Palmer met him at the back gate, and took his horse, but judged it advisable to put no questions about the news, while his master made his way in by the kitchen entrance of the rambling old manor house, and entered a stone-paved low room, a sort of office or study, where he received, and paid, money for my Lady, and smoked his pipe. Here he sat down in his wooden armchair, spread forth his legs, and took out the letter, opening it with careful avoidance of defacing the large red seal, covered with many quarterings, and the Delavie escutcheon of pretence reigning over all.

It opened, as he expected, with replies to some matters about leases and repairs; and then followed:—

"I am informed that you have a large Family, and Daughters growing up whom it is desirable to put in the way of making a good Match, or else an honourable Livelihood; I am therefore willing, for the Sake of our Family Connection, to charge myself with your youngest Girl, whose Name I understand to be Aurelia. I will cause her to be trained in useful Works in my Household, expecting her, in Return, to assist in the Care and Instruction of my young Children; and if she please me and prove herself worthy and attentive, I will bestow her Marriage upon some suitable Person. This is the more proper and convenient for you, because your Age and Health are such that I may not long be able to retain you in the Charge of my Estate—in which indeed you are continued only out of Consideration of an extremely distant Relationship, although a younger and more active Man, bred to the Profession, would serve me far more profitably."

When Betty came into the room a few minutes later to pull off her father's boots she found him sitting like one transfixed. He held out the letter, saying, "Read that, child."

Betty stood by the window and read, only giving one start, and muttering between her teeth, "Insolent woman!" but not speaking the words aloud, for she knew her father would treat them as treason. He always had a certain tender deference for his cousin Urania, mixed with something akin to compunction, as if his loyalty to his betrothed had been disloyalty to his family. Thus, he exceeded the rest of his sex in blindness to the defects that had been so evident to his wife and daughter; and whatever provocation might make him say of my Lady himself, he never permitted a word against her from any one else. He looked wistfully at Betty and said, "My little Aura! It is a kindly thought. Her son must have writ of the child. But I had liefer she had asked me for the sight of my old eyes."

"The question is," said Betty, in clear, incisive tones, "whether we surrender Aurelia or your situation?"

"Nay, nay, Betty, you always do my cousin less than justice. She means well by the child and by us all. Come, come say what is in your mind," he add testily.

"Am I at liberty to express myself, sir?"

"Of course you are. I had rather hear the whole discharge of your battery than see you looking constrained and satirical."

"Then, sir, my conclusion is this. The young baronet has shown himself smitten with out pretty Aurelia, and has spoken of tarrying on his return to make farther acquaintance. My Lady is afraid of his going to greater lengths, and therefore wishes to have her at her disposal."

"She proposes to take her into her own family; that is not taking her out of his way."

"I am sure of that."

"You are prejudiced, like your poor dear mother—the best of women, if only she could ever have done justice to her Ladyship! Don't you see, child, Aurelia would not be gone before his return, supposing he should come this way."

"His visit was to be for six weeks. Did you not see the postscript?"

"No, the letter was enough for one while."

"Here it is: 'I shall send Dove in the Space of about a Fortnight or three Weeks to bring to Town the young Coach Horses you mentioned. His Wife is to return with him, as I have Occasion for her in Town, and your Daughter must be ready to come up with them.'"

"Bless me! That is prompt! But it is thoughtful. Mrs. Dove is a good soul. It seems to me as if my Lady, though she may not choose to say so, wishes to see the child, and if she approve of her, breed her up in the accomplishments needed for such an elevation."

"If you hold that opinion, dear sir, it is well."

"If I thought she meant other than kindness toward the dear maid, I had rather we all pinched together than risk the little one in her hands. I had rather-if it comes to that—live on a crust a day than part with my sweet child; but if it were for good, Betty! It is hard for you all three to be cooped up together here, with no means of improving your condition; and this may be an opening that I ought not to reject. What say you, Betty?"

"If I were to send her out into the world, I had rather bind her apprentice to the Misses Rigby to learn mantua-making."

"Nay, nay, my dear; so long as I live there is no need for my children to come to such straits."

"As long as you retain your situation, sir; but you perceive how my Lady concludes her letter."

"An old song, Betty, which she sings whenever the coin does not come in fast enough to content her. She does not mean what she says; I know Urania of old. No; I will write back to her, thanking her for her good offices, but telling her my little girl is too young to be launched into the world as yet. Though if it were Harriet, she might not be unwilling."

"Harriet would be transported at the idea; but it is not she whom the Lady wants. And indeed I had rather trust little Aurelia to take care of herself than poor Harriet."

"We shall see! We shall see! Meantime, do not broach the subject to your sisters."

Betty assented, and departed with a heavy heart, feeling that, whatever her father might believe, the choice would be between the sacrifice of Aurelia or of her father's agency, which would involve the loss of home, of competence, and of the power of breeding up her darling Eugene according to his birth. She did not even know what her father had written, and could only go about her daily occupations like one under a weight, listening to her sisters' prattle about their little plans with a strange sense that everything was coming to an end, and constantly weighing the comparative evils of yielding or refusing Aurelia.

No one would have more valiantly faced poverty than Elizabeth Delavie, had she alone been concerned. Cavalier and Jacobite blood was in her veins, and her unselfish character had been trained by a staunch and self-devoted mother. But her father's age and Eugene's youth made her waver. She might work her fingers to the bone, and live on oatmeal, to give her father the comforts he required; but to have Eugene brought down from his natural station was more than she could endure. His welfare must be secured at the cost not only of Aurelia's sweet presence, but of her happiness; and Betty durst not ask herself what more she dreaded, knowing too that she would probably be quite incapable of altering her father's determination whatever it might be, and that he was inclined to trust Lady Belamour. The only chance of his refusal was that he should take alarm at the manner of requiring his daughter from him.

# CHAPTER V. THE SUMMONS

But when the King knew that the thing must be,
And that no help there was in this distress,
He bade them have all things in readiness
To take the maiden out.—MORRIS.

The second Sunday of suspense had come. The Sundays of good young ladies little resembled those of a century later, though they were not devoid of a calm peacefulness, worthy of the "sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright." The inhabited rooms of the old house looked bright and festal; there were fresh flowers in the pots, honey as well as butter on the breakfast table. The Major and Palmer were both in full uniform, wonderfully preserved. Eugene, a marvel of prettiness, with his curled hair and little velvet coat, contrived by his sisters out of some ancestral hoard. Betty wore thick silk brocade from the same store; Harriet a fresh gay chintz over a crimson skirt, and Aurelia was in spotless white, with a broad blue sash and blue ribbons in her hat, for her father liked to see her still a child; so her hair was only tied with blue, while that of her sisters was rolled over a cushion, and slightly powdered.

The church was so near that the Major could walk thither, leaning on his stout crutch-handled stick, and aided by his daughter's arm, as he proceeded down the hawthorn lane, sweet with the breath of May, exchanging greetings with whole families of the poor, the fathers in smock frocks wrought with curious needlework on the breast and back, the mothers in high-crowned hats and stout dark blue woollen gowns, the children, either patched or ragged, and generally barefooted, but by no means ill-fed.

No Sunday school had been invented. The dame who hobbled along in spectacles, dropping a low curtsey to the "quality," taught the hornbook and the primer to a select few of the progeny of the farmers and artisans, and the young ladies would no more have thought of assisting her labours than the blacksmith's. They only clubbed their pocket money to clothe and pay the schooling of one little orphan, who acknowledged them by a succession of the lowest bobs as she trotted past, proud as Margery Twoshoes herself of the distinction of being substantially shod.

The church was small, and with few pretensions to architecture at the best. It had been nearly a ruin, when, stirred by the Major, the church-wardens had taken it in hand, so that, owing to Richard Stokes and John Ball, as they permanently declared in yellow letters on a blue ground, the congregation were no longer in danger of the roof admitting the rain or coming down on the congregation. They had further beautified the place with a huge board of the royal arms, and with Moses and Aaron in white cauliflower wigs presiding over the tables of the Commandments. Four long dark, timber pews and numerous benches, ruthlessly constructed out of old carvings, occupied the aisle, and the chancel was more than half filled with the lofty "closet" of the Great House family. Hither the Delavie family betook themselves, and on her way Betty was startled by the recognition, in the seat reserved for the servants, of a broad back and curled wig that could belong to no one but Jonah Dove. She did her utmost to keep her mind from dwelling on what this might portend, though she followed the universal custom by exchanging nods and curtsies with the Duckworth family as she sailed up the aisle at the head of the little procession.

There was always a little doubt as to who would serve the church. One of the Canons was the incumbent, and the curate was Mr. Arden, the scientific minor canon, but when his services were required at the cathedral, one of his colleagues would supply his place, usually in a sadly perfunctory manner. However, he was there in person, as his voice, a clear and pleasant one, showed the denizens of the "closet," for they could not see out of it, except where Eugene had furtively enlarged a moth-eaten hole in the curtain, through which, when standing on the seat, he could enjoy an oblique view

of the back of an iron-moulded surplice and a very ill-powdered wig. This was a comfort to him. It would have been more satisfactory to have been able to make out whence came the stentorian A-men, that responded to the parson, totally unaccompanied save by the good Major, who always read his part almost as loud as the clerk, from a great octavo prayer-book, bearing on the lid the Delavie arms with coronet, supporters, and motto, "*Ma Vie et ma Mie*." It would have been thought unladylike, if not unscriptural, to open the lips in church; yet, for all her silence, good Betty was striving to be devout and attentive, praying earnestly for her little sister's safety, and hailing as a kind of hopeful augury this verse from the singers—

"At home, abroad, in peace, in war
Thy God shall thee defend,
Conduct thee through life's pilgrimage
Safe to the journey's end."

Much cannot be said for the five voices that sang, nor for the two fiddles that accompanied them. Eugene had scarcely outgrown his terror at the strains, and still required Aurelia to hold his hand, under pretext of helping him to follow the words, not an easy thing, since the last lines were always repeated three or four times.

Somehow the repetition brought them the more home to Betty's heart, and they rang consolingly in her ears, all through the sermon, of which she took in so little that she never found out that it was an elaborate exposition of the Newtonian philosophy, including Mr. Arden's views of the miracle at the battle Beth-horon, in the Lesson for the day.

The red face and Belamour livery looked doubly ominous when she came out of church, but she had to give her arm to her father till they were overtaken by Mr. Arden, who always shared the Sunday roast beef and plum pudding. Betty feared it was the best meal he had in the week, for he lived in lodgings, and his landlady was not too careful of his comforts, while he was wrapped up in his books and experiments. There was a hole singed in the corner of his black gown, which Eugene pointed out with great awe to Aurelia as they walked behind him.

"See there, Aura. Don't you think he has been raising spirits, like Friar Bacon?"

"What do you know about Friar Bacon?" asked Harriet.

"He is in a little book that I bought of the pedlar. He had a brazen head that said—

'Time is,
Time was,
Time will be.'

I wonder if Mr. Arden would show me one like it."

"You ridiculous little fellow to believe such trash!" said Harriet.

"But, Hatty, he can really light a candle without a tinder-box," said Eugene. "His landlady told Palmer so; and Palmer says the Devil flew away with Friar Bacon; but my book says he burnt all his books and gave himself to the study of divinity, and dug his grave with his own nails."

"Little boys should not talk of such things on Sundays," said Harriet, severely.

"One does talk of the Devil on Sunday, for he is in the catechism," returned Eugene. "If he carries Mr. Arden off, do you think there will be a great smoke, and that folk will see it?"

Aurelia's silvery peal of laughter fell sadly upon Betty's ears in front, and her father and Mr. Arden turned to ask what made them so merry. Aurelia blushed in embarrassment, but Harriet was ready.

"You will think us very rude, Sir, but my little brother has been reading the life of Friar Bacon, and he thinks you an equally great philosopher."

"Indeed, my little master, you do me too much honour. You will soon be a philosopher yourself. I did not expect so much attention in so young an auditor," said mr. Arden, thinking this the effect of his sermon on the solar system.

Whereupon Eugene begged to inspect the grave he was digging with his own nails.

They were at home by this time, and Betty was aware that they had been followed at a respectful distance by Palmer and the coachman. Anxious as she was, she could not bear that her father's dinner should be spoilt, or that he, in his open-hearted way, should broach the matter with Mr. Arden; so she repaired to the garden gate, and on being told that Mr. Dove had a packet from my Lady for the Major, she politely invited him to dinner with the servants, and promised that her father should see him afterwards.

This gave a long respite, since the servants had the reversion of the beef, so the Mr. Arden had taken leave, and gone to see a bedridden pauper, and the Major had time for his forty winks, while Betty, though her heart throbbed hard beneath her tightly-laced boddice, composed herself to hear Eugene's catechism, and the two sisters, each with a good book, slipped out to the honeysuckle arbour in the garden behind the house. Harriet had *Sherlock in Death*, her regular Sunday study, though she never got any further than the apparition of Mrs. Veal, over which she gloated in a dreamy state; Aurelia's study was a dark-covered, pale-lettered copy of the *Ikon Basilike*, with the strange attraction that youth has to pain and sorrow, and sat musing over the resigned outpourings of the perplexed and persecuted king, with her bright eyes fixed on the deep blue sky, and the honeysuckle blossoms gently waving against it, now and then visited by bee or butterfly, while through the silence came the throbbing notes of the nightingale, followed by its jubilant burst of glee, and the sweet distant chime of the cathedral bells rose and fell upon the wind. What peace and repose there was in all the air, even in the gentle breeze, and the floating motions of the swallows skimming past.

The stillness was first broken by the jangle of their own little church bell, for Mr. Arden was a more than usually diligent minister, and always gave two services when he was not in course at the cathedral. The young ladies always attended both, but as Harriet and Aurelia crossed the lawn, their brother ran to meet them, saying, "We are not to wait for sister."

"I hope my papa is well," said Aurelia.

"Oh yes," said Eugene, "but the man in the gold-laced hat has been speaking with him. Palmer says it is Mrs. Dove's husband, and he is going to take Lively Tom and Brown Bet and the two other colts to London. He asked if I should like to ride a-cockhorse there with him. 'Dearly,' I said, and then he laughed and said it was not my turn, but he should take Miss Aurelia instead."

Aurelia laughed, and Harriet said, "Extremely impudent."

Little she guessed what Betty was at that moment reading.

"I am astonished," wrote Lady Belamour to her cousin, "that you should decline so highly advantageous an Offer for your Daughter. I can only understand it as a Token that you desire no further Connection with, nor Favour from me; and I shall therefore require of you to give up the Accounts, and vacate the House by Michaelmas next ensuing. However, as I am willing to allow some excuse for the Weakness of parental Affection, if you change your Mind within the next Week and send up your Daughter with Dove and his Wife, I will overlook your first hasty and foolish Refusal, ungrateful as it was, and will receive your Daughter and give her all the Advantages I promised. Otherwise your Employment is at an end, and you had better prepare your Accounts for Hargrave's Inspection."

"There is no help for it then," said Betty.

"And if it be for the child's advantage, we need not make our moan," said her father. "'Tis like losing the daylight out of our house, but we must not stand in the way of her good."

"If I were only sure it is for her good!"

"Why, child, there's scarce a wench in the county who would not go down on her knees for such a chance. See what Madam Duckworth would say to it for Miss Peggy!"

Betty said no more. The result of her cogitations had been that since Aurelia must be yielded for the sake of her father and Eugene, it was better not to disturb him with fears, which would only anger him at the moment and disquiet him afterwards. She was likewise reassured by Mrs. Dove's going with her, since that good woman had been nurse to the little Belamour cousins now deceased, and was well known as an excellent and trustworthy person, so that, if she were going to act in the same capacity to my Lady's second family, Aurelia would have a friend at hand. So the Major cheated his grief by greeting the church-goers with the hilarious announcement—

"Here's great news! What says my little Aura to going London to my Lady's house."

"O Sir! are you about to take us."

"Not I! My Lady wants pretty young maidens, not battered old soldiers."

"Nor my sisters? O then, if you please, Sir, I would rather not go!"

"Silly children cannot choose! No, no, Aura, you must go out and see the world, and come back to us such a belle that your poor old father will scarce know you."

"I do not wish to be a belle," said the girl. "O Sir, let me stay with you and sister."

"Do not be so foolish, Aura," put in Harriet. "It will be the making of you. I wish I had the offer."

"O Harriet, could not you go instead?"

"No, Aurelia," said Betty. "There is no choice, and you must be a good girl and not vex my father."

The gravity of her eldest sister convinced Aurelia that entreaties would be vain, and there was soon a general outburst of assurances that she would see all that was delightful in London, the lions in the Tower, the new St. Paul's, the monuments, Ranelagh, the court ladies, may be, the King and Queen themselves; until she began to feel exhilarated and pleased at the prospect and the distinction.

Then came Monday and the bustle of preparing her wardrobe. The main body of it was to be sent in the carrier's waggon, for she was to ride on a pillion behind Mr. Dove, and could only take a valise upon a groom's horse. There was no small excitement in the arrangement, and in the farewells to the neighbours, who all agreed with Harriet in congratulating the girl on her promotion. Betty did her part with all her might, washed lace, and trimmed sleeves, and made tuckers, giving little toilette counsels, while her heart ached sorely all the time.

When she could speak to Mrs. Dove alone, she earnestly besought that old friend to look after the child, her health, her dress, and above all to supply here lack of experience and give her kind counsel and advice.

"I will indeed, ma'am, as though she were my own," promised Mrs. Dove.

"O nurse, I give my sweet jewel to your care; you know what a great house in London is better than I do. You will warn her of any danger."

"I will do my endeavour, ma'am. We servants see and hear much, and if any harm should come nigh the sweet young miss, I'll do my best for her."

"Thank you, nurse, I shall never, never see her more in her free artless childishness," said Betty, sobbing as if her heart would break; "but oh, nurse, I can bear the thought better since I have known that you would be near her."

And at night, when her darling nestled for the last time in her arms, the elder sister whispered her warnings. Her knowledge of the great world was limited, but she believed it to be a very wicked place, and she profoundly distrusted her brilliant kinswoman; yet her warnings took no shape more definite than—"My dearest sister will never forget her prayers nor her Bible." There was a soft response and fresh embrace at each pause. "Nor play cards of a Sunday, nor ever play high. And my Aura must be deaf to rakish young beaux and their compliments. They never mean well by poor pretty maids. If you believe them, they will only mock, flout, and jeer you in the end. And if the young baronet should seek converse with you, promise me, oh, promise me, Aurelia, to grant him no favour, no, not so much as to hand him a flower, or stand chatting with him unknown to his mother. Promise me

again, child, for naught save evil can come of any trifling between you. And, Aurelia, go to Nurse Dove in all your difficulties. She can advise you where your poor sister cannot. It will ease my heart if I know that my child will attend to her. You will not let yourself be puffed up with flattery, nor be offended if she be open and round with you. Think that your poor sister Betty speaks in her. Pray our old prayers, go to church, and read your Psalms and Lessons daily, and oh! never, never cheat your conscience. O may God, in His mercy, keep my darling!"

So Aurelia cried herself to sleep, while Betty lay awake till the early hour in the morning when all had to be prepared for the start. There was to be a ride of an hour and a half before breakfast so as to give the horses a rest. It was a terrible separation, in many respects more complete than if Aurelia had been going, in these days, to America; for communication by letter was almost as slow, and infinitely more expensive.

No doubt the full import of what he had done had dawned even on Major Delavie during the watches of that last sorrowful night, for he came out a pale, haggard man, looking as if his age had doubled since he went to bed, wrapped in his dressing gown, his head covered with his night-cap, and leaning heavily on his staff. He came charged with one of the long solemn discourses which parents were wont to bestow on their children as valedictions, but when Aurelia, in her camlet riding cloak and hood, brought her tear-stained face to crave his blessing, he could only utter broken fragments. "Bless thee my child! Take heed to yourself and your ways. It is a bad world, beset with temptations. Oh! heaven forgive me for sending my innocent lamb out into it. Oh! what would your blessed mother say?"

"Dear sir," said Betty, who had wept out her tears, and was steadily composed now, "this is no time to think of that. We must only cheer up our darling, and give her good counsel. If she keep to what her Bible, her catechism and her conscience tell her, she will be a good girl, and God will protect her."

"True, true, your sister is right; Aura, my little sweetheart, I had much to say to you, but it is all driven out of my poor old head."

"Aura! Aura! the horses are coming! Ten of them!" shouted Eugene. "Come along! Oh! if I were but going! How silly of you to cry; *I* don't."

"There! there! Go my child, and God in His mercy protect you!"

Aurelia in speechless grief passed from the arms of one sister to the embrace of the other, hugged Eugene, was kissed by Nannerl, who forced a great piece of cake into her little bag, and finally was lifted to her pillion cushion by Palmer, who stole a kiss of her hand before Dove put his horse in motion, while Betty was still commending her sister to his wife's care, and receiving reiterated promises of care.

# CHAPTER VI. DISAPPOINTED LOVE

I know thee well, thy songs and sighs,
A wicked god thou art;
And yet, most pleasing to the eyes,
And witching to the heart.

*W. MACKWORTH PRAED.*

The house was dull when Aurelia was gone. Her father was ill at ease and therefore testy, Betty too sore at heart to endure as cheerfully as usual his unwonted ill-humour. Harriet was petulant, and Eugene troublesome, and the two were constantly jarring against one another, since the one missed her companion, the other his playmate; and they were all more sensible than ever how precious and charming an element was lost to the family circle.

On the next ensuing Sunday, Eugene had made himself extremely obnoxious to Harriet, by persisting in kicking up the dust, and Betty, who had gone on before with her father, was availing herself of the shelter of the great pew to brush with a sharp hand the dust from the little legs, when, even in the depths of their seclusion, the whole party were conscious of a sort of breathless sound of surprise and admiration, a sweep of bows and curtsies, and the measured tread of boots and clank of sword and spurs coming nearer—yes, to the very chancel. Their very door was opened by the old clerk with the most obsequious of reverences, and there entered a gorgeous vision of scarlet and gold, bowing gracefully with a wave of a cocked and plumed hat!

The Major started, and was moving out of his corner—the seat of honour—but the stranger forbade this by another gesture, and took his place, after standing for a moment with his face hidden in his hat. Then he took an anxious survey, not without an almost imperceptible elevation of eyebrow and shoulder, as if disappointed, and accepted the Prayer-book, which the Major offered him.

Betty kept her eyes glued to her book, and when that was not in use, upon the mittened hands crossed before her, resolute against distraction, and every prayer turning into a petition for her sister's welfare; but Eugene gazed, open-eyed and open-mouthed, oblivious of his beloved hole, and Harriet, though keeping her lids down, and her book open, contrived to make a full inspection of the splendid apparition.

It was tall and slight, youthfully undeveloped, yet with the grace of personal symmetry, high breeding, and military training, upright without stiffness, with a command and dexterity of movement which prevented the sword and spurs from being the annoyance to his pew-mates that country awkwardness usually made these appendages. The spurs were on cavalry boots, guarding the knee, and met by white buckskins, both so little dusty that there could have been no journey that morning. The bright gold-laced scarlet coat of the Household troops entirely effaced the Major's old Austrian uniform; and over it, the hair, of a light golden brown, was brushed back, tied with black ribbon, and hung down far behind in a queue, only leaving little gold rings curling on the brow and temples. The face was modelled like a cameo, faultless in the outlines, with a round peach-like fresh contour and bloom on the fair cheek, which had much of the child, though with a firmness in the lip, and strength in the brow, that promised manliness. Indeed there was a wonderful blending of the beauty of manhood and childhood about the youth; and his demeanour was perfectly decorous and reverent, no small merit in a young officer and London beau. Indeed Betty could almost have forgotten his presence, if gleams from his glittering equipments had not kept glancing before her eyes, turn them where she would, and if Mr. Arden's sermon had not been of Solomon's extent of natural philosophy, and so full of Hebrew, Greek, and Latin that she could not follow it at all.

After the blessing, the young gentleman, with a bow, the pink of courtesy, offered a hand to lead her out, nor could she refuse, though, to use her own expression, she hated the absurdity of mincing down the aisle with a fine young spark looking like her grandson; while her poor father had to put up with Harriet's arm. Outside came the greetings, the flourish of the hat, the "I may venture to introduce myself, and to beg of you, sir, and of my fair cousins to excuse my sudden intrusion."

"No apology can be needed for your appearance in your own pew, Sir Amyas," said the Major with outstretched hand; "it did my heart good to see you there!"

"I would not have taken you thus by surprise," continued the youth, "but one of my horses lost a shoe yesterday, and we were constrained to halt at Portkiln for the night, and ride on this morning. Herries went on to the Deanery, and I hoped to have seen you before church, but found you had already entered."

Portkiln was so near, that this Sabbath day's journey did not scandalise Betty, and her father eagerly welcomed his kinsman, and insisted that he should go no farther. Sir Amyas accepted the invitation, nothing loth, only asking, with a little courtly diffidence, if it might not be convenient for him to sleep at the Great House, and begging the ladies to excuse his riding dress.

His eyes wandered anxiously as though in search of something in the midst of all his civility, and while the Major was sending Eugene to bring Mr. Arden—who was hanging back at the churchyard gate, unwilling to thrust himself forward—the faltering question was put, while the cheeks coloured like a girl's, "I hope my fair partner, my youngest cousin, Miss Aurelia Delavie, is in good health?"

"We hope so, sir, thank you," returned Betty; "but she left us six days ago."

"Left you!" he repeated, in consternation that overpowered his courtliness.

"Yes, sir," said Harriet, "my Lady, your mother, has been good enough to send for her to London."

"My Lady!" he murmured to himself; "I never thought of that! How and when did she go?"

The answer was interrupted by the Major coming up "Sir Amyas Belamour, permit me to present to you the Reverend Richard Arden, the admirable divine to whom we are beholden for the excellent and learned discourse of this morning. You'll not find such another scholar in all Carminster."

"I am highly honoured," returned the baronet, with a bow in return for Mr. Arden's best obeisance, such as it was; and Harriet, seeing Peggy Duckworth in the distance, plumed herself on her probable envy.

Before dinner was served Sir Amyas had obtained the information as to Aurelia's departure, and even as to the road she had taken, and he had confessed that, "Of course he had write to his mother that he had danced with the most exquisitely beautiful creature he had ever seen, and that he longed to know his cousins better." No doubt his mother, having been thus reminded of her connections, had taken the opportunity of summoning Aurelia to London to give her the advantages of living in her household and acquiring accomplishments. The lad was so much delighted at the prospect of enjoying her society that he was almost consoled for not finding her at the Manor House; and his elaborate courtesy became every moment less artificial and more affectionate, as the friendly atmosphere revealed that the frankness and simplicity of the boy had not been lost, captain in the dragoon guards as he was, thanks to interest, though he had scarcely yet joined his troop. He had been with a tutor in the country, until two years ago, when his stepfather, Mr. Wayland, had taken him, still with his tutor, on the expedition to the Mediterranean. He had come home from Gibraltar, and joined his regiment only a few weeks before setting out with his friend Captain Herries, to visit Battlefield, Lady Aresfield's estate in Monmouthshire. He was quartered in the Whitehall barracks, but could spend as much time as he pleased at his mother's house in Hanover Square.

Betty's mind misgave her as she saw the brightening eye with which he said it; but she could not but like the youth himself, he was so bright, unspoilt, and engaging that she could not think him capable of doing wilful wrong to her darling. Yet how soon would the young soldier, plunged into the

midst of fashionable society, learn to look on the fair girl with the dissipated eyes of his associates? There was some comfort in finding that Mr. Wayland was expected to return in less than a year, and that his stepson seemed to regard him with unbounded respect, as a good, just, and wise man, capable of everything! Indeed Sir Amyas enlightened Mr. Arden on the scientific construction of some of Mr. Wayland's inventions so as to convince both the clergyman and the soldier that the lad himself was no fool, and had profited by his opportunities.

Major Delavie produced his choice Tokay, a present from an old Hungarian brother-officer, and looked happier than since Aurelia's departure. He was no match-maker, and speculated on no improbable contingencies for his daughter, but he beheld good hopes for the Delavie property and tenants in an heir such as this, and made over his simple loyal heart to the young man. Presently he inquired whether the unfortunate Mr. Belamour still maintained his seclusion.

"Yes, sir," was the reply. "He still lives in two dark rooms with shutters and curtains excluding every ray of light. He keeps his bed for the greater part of the day, but sometimes, on a very dark night, will take a turn on the terrace."

"Poor gentleman!" said Betty. "Has he no employment or occupation?"

"Mr. Wayland contrived a raised chess and draught board, and persuaded him to try a few games before we went abroad, but I do not know whether he has since continued it."

"Does he admit any visits?"

"Oh no. He has been entirely shut up, except from the lawyer, Hargrave, on business. Mr. Wayland, indeed, strove to rouse him from his despondency, but without success, except that latterly he became willing to receive him."

"Have you ever conversed with him?"

There was an ingenuous blush as the young man replied. "I fear I must confess myself remiss. Mr. Wayland has sometimes carried me with him to see my uncle, but not with my good will, and my mother objected lest it should break my spirits. However, when I left Gibraltar, my good father charged me to endeavour from time to time to enliven my uncle's solitude, but there were impediments to my going to him, and I take shame to myself for not having striven to overcome them."

"Rightly spoken, my young kinsman," cried the Major. "There are no such impediments as a man's own distaste."

"And pity will remove that," said Betty.

Soon after the removal of the cloth the ladies withdrew, and Eugene was called to his catechism, but he was soon released, for the Tokay had made her father sleepy, while it seemed to have emboldened Mr. Arden, since he came forth with direct intent to engross Harriet; and Sir Amyas wandered towards Betty, apologising for the interruption.

"It is a rare occasion," said she as her pupil scampered away.

"Happy child, to be taught by so good a sister," said the young baronet, regretfully.

"Your young half-brothers and sisters must be of about the same age," said Betty.

"My little brother, Archer, is somewhat younger. He is with my mother in London, the darling of the ladies, who think him a perfect beauty, and laugh at all his mischievous pranks. As to my little sisters, you will be surprised to hear that I have only seen them once, when I rode with their father to see them at the farm houses at which they are nursed."

"No doubt they are to be fetched home, since Mrs. Dove is gone to wait on them, and my Lady said something of intending my sister to be with her young children."

"Nay, she must have no such troublesome charge. My mother cannot intend anything of the kind. I shall see that she is treated as–"

Betty, beginning to perceive that he knew as little of his own mother as did the rest of his sex, here interrupted him. "Excuse me, sir, I doubt not of your kind intentions, but let me speak, for Aurelia is a very precious child to me, and I am afraid that any such attempt on your part might do her harm rather than good. She must be content with the lot of a poor dependant."

"Never!" he exclaimed. "She is a Delavie; and besides, no other ever shall be my wife."

"Hush, hush!" Betty had been saying before the words were out of his "You are but a silly boy, begging your Honour's pardon, though you speak, I know, with all your heart. What would your Lady mother say or do to my poor little sister if she heard you?"

"She could but send her home, and then flood and fire could not hold me from her."

"I wish that were the worst she could do. No, Sir Amyas Belamour, if you have any kindness for the poor helpless girl under your mother's roof, you will make no advance to excite alarm or anger against her. Remember it is she who will be the sufferer and not yourself. The woman, however guiltless, is sure to fall under suspicion and bear the whole penalty. And oh! what would become of her, defenceless, simple, unprotected as she is?"

"Yet you sent her!" said he.

"Yes," said Betty, sadly, "because there was no other choice between breaking with my Lady altogether."

He made an ejaculation under his breath, half sad, half violent, and exclaimed, "Would that I were of age, or my father were returned."

"But now you know all, you will leave my child in peace," said Betty.

"What, you would give me no hope!"

"Only such as you yourself have held out," said Betty. "When you are your own master, if you keep in the same mind till then, and remain truly worthy, I cannot tell what my father would answer."

"I am going to speak to him this very day. I came with that intent."

"Do no such thing, I entreat," cried Betty. "He would immediately think it his duty to inform my Lady. Then no protestation would persuade her that we had not entrapped your youth and innocence. His grey head would be driven out without shelter, and what might not be the consequence to my sister? You could not help us, and could only make it worse. No, do nothing rash, incautious, or above all, disobedient. It would be self-love, not true love that would risk bringing her into peril and trouble when she is far out of reach of all protection."

"Trust me, trust me, Cousin Betty," cried the youth. "Only let me hope, and I'll be caution itself; but oh! what an endless eternity is two years to wait without a sign!"

But here appeared the Major, accompanied by Captain Herries and Dean Churchill, who had ordered out his coach, Sunday though it were, to pay his respects to my Lady's son, and carry him and his hosts back to sup at the Deanery. It was an age of adulation, but Betty was thankful that perilous conversations were staved off.

# CHAPTER VII. ALL ALONE

By the simplicity of Venus' doves.
*Merchant of Venice*.

That Sunday was spent by Aurelia at the Bear Inn, at Reading. Her journey had been made by very short stages, one before breakfast, another lasting till noon, when there was a long halt for dinner and rest for horse and rider, and then another ride, never even in these longest summer days prolonged beyond six or seven o'clock at latest, such was the danger of highwaymen being attracted by the valuable horses, although the grooms in charge were so well armed that they might almost as well have been troopers.

The roads, at that time of year, were at their best, and Aurelia and Mrs. Dove were mounted on steady old nags, accustomed to pillions. Aurelia could have ridden single, but this would not have been thought fitting on a journey with no escort of her own rank, and when she mounted she was far too miserable to care for anything but hiding her tearful face behind Mr. Dove's broad shoulders. Mrs. Dove was perched behind a wiry, light-weighted old groom, whom she kept in great order, much to his disgust.

After the first wretchedness, Aurelia's youthful spirits had begun to revive, and the novel scenes to awaken interest. The Glastonbury thorn was the first thing she really looked at. The Abbey was to her only an old Gothic melancholy ruin, not worthy of a glance, but the breezy air of the Cheddar Hills, the lovely cliffs, and the charm of the open country, with its strange islands of hills dotted about, raised her spirits, as she rode through the meadows where hay was being tossed, and the scent came fragrant on the breeze. Mr. Dove would tell her over his shoulder the names of places and their owners when they came to parks bordering the road, and castles "bosomed high in the tufted trees." Or he would regale her with legends of robberies and point to the frightful gibbets, one so near to the road that she shut her eyes and crouched low behind him to avoid seeing the terrible burthen. She had noted the White Horse, and shuddered at the monument at Devizes commemorating the judgment on the lying woman, and a night had been spent at Marlborough that "Miss" might see a strolling company of actors perform in a barn; but as the piece was the *Yorksire Tragedy*, the ghastly performance overcame her so completely that Mrs. Dove had to take her away, declaring that no inducement should ever take her to a theatre again.

Mr. Dove was too experienced a traveller not to choose well his quarters for the night, and Aurelia slept in the guest chambers shining with cleanliness and scented with lavender, Mrs. Dove always sharing her room. "Miss" was treated with no small regard, as a lady of the good old blood, and though the coachman and his wife talked freely with her, they paid her all observance, never ate at the same table, and provided assiduously for her comfort and pleasure. Once they halted a whole day because even Mr. Dove was not proof against the allurements of a bull-baiting, though he carefully explained that he only made a concession to the grooms to prevent them from getting discontented, and went himself to the spectacle to hinder them from getting drunk, in which, be it observed, he did not succeed.

So much time was spent on thus creeping from stage to stage that Aurelia had begun to feel as if the journey had been going on for ages, and as if worlds divided her from her home, when on Sunday she timidly preceded Mrs. Dove into Reading Abbey Church, and afterwards was shown where rolled Father Thames. The travellers took early morning with them for Maidenhead Thicket, and breakfasted on broiled trout at the King's Arms at Maidenhead Bridge, while Aurelia felt her eye filled with the beauty of the broad glassy river, and the wooded banks, and then rose onwards, looking with loyal awe at majestic Windsor, where the flag was flying. They slept at a poor little inn a

Longford, rather than cross Hounslow Heath in the evening, and there heard all the last achievements of the thieves, so that Aurelia, in crossing the next day, looked to see a masked highwayman start out of every bush; but they came safely to the broad archway of the inn at Knightsbridge, their last stage. Mrs. Dove took her charge up stairs at once to refresh her toilette, before entering London and being presented to my Lady.

But a clattering and stamping were heard in the yard, and Aurelia, looking from the window, called Mrs. Dove to see four horses being harnessed to a coach that was standing there.

"Lawk-a-day?" cried the good woman, "if it be not our own old coach, as was the best in poor Sir Jovian's time! Ay, there be our colours, you see, blue and gold, and my Lady's quartering. Why, 'twas atop of that very blue hammercloth that I first set eyes on my Dove! So my Lady has sent to meet you, Missie. Well, I do take it kind of her. Now you will not come in your riding hood, all frowsed and dusty, but can put on your pretty striped sacque and blue hood that you wore on Sunday, and look the sweet pretty lady you are."

Mrs. Dove's intentions were frustrated, for the maid of the inn knocked at the door with a message that the coach had orders not to wait, but that Miss was to come down immediately.

"Dear, dear!" sighed Mrs. DOve. "Tell the jackanapes not to be so hasty. He must give the young lady time to change her dress, and eat a mouthful."

This brought Dove up to the door. "Never mind dressing and fallals," he said; "this is a strange fellow that says he is hired for the job, and his orders are precise. Miss must take a bit of cake in her hand. Come, dame, you have not lived so long in my Lady's service as to forget what it is to cross her will, or keep her waiting."

Therewith he hurried Aurelia down stairs, his wife being in such a state of *deshabille* that she could not follow. He handed the young lady into the carriage, gave her a parcel of slices of bread and meat, with a piece of cake, shut the door, and said, "Be of good heart, Missie, we'll catch you up by the time you are in the square. All right!"

Off went Aurelia in solitude, within a large carriage, once gaily fitted though now somewhat faded and tarnished. She was sorry to be parted from the Doves, whom she wanted to give her courage for the introduction to my Lady, and to explain to her the wonders of the streets of London, which she did not *quite* expect to see paved with gold! She ate her extemporised meal, gazing from the window, and expecting to see houses and churches thicken on her, and hurrying to brush away her crumbs, and put on her gloves lest she should arrive unawares, for she had counted half-a-dozen houses close together. No! here was another field! More fields and houses. The signs of habitation were, so far from increasing, growing more scanty, and looked strangely like what she had before passed. Could this be the right road! How foolish to doubt, when this was my Lady's own coach. But oh, that it had waited for Mrs. Dove! She would beg her to get in when the riders overtook her. When would they? No sign of them could be seen from the windows, and here were more houses. Surely this was Turnham Green again, or there must be another village green exactly like it in the heart of London. How many times did not poor Aurelia go through all these impressions in the course of the drive. She was absolutely certain that she was taken through Brentford again, this time without a halt; but after this the country became unknown to her, and the road much worse. It was in fact for the most part a mere ditch or cart track, so rough that the four horses came to a walk. Aurelia had read no novels but *Telemaque* and *Le Grand Cyrus*, so her imagination was not terrified by tales of abduction, but alarm began to grow upon her. She much longed to ask the coachman whither he was taking her, but the check string had been either worn out or removed; she could not open the door from within, nor make him hear, and indeed she was a little afraid of him.

Twilight began to come on; it was much later than Mr. Dove had ever ventured to be out, but here at last there was a pause, and the swing of a gate, the road was smoother and she seemed to be in a wood, probably private ground. On and on, for an apparently interminable time, went the coach with the wearied and affrighted girl, through the dark thicket, until at last she emerged, into a park, where

she could again see the pale after-glow of the sunset, and presently she found herself before a tall house, perfectly dark, with strange fantastic gables and chimneys, ascending far above against the sky.

All was still as death, except the murmuring caws of the rooks in their nests, and the chattering shriek of a startled blackbird. The servant from behind ran up the steps and thundered at the door; it was opened, a broad line of light shone out, some figures appeared, and a man in livery came forward to open the carriage door, but to Aurelia's inexpressible horror, his face was perfectly black, with negro features, rolling eyes, and great white teeth!

She hardly knew what she did, the dark carriage was formidable on one side, the apparition on the other! The only ray of comfort was in the face of a stout, comely, rosy maid-servant, who was holding the candle on the threshold, and with one bound the poor traveller dashed past the black hand held out to help her, and rushing up to the girl, caught hold of her, and gasped out, "Oh! What is that? Where am I? Where have they taken me?"

"Lawk, ma'am," said the girl, with a broad grin, "that 'ere bees only Mr. Jumbo. A' won't hurt'ee. See, here's Mistress Aylward."

A tall, white-capped, black-gowned elderly woman turned on the new-comer a pale, grave, unsmiling face, saying, "Your servant—Miss Aurelia Delavie, as I understand."

Bending her head, and scarcely able to steady herself, for she was shaking from head to foot, Aurelia managed to utter the query,

"Where am I?"

"At Bowstead Park, madam, by order of my Lady."

Much relieved, and knowing this was the Belamour estate, Aurelia said, "Please let me wait till Mrs. Dove comes before I am presented to my Lady."

"My Lady is not here, madam," said Mrs. Aylward. "Allow me—" and she led the way across a great empty hall, that seemed the vaster for its obscurity, then along a matted passage, and down some steps into a room surrounded with presses and cupboards, evidently belonging to the to the housekeeper. She set a chair for the trembling girl, saying, "You will excuse the having supper here to-night, madam; the south parlour will be ready for you to-morrow."

"Is not Mrs. Dove coming?" faintly asked Aurelia.

"Mrs. Dove is gone to London to attend on little Master Wayland. You are to be here with the young ladies, ma'am."

"What young ladies?" asked the bewildered maiden.

"My Lady's little daughters—the Misses Wayland. I thought she had sent you her instructions; but I see you are over wearied and daunted," she added, more kindly; "you will be better when you have taken some food. Molly, I say, you sluggard of a wench, bring the lady's supper, and don't stand gaping there."

Mrs. Aylward hurried away to hasten operations, and Aurelia began somewhat to recover her senses, though she was still so much dismayed that she dreaded to look up lest she should see something frightful, and started at the first approach of steps.

A dainty little supper was placed before her, but she was too faint and sick at heart for appetite, and would have excused herself. However, Mrs. Aylward severely said she would have no such folly, filled a glass of wine, and sternly administered it; then setting her down in a large chair, helped her to a delicate cutlet. She ate for very fright, but her cheeks and eyes were brightened, the mists of terror and exhaustion began to clear away, and when she accepted a second help, she had felt herself reassured that she had not fallen into unkindly hands. If she could only have met a smile she would have been easier, but Mrs. Aylward was a woman of sedate countenance and few words, and the straight set line of lips encouraged no questioning, so she merely uttered thanks for each act of hospitality.

"There! You will take no more roll? You are better, now, but you will not be sorry to go to your bed," said Mrs. Aylward, taking up a candle, and guiding her along the passage up a long stair to a

pretty room wainscoted and curtained with fresh white dimity, and the window showing the young moon pale in the light of the western sky.

Bedrooms were little furnished, and this was more luxurious than the dear old chamber at home, but the girl had never before slept alone, and she felt unspeakably lonely in the dreariness, longing more than ever for Betty's kiss—even for Betty's blame—or for a whine from Harriet; and she positively hungered for a hug from Eugene, as she gazed timidly at the corners beyond the influence of her candle; and instead of unpacking the little riding mail she kissed it, and laid her cheek on it as the only thing that came from home, and burst into a flood of despairing tears.

In the midst, there fell on her ears a low strain of melancholy music rising and falling like the wailing of mournful spirits. She sprang to her feet and stood listening with dilated eyes; then, as a louder note reached her, in terror uncontrollable, she caught up her candle, rushed down the stairs like a wild bird, and stood panting before Mrs. Aylward, who had a big Bible open on the table before her.

"Oh, ma'am," she cried, between her panting sobs, "I can't stay there! I shall die!"

"What means this, madam?" said Mrs. Aylward, stiffly, making the word sound much like "foolish child."

"The—the music!" she managed faintly to utter, falling again into the friendly chair.

"The music?" said Mrs. Aylward, considering; then with a shade of polite contempt, "O! Jumbo's fiddle! I did not know it could be heard in your room, but no doubt the windows below are open."

"Is Jumbo that black man?" asked Aurelia, shuddering; for negro servants, though the fashion in town, had not penetrated into the west.

"Mr. Belamour's blackamoor. He often plays to him half the night."

"Oh!" with another quivering sound of alarm; "is Mr. Belamour the gentleman in the dark?"

"Even so, madam, but you need have no fears. He keeps his room and admits no one, though he sometimes walks out by night. You will only have to keep the children from a noise making near his apartments. Good night, madam."

"Oh, pray, if I do not disturb you, would you be pleased to let me stay till you have finished your chapter; I might not be so frightened then."

In common humanity Mrs. Aylward could not refuse, and Aurelia sat silently grasping the arms of her chair, and trying to derive all the comfort she could from the presence of a Bible and a good woman. Her nerves were, in fact, calmed by the interval, and when Mrs. Aylward took off her spectacles and shut up her book, it had become possible to endure the terrors of the lonely chamber.

# CHAPTER VIII. THE ENCHANTED CASTLE

A little she began to lose her fear.—MORRIS.

Aurelia slept till she was wakened by a bounce at the door, and the rattling of the lock, but it was a little child's voice that was crying, "I will! I will! I will go in and seem by cousin!"

Then came Mrs. Aylward's severe voice: "No, miss, you are not to waken your cousin. Come away. Where is that slut, Jenny?"

Then there was a scuffle and a howl, as if the child were being forcibly carried away. Aurelia sprang out of bed, for sunshine was flooding the room, and she felt accountable for tardiness. She had made some progress in dressing, when again little hands were on the lock, little feet kicking the door, and little voices calling, "Let me in."

She opened the door, and white nightgowns, all tumbled back one over the other.

"My little cousins," she said, "come and kiss me."

One came forward and lifted up a sweet little pale face, but the other two stood, each with a finger in the mouth, right across the threshold, in a manner highly inconvenient to Aurelia, who was only in her stiff stays and dimity petticoat, with a mass of hair hanging down below her waist. She turned to them with arms out-stretched, but this put them instantly to the rout, and they ran off as fast as their bare pink feet could carry them, till one stumbled, and lay with her face down and her plump legs kicking in the air. Aurelia caught her up, but the capture produced a powerful yell, and out, all at once hurried into the corridor, Mrs. Aylward, a tidy maid servant, a stout, buxom countrywoman, and a rough girl, scarcely out of bed, but awake enough to snatch the child out of the young lady's arms, and carry her off. The housekeeper began scolding vigorously all round, and Aurelia escaped into her room, where she completed her toilette, looking out into a garden below, laid out in the formal Dutch fashion, with walks and beds centring in a fountain, the grass plats as sharply defined as possible, and stiff yews and cypresses dotted at regular intervals or forming straight alleys. She felt strange and shy, but the sunshine, the cheerfulness, and the sight of the children, had reassured her, and when she had said her morning prayer, she had lost the last night's sense of hopeless dreariness and unprotectedness. When another knock came, she opened the door cheerfully, but there was a chill in meeting Mrs. Aylward's grave, cold face, and stiff salutation. "If you are ready, madam," she said, "I will show you to the south parlour, where the children will eat with you."

Aurelia ventured to ask about her baggage, and was told that it would be forwarded from Brentford. Mrs. Aylward then led the way to a wide stone staircase, with handsome carved balusters, leading down into the great hall, with doors opening from all sides. All was perfectly empty, and so still, that the sweep of the dresses, and the tap of the heels made an echo; and the sunshine, streaming in at the large window, marked out every one upon the floor, in light and shadow, and exactly repeated the brown-shaded, yellow-framed medallions of painted glass upon the pavement. There was something awful and oppressive in the entire absence of all tokens of habitation, among those many closed doors.

One, however, at the foot of the stairs was opened by Mrs. Aylward. It led to a sort of narrow lobby, with a sashed window above a low door, opening on stone steps down to the terrace and garden. To the right was an open door, giving admittance to a room hung with tapestry, with a small carpet in the centre of the floor, and a table prepared for the morning meal. There was a certain cheerfulness about it, though it was bare of furniture; but there was an easy chair, a settee, a long couch, a spinnet, and an embroidery frame, so that altogether it had capabilities of being lived in.

"Here you will sit, madam, with the young ladies," said Mrs. Aylward. "They have a maid-servant who will wait on you, and if you require anything, you will be pleased to speak to me. My

Lady wishes you to take charge of them, and likewise to execute the piece of embroidery you will find in that frame, with the materials. This will be your apartment, and you can take the young ladies into the garden and park, wherever you please, except that they must not make a noise before the windows of the other wing, which you will see closed with shutters, for those are Mr. Belamour's rooms."

With these words Mrs. Aylward curtsied as if about to retire, Aurelia held out her hand in entreaty. "Oh, cannot you stay with me?"

"No, madam, my office is the housekeeper's," was the stiff response. "Molly will call me if you require my services. I think you said you preferred bread and milk for breakfast. Dinner will be served at one."

Mrs. Aylward retreated, leaving a chill on the heart of the lonely girl.

She was a clergyman's widow, though with no pretensions to gentility, and was a plain, conscientious, godly woman, but with the narrow self-concentrated piety of the time, which seemed to ignore all the active part of the duty to our neighbour. She had lived many years as a faithful retainer to the Belamour family, and avoided perplexity by minding no one's business but her own, and that thoroughly. Naturally reserved, and disapproving much that she saw around her, she had never held it to be needful to do more than preserve her own integrity, and the interests of her employers, and she made it a principle to be in no wise concerned in family affairs, and to hold aloof from perilous confidences.

Thus Aurelia was left to herself, till three bowls of milk were borne in by Molly, who was by no means loth to speak.

"The little misses will be down directly, ma'am," she said, "that is, two on 'em. The little one, she won't leave Jenny Bowles, but Dame Wheatfield, she'll bring down the other two. You see, ma'am, they be only just taken home from being out at nurse, and don't know one another, nor the place, and a pretty handful we shall have of 'em."

Here came a call for Molly, and the girl with a petulant exclamation, sped away, leaving Aurelia to the society of the tapestry. It was of that set of Gobelin work which represents the four elements personified by their goddesses, and Aurelia's mythology, founded on Fenelon, was just sufficient to enable her to recognise the forge of Vulcan and the car [chariot—D.L.] of Venus. Then she looked at the work prepared for her, a creamy piece of white satin, and a most elaborate pattern of knots of roses, lilacs, hyacinths, and laburnums, at which her heart sank within her. However, at that moment the stout woman she had seen in the morning appeared at the open door with a little girl in each hand, both in little round muslin caps, long white frocks, and blue sashes.

One went up readily to Aurelia and allowed herself to be kissed, and lifted to a chair; the other clung to Dame Wheatfield, in spite of coaxing entreaties. "Speak pretty, my dear; speak to the pretty lady. Don't ye see how good your sister is? It won't do, miss," to Aurelia; "she's daunted, is my pretty lamb. If I might just give her her breakwist—for it is the last time I shall do it—then she might get used to you before my good man comes for me."

Aurelia was only too glad to instal Dame Wheatfield in a chair with her charge in her lap. The other child was feeding herself very tidily and independently, and Aurelia asked her if she were the eldest.

"Yes," she said.

"And what shall I call you, my dear?"

"I'm Missy."

"No, Missy, me—me eldest," cried the other.

"Bless the poor children!" exclaimed Mrs. Wheatfield, laughing, "they be both of 'em eldest, as one may say."

"They are twins, then?" said Aurelia.

"More than that—all three of them came together! I've heard tell of such a thing once or twice, but never of all living and thriving. Folk said it was a judgment on my Lady that she spoke sharp

and hard to a poor beggar woman with a child on each arm. It was not a week out before my Lady herself was down, quite unexpected, as I may say, for she was staying here for a week, with a lot of company, when these three was born. They do say she was nigh beside herself that the like of that should have happened to her. Mr. Wayland, he was not so ill pleased, but the poor little things had to be got out of the house any way, for she could not abear to hear of them. Mrs. Rolfe, as was an old servant of the family, took that one, and I was right glad to have you, my pretty one, for I had just lost my babe at a fortnight old, and the third was sent to Goody Bowles, for want of a better. They says as how my Lady means to bring them out one by one, and to make as this here is bigger, and the other up stairs is lesser, and never let on that they are all of an age."

The good gossip must have presumed greatly on the children's want of comprehension if she did not suppose that they understood her at least as well as the young lady to whom her dialect was strange.

"And has she not seen them?"

"Never till last Monday, if you'll believe me miss, when she drove down in her coach, and the children were all brought home. I thought she might have said something handsome, considering the poor little babe as my Missy here was when I had her—not so long as my hand—and scarce able to cry enough to show she was alive. The work I and my good man had with her! He would walk up and down half the night with her. Not as we grudged it. He is as fond of the child as myself; and Mr. Wayland, he knew it. 'She has a good nurse, dame,' says he to me, with the water in his eyes, before he went to foreign parts. But my Lady! When the little one as had been with Goody Bowles—an ignorant woman, you see—cried and clung to her, and kicked, 'Little savages all,' says my Lady. There was thanks to them that had had more work to rear her children than ever with one of her own! 'Perfect little rustics!' she said, even when you made your curtsey as pretty as could be, didn't you, my little lammie?"

"Mammy Rolfe taught me to make my curtsey like a London lady," said the other child, the most advanced in manners.

"Aha! little pitchers have long ears; but, bless you, they don't know what it means," said Dame Wheatfield, too glad to talk to check herself on any account; "Not so much as a kiss for them, poor little darlings! Folks say she does not let even Master Wayland kiss aught but her hands for fear of her fine colours. A plague on such colours, I say."

"Poor little things!" whispered Aurelia.

"You'll be good to them, won't you miss?"

"Indeed I hope so! I am only just come from home, and they will be all I have to care for here."

"Ay, you must be lonesome in this big place; but I'm right glad to have seen you, miss; I can part with the little dear with a better heart, for Mrs. Aylward don't care for children, and Jenny Bowles is a rough wench, wrapped up in her own child, and won't be no good to the others. Go to the lady, my precious," she added, trying to put the little girl into her cousin's lap, but this was met with struggles, and vehement cries of—

"No; stay with mammy!"

The little sister, who had not brought her nurse, was, however, well contented to be lifted to Aurelia's knee, and returned her caresses.

"And have you not a name, my dear? We can't call you all missie."

"Fay," the child lisped; "Fayfiddly Wayland."

"Lawk-a-daisy!" and Mrs. Wheatfield fell back laughing. "I'll tell you how it was, ma'am. When no one thought they would live an hour, Squire Wayland he sent for parson and had 'em half baptised Faith, Hope, and Charity. They says his own mother's was called Faith, and the other two came natural after it, and would do as well to be buried by as aught. So that's what she means by Fay, and this here is Miss Charity."

"She said something besides Faith."

"Well, when my lady got about again, they say if she was mad at their coming all on a heap, she was madder still at their name. Bible wasn't grand enough for her! I did hear tell that she throwed her slipper at her husband's head, and was like to go into fits. So to content her he came down, and took each one to Church, and had a fine London name of my Lady's choosing tacked on in parson's register for them to go by; but to my mind it ain't like their christened name. Mine here got called for her share Amoretta."

"A little Love," cried Aurelia. "Oh, that is pretty. And what can your name be, my dear little Fay? Will you tell me again?"

When repeated, it was plainly Fidelia, and it appeared that Hope had been also called Letitia. As to age, Mrs. Wheatfield knew it was five years last Michaelmas since the child had been brought to her from whom she was so loth to part that she knew not how to go when her husband came for her in his cart. He was a farmer, comfortably off, though very homely, and there were plenty of children at home, so that she had been ill spared to remain at the Park till Aurelia's arrival. Thus she took the opportunity of going away while the little one was asleep.

Aurelia asked where she lived now. At Sedhurst, in the next parish, she was told; but she would not accept a promise that her charge should soon be brought to visit her. "Better not, ma'am, thank you all the same, not till she's broke in. She'll pine the less if she don't see nor hear nothing about the old place, nor Daddy and Sally and Davie. If you bring her soon, you'll never get her away again. That's the worst of a nurse-child. I was warned. It just breaks your heart!"

So away went the good foster-mother sobbing; and Aurelia's charge began. Fay claimed her instantly to explore the garden and house. The child had been sent home alone on the sudden illness of her nurse, and had been very forlorn, so that her cousin's attention was a great boon to her. Hope was incited to come out; but Jenny Bowles kept a jealous watch over her, and treated every one else as an enemy; and before Aurelia's hat was on, came the terrible woe of Amoret's awakening. Her sobs and wailings for her mammy were entirely beyond the reach of Aurelia's soothings and caresses, and were only silenced by Molly's asseveration that the black man was at the door ready to take her into the dark room. That this was no phantom was known to the poor child, and was a lurking horror to Aurelia herself. No wonder that the little thing clung to her convulsively, and would not let her hand go for the rest of the day, every now and then moaning out entreaties to go home to mammy.

With the sad little being hanging to her hand, Aurelia was led by Fay round their new abiding place. The house was of brick, shaped like the letter H, Dutch, and with a tall wing, at each end of the main body, projecting, and finishing in fantastic gables edged with stone. One of these square wings was appropriated to Aurelia and her charges, the other to the recluse Mr. Belamour. The space that lay between the two wings, on the garden front, was roofed over, and paved with stone, descending in several broad shallow steps at the centre and ends, guarded at each angle by huge carved eagles, the crest of the builder, of the most regular patchwork, and kept, in spite of the owner's non-residence, in perfect order. The strange thing was that this fair and stately place, basking in the sunshine of early June, should be left in complete solitude save for the hermit in the opposite wing, the three children, and the girl, who felt as though in a kind of prison.

The sun was too hot for Aurelia to go out of doors till late in the day, when the shadow of the house came over the steps. She was sitting on one, with Amoret nestled in her lap, and was crooning an old German lullaby of Nannerl's, which seemed to have a wonderful effect in calming the child, who at last fell into a doze. Aurelia had let her voice die away, and had begun to think over her strange situation, when she was startled by a laugh behind her, and looking round, hardly repressed a start or scream, at the sight of Fay enjoying a game at bo-peep, with—yes—it actually was—the negro —over the low-sashed door.

"I beg pardon, ma'am," said Jumbo, twitching his somewhat grizzled wool; "I heard singing, and little missy—"

Unfortunately Amoret here awoke, and with a shriek of horror cowered in her arms.

"I am so sorry," said Aurelia, anxious not to hurt his feelings. "She knows no better."

Jumbo grinned, bowed, and withdrew, Fay running after him, for she had made friends with him during her days of solitude, being a fearless child, and not having been taught to make a bugbear of him. "The soot won't come off," she said.

Aurelia had not a moment to herself till Fay had said the Lord's prayer at her knee, and Amoret, with much persuasion, had been induced to lisp out—

"Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John,
Bless the bed I sleep upon;
Four corners to by bed,
Four angles round my head,
One to read and one to write,
And two to guard my soul at night."

Another agony for mammy ensued, nor could Aurelia leave the child till sleep had hushed the wailings. Then only could she take her little writing-case to begin her letter to Betty. It would be an expensive luxury to her family, but she knew how it would be longed for; and though she cried a good deal over her writing, she felt as if she ought to make the best of her position, for had not Betty said it was for her father's sake? No, her tears must not blot the paper, to distress those loving hearts. Yet how the drops *would* come, gathering fast and blinding her! Presently, through the window, came the sweet mysterious strains of the violin, not terrifying her as before, but filling her with an inexpressible sense of peace and calmness. She sat listening almost as one in a dream, with her pen suspended, and when the spell was broken by Molly's entrance with her supper, she went on in a much more cheerful strain than she had begun. It was dull, and it was a pity that her grand wardrobe, to say nothing of Betty's good advice, should be wasted, but her sister would rejoice in her seclusion from the grand, fashionable world, and her heart went out to the poor little neglected children, whose mother could not bear the sight of them.

# CHAPTER IX. THE TRIAD

"I know sisters, sisters three."

Ere many days had passed Aurelia had drifted into what would now be regarded as the duties of a nursery governess to her little companions.

Fay and Amoret were always with her, and depended on her for everything. Jenny Bowles, with a sort of animal jealousy, tried to monopolise her charge, Letitia. The child was attracted by the sounds of her sister's sports, and there was no keeping her from them, or from their cousin. Then the rude untaught Jenny became cross, moped, showed spite to the other children, and insolence to the young lady, and was fortunately overheard by Mrs. Aylward, and dismissed. Letty did not seem to mind the loss as Amoret had felt that of her foster-mother, for indeed Jenny had been almost as disagreeable to her as to the others during these days of jealousy.

The triad were not much alike: Amoret was the largest of the three, plump, blue-eyed, golden-haired, rosy-cheeked, a picture of the cherub-type of child; Letitia had the delicate Delavie features and complexion; and Fidelia, the least pretty, was pale, and rather sallow, with deep blue eyes set under a broad forehead and dark brows, with hair also dark. Though the smallest, she was the most advanced, and showed signs of good training. She had some notion of good manners, and knew as much of her hornbook [a child's primer consisting of a sheet of parchment or paper protected by a sheet of transparent horn—D.L.] and catechism as little girls of five were wont to know. The other two were perfectly ignorant, but Mrs. Aylward procured hornbooks, primers, and slates, and Aurelia began their education in a small way.

It was a curious life. There was the great empty house, through whose long corridors and vacant rooms the children might wander at will, peeping at the swathed curtains of velvet pile, the rolls of carpet, and the tapestry pictures on the walls, running and shouting in the empty passages, or sometimes, in a fit of nameless fright, taking refuge in Aurelia's arms. Or they might play in the stately garden, provided they trod on no borders, and meddled with neither flower nor fruit. The old gardener began by viewing them as his natural enemies, but soon relaxed in amusement at their pretty sportive ways, gave them many precious spoils, and forgave more than one naughty little inroad, which greatly alarmed their guardian.

Or if the little party felt enterprising, there lay beyond, the park, its slopes covered with wild strawberries, and with woods where they could gather flowers unchecked. Further, there was no going, except on alternate Sundays, when there was service in the tumble-down Church at the park gate. It was in far worse condition than the Church at home, and was served by a poor forlorn-looking curate, who lived at Brentford, and divided his services between four parishes, each of which was content to put up with a fortnightly alternate morning and evening service. The Belamour seat was a square one, without the comfortable appliances of the Delavie closet, and thus permitting a much fuller view, but there was nothing to be seen except a row of extremely gaudy Belamour hatchments, displaying to the full, the saltir-wise sheafs of arrows on the shields or lozenges, supported by grinning skulls. The men's shields preserved their eagle crest, the women had only lozenges, and the family motto, *Amo et Amabo*, was exchanged for the more pious "*Resurgam*."

Aurelia found that the family seat, whither she was marshalled by Mrs. Aylward, was already occupied by two ladies, who rose up, and made her stately curtsies with a decidedly disgusted air, although there was ample space for her and Fidelia, the only one of her charges whom she had ventured to take with her. They wore the black hoods, laced boddices, long rolls of towering curl and open upper skirts, of Queen Anne's day, and in the eyes of thirty years' later, looked so ridiculous that Fay could not but stare at them the whole time, and whenever Aurelia turned her glances from her

book to see whether her little companion was behaving herself, the big blue considering eyes were always levelled full upon the two forms before her.

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.