YONGE CHARLOTTE MARY

HEARTSEASE; OR, THE BROTHER'S WIFE

Charlotte Yonge

Heartsease; Or, The Brother's Wife

Yonge C.

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Содержание

Charlotte M. Yonge
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PART I

And Maidens call them Love in Idleness.

—*Midsummer Night's Dream*

CHAPTER 1

There are none of England's daughters that bear a prouder presence.
And a kingly blood sends glances up, her princely eye to trouble,
And the shadow of a monarch's crown is softened in her hair.

—ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

The sun shone slanting over a spacious park, the undulating ground here turning a broad lawn towards the beams that silvered every blade of grass; there, curving away in banks of velvet green; shadowed by the trees; gnarled old thorns in the holiday suit whence they take their name, giant's nosegays of horse-chestnuts, mighty elms and stalwart oaks, singly or in groups, the aristocracy of the place; while in the background rose wooded coverts, where every tint of early green blended in rich masses of varied foliage.

An avenue, nearly half a mile in length, consisted of a quadruple range of splendid lime trees of uniform growth, the side arcades vaulted over by the meeting branches, and the central road, where the same lights and shadows were again and again repeated, conducting the eye in diminishing perspective to a mansion on a broad base of stone steps. Herds of cattle, horses, and deer, gave animation to the scene, and near the avenue were a party of village children running about gathering cowslips, or seated on the grass, devouring substantial plum buns.

Under a lordly elm sat a maiden of about nineteen years; at her feet a Skye terrier, like a walking door-mat, with a fierce and droll countenance, and by her side a girl and boy, the one sickly and poorly clad, the other with bright inquiring eyes, striving to compensate for the want of other faculties. She was teaching them to form that delight of childhood, a cowslip ball, the other children supplying her with handfuls of the gold-coated flowers, and returning a pull of the forelock or a bobbed curtsey to her smiling thanks.

Her dress was of a plain brown-holland looking material, the bonnet she had thrown off was of the coarsest straw, but her whole air declared her the daughter of that lordly house; and had gold and rubies been laid before her instead of cowslips with fairy favours, they would well have become her princely port, long neck, and stately head, crowned with a braid of her profuse black hair. That regal look was more remarkable in her than beauty; her brow was too high, her features not quite regular, her complexion of gypsy darkness, but with a glow of eyes very large, black, and deeply set, naturally grave in expression, but just now beaming and dancing in accordance with the encouraging smiles on her fresh, healthy, red lips, as her hands, very soft and delicate, though of large and strong make, completed the ball, threw it in the little boy's face, and laughed to see his ecstasy over the delicious prize; teaching him to play with it, tossing it backwards and forwards, shaking him into animation, and ever and anon chasing her little dog to extract it from between his teeth.

Suddenly she became aware of the presence of a spectator, and instantly assuming her bonnet, and drawing up her tall figure, she exclaimed, in a tone of welcome:

'Oh, Mr. Wingfield, you are come to see our cowslip feast.'

'There seems to be great enjoyment,' replied the young curate, looking, however, somewhat pre-occupied.

'Look at Charlie Layton,' said she, pointing to the dumb boy. 'That ball is perfect felicity, he had rather not play with it, the delight is mere possession.' She was turning to the boy again, when Mr. Wingfield said, not without hesitation—'You have not heard when to expect your party from Madeira?'

'You know we cannot hear again. They were to sail by the next packet, and it is uncertain how soon they may arrive.'

'And—and—your brother Arthur. Do you know when he comes home?'

'He promised to come this spring, but I fancy Captain Fitzhugh has inveigled him somewhere to fish. He never writes, so he may come any day. But what—is anything the matter?'

'I have a letter here that—which—in Lord Martindale's absence, I thought it might be better—you might prefer my coming direct to you. I cannot but think you should be aware'—stammered Mr. Wingfield.

'Well,'—she said, haughtily.

'Here is a letter from my cousin, who has a curacy in the Lake country. Your brother is at Wrangerton, the next town.'

'Arthur is well?' cried she, starting.

'Yes, yes, you need not be alarmed, but I am afraid there is some entanglement. There are some Miss Mosses—'

'Oh, it is that kind of thing!' said she, in an altered tone, her cheeks glowing; 'it is very silly of him to get himself talked about; but of course it is all nothing.'

'I wish I could think so,' said Mr. Wingfield; 'but, indeed, Miss Martindale,' for she was returning to the children, 'I am afraid it is a serious matter. The father is a designing person.'

'Arthur will not be taken in,' was her first calm answer; but perceiving the curate unconvinced, though unwilling to contradict, she added, 'But what is the story?'

Mr. Wingfield produced the letter and read; 'Fanshawe, the curate of Wrangerton, has just been with me, telling me his rector is in much difficulty and perplexity about a son of your parishioner, Lord Martindale. He came to Wrangerton with another guardsman for the sake of the fishing, and has been drawn into an engagement with one of the daughters of old Moss, who manages the St. Erme property. I know nothing against the young ladies, indeed Fanshawe speaks highly of them; but the father is a disreputable sort of attorney, who has taken advantage of Lord St. Erme's absence and neglect to make a prey of the estate. The marriage is to take place immediately, and poor Mr. Jones is in much distress at the dread of being asked to perform the ceremony, without the consent of the young man's family.'

'He cannot do it,' exclaimed the young lady; 'you had better write and tell him so.'

'I am afraid,' said Mr. Wingfield, diffidently, 'I am afraid he has no power to refuse.'

'Not in such a case as this? It is his duty to put a stop to it.'

'All that is in his power he will do, no doubt, by reasoning and remonstrance; but you must remember that your brother is of age, and if the young lady's parents consent, Mr. Jones has no choice.'

'I could not have believed it! However, it will not come to that: it is only the old rector's fancy. To make everything secure I will write to my brother, and we shall soon see him here.'

'There is still an hour before post-time,' said Mr. Wingfield; 'shall I send the children home?'

'No, poor little things, let them finish their game. Thank you for coming to me. My aunt will, I hope, hear nothing of it. Good evening.'

Calling an elder girl, she gave some directions; and Mr. Wingfield watched her walking down the avenue with a light-footed but decided and characteristic tread, expressing in every step, 'Where I am going, there I will go, and nothing shall stop me.'

'Nonsense!' she said to herself; 'Arthur cannot be so lost to the sense of everything becoming. Such pain cannot be in store for me! Anything else I could bear; but this must not, cannot, shall not be. Arthur is all I have; I cannot spare him; and to see him shipwrecked on a low-bred designing creature would be too much misery. Impossible—so clear-headed as he is, so fastidious about women! And yet this letter spoke decidedly. People talk of love! and Arthur is so easy, he would let himself be drawn on rather than make a disturbance. He might be ensnared with his eyes open, because he disliked the trouble of breaking loose, and so would not think of the consequence. Nothing could save him so well as some one going to him. He can read a letter or not as he chooses. Oh, if papa were at home—oh, if Mr. Wingfield were but Percy Fotheringham—he who fears no man, and can manage any one! Oh!

if I could go myself; he heeds me when he heeds no one else. Shall I go? Why not? It would save him; it would be the only effectual way. Let me see. I would take Simmonds and Pauline. But then I must explain to my aunt. Stuff! there are real interests at stake! Suppose this is exaggeration—why, then, I should be ridiculous, and Arthur would never forget it. Besides, I believe I cannot get there in one day—certainly not return the same. I must give way to conventionalities, and be a helpless young lady.'

She reached the house, and quickly dashed off her letter:—

'My Dear Arthur,—I hope and trust this letter may be quite uncalled for, though I feel it my duty to write it. I used to have some influence with you, and I should think that anything that reminded you of home would make you pause.

'Report has of course outrun the truth. It is impossible you should be on the brink of marriage without letting us know—as much so, I should trust, as your seriously contemplating an engagement with one beneath your notice. I dare say you find it very pleasant to amuse yourself; but consider, before you allow yourself to form an attachment—I will not say before becoming a victim to sordid speculation. You know what poor John has gone through, though there was no inferiority there. Think what you would have to bear for the sake, perhaps, of a pretty face, but of a person incapable of being a companion or comfort, and whom you would be ashamed to see beside your own family. Or, supposing your own affections untouched, what right have you to trifle with the feelings of a poor girl, and raise expectations you cannot and ought not to fulfil? You are too kind, when once you reflect, to inflict such pain, you, who cannot help being loved. Come away while it is time; come home, and have the merit of self-sacrifice. If your fancy is smitten, it will recover in its proper sphere. If it costs you pain, you know to whom you have always hitherto turned in your vexations. Dear Arthur, do not ruin yourself; only come back to me. Write at once; I cannot bear the suspense.

'Your most affectionate sister,

'THEODORA A. MARTINDALE.'

She made two copies of this letter; one she directed to 'The Hon. Arthur Martindale, Grenadier Guards, Winchester;' the other, 'Post-Office, Wrangerton.' In rather more than a week she was answered:—

'My Dear Theodora,—You judged rightly that I am no man to trifle, or to raise expectations which I did not mean to fulfil. My wife and I are at Matlock for a few days before joining at Winchester.

'Your affectionate brother,

'ARTHUR N. MARTINDALE,'

CHAPTER 2

She's less of a bride than a bairn,
She's ta'en like a colt from the heather,
With sense and discretion to learn.

A chiel maun be patient and steady
That yokes with a mate in her teens.

Woo'd and Married and A'
JOANNA BAILLIE

A gentleman stood waiting at the door of a house not far from the Winchester barracks.

'Is my brother at home, James?' as the servant gave a start of surprise and recognition.

'No, sir; he is not in the house, but Mrs.—; will you walk in? I hope I see you better, sir.'

'Much better, thank you. Did you say Mrs. Martindale was at home?'

'Yes, sir; Mr. Arthur will soon be here. Won't you walk in?'

'Is she in the drawing-room?'

'No, I do not think so, sir. She went up-stairs when she came in.'

'Very well. I'll send up my card,' said he, entering, and the man as he took it, said, with emphasis, and a pleading look, 'She is a very nice young lady, sir,' then opened a room door.

He suddenly announced, 'Mr. Martindale,' and that gentleman unexpectedly found himself in the presence of a young girl, who rose in such confusion that he could not look at her as he shook her by the hand, saying, 'Is Arthur near home?'

'Yes—no—yes; at least, he'll come soon,' was the reply, as if she hardly knew what her words were.

'Were you going out?' he asked, seeing a bonnet on the sofa.

'No, thank you,—at least I mean, I'm just come in. He went to speak to some one, and I came to finish my letter. He'll soon come,' said she, with the rapid ill-assured manner of a school-girl receiving her mamma's visitors.

'Don't let me interrupt you,' said he, taking up a book.

'O no, no, thank you,' cried she, in a tremor lest she should have been uncivil. 'I didn't mean—I've plenty of time. 'Tis only to my home, and they have had one by the early post.'

He smiled, saying, 'You are a good correspondent.'

'Oh! I must write. Annette and I were never apart before.'

'Your sister?'

'Yes, only a year older. We always did everything together.'

He ventured to look up, and saw a bright dew on a soft, shady pair of dark eyes, a sweet quivering smile on a very pretty mouth, and a glow of pure bright deep pink on a most delicately fair skin, contrasted with braids of dark brown hair. She was rather above the ordinary height, slender, and graceful, and the childish beauty of the form or face and features surprised him; but to his mind the chief grace was the shy, sweet tenderness, happy and bright, but tremulous with the recent pain of the parting from home. With a kindly impulse, he said, 'You must tell me your name, Arthur has not mentioned it.'

'Violet;' and as he did not appear at once to catch its unusual sound, she repeated, 'Violet Helen; we most of us have strange names.'

'Violet Helen,' he repeated, with an intonation as if struck, not unpleasingly, by the second name. 'Well, that is the case in our family. My sister has an uncommon name.'

'Theodora,' said Violet, pausing, as if too timid to inquire further.

'Have you only this one sister?' he said.

'Six, and one brother,' said she, in a tone of exulting fondness. A short silence, and then the joyful exclamation, 'There he is!' and she sprang to the door, leaving it open, as her fresh young voice announced, full of gratulation, 'Here's your brother.'

'Guileless and unconscious of evil, poor child!' thought the brother; 'but I wonder how Arthur likes the news.'

Arthur entered, a fine-looking young man, of three-and-twenty, dark, bright complexioned, tall, and robust. He showed not the least consciousness of having offended, and his bride smiled freely as if at rest from all embarrassment now that she had her protector.

'Well, John,' was his greeting, warmly spoken. 'You here? You look better. How is the cough?'

'Better, thank you.'

'I see I need not introduce you,' said Arthur, laying his hand on the arm of his blushing Violet, who shrank up to him as he gave a short laugh. 'Have you been here long?'

'Only about five minutes.'

'And you are come to stay?'

'Thank you, if you can take me in for a day or two.'

'That we can. There is a tolerable spare room, and James will find a place for Brown. I am glad to see you looking so much better. Have you got rid of the pain in your side?'

'Entirely, thank you, for the last few weeks.'

'How is my mother?'

'Very well. She enjoyed the voyage extremely.'

'She won't concoct another Tour?'

'I don't think so,' said John, gravely.

'There has SHE,' indicating his wife, 'been thinking it her duty to read the old Italian one, which I never opened in my life. I declare it would take a dictionary to understand a page. She is scared at the variety of tongues, and feels as if she was in Babel.'

John was thinking that if he did not know this rattling talk to be a form of embarrassment, he should take it for effrontery.

'Shall I go and see about the room?' half-whispered Violet.

'Yes, do;' and he opened the door for her, exclaiming, almost before she was fairly gone, 'There! you want no more explanation.'

She is very lovely!' said John, in a tone full of cordial admiration.

'Isn't she?' continued Arthur, triumphantly. 'Such an out-of-the-way style;—the dark eyes and hair, with that exquisite complexion, ivory fairness,—the form of her face the perfect oval!—what you so seldom see—and her figure, just the right height, tall and taper! I don't believe she could be awkward if she was to try. She'll beat every creature hollow, especially in a few years' time when she's a little more formed.'

'She is very young?'

'Sixteen on our wedding-day. That's the beauty of it. If she had been a day older it would have been a different thing. Not that they could have spoilt her,—she is a thoroughbred by nature, and no mistake.'

'How did your acquaintance begin?'

'This way,' said Arthur, leaning back, and twirling a chair on one of its legs for a pivot. 'Fitzhugh would have me come down for a fortnight's fishing to Wrangerton. There's but one inn there fit to put a dog to sleep in, and when we got there we found the house turned out of window for a ball, all the partitions down on the first floor, and we driven into holes to be regaled with distant fiddle-squeak. So Fitzhugh's Irish blood was up for a dance, and I thought I might as well give in to it, for the floor

shook so that there was no taking a cigar in peace. So you see the stars ordained it, and it is of no use making a row about one's destiny,' concluded Arthur, in a sleepy voice, ceasing to spin the chair.

'That was your first introduction?'

'Ay. After that, one was meeting the Mosses for ever; indeed, we had to call on the old fellow to get leave for fishing in that water of Lord St. Erme's. He has a very pretty sort of little place out of the town close to the park, and—and somehow the weather was too bright for any sport, and the stream led by their garden.'

'I perceive,' said John.

'Well, I saw I was in for it, and had nothing for it but to go through with it. Anything for a quiet life.'

'A new mode of securing it,' said John, indignant at his nonchalance.

'There you don't display your wonted sagacity,' returned Arthur coolly. 'You little know what I have gone through on your account. If you had been sound-winded, you would have saved me no end of persecution.'

'You have not avoided speculation as it is,' John could not help saying.

'I beg to observe that you are mistaken. Old Moss is as cunning a fox as ever lived; but I saw his game, and without my own good-will he might have whistled for me. I saw what he was up to, and let him know it, but as I was always determined that when I married it should be to please myself, not my aunt, I let things take their course and saved the row at home.'

'I am sure she knew nothing of this.'

'She? Bless you, poor child. She is as innocent as a lamb, and only thinks me all the heroes in the world.'

'She did not know my father was ignorant of it?'

'Not she. She does not know it to this day.' John sat thinking; Arthur twirled the chair, then said, 'That is the fact. I suppose my aunt had a nice story for you.'

'It agreed in the main with yours.'

'I was unlucky,' said Arthur, 'I meant to have brought her home before my aunt and Theodora had any news of it. I could have got round them that way, but somehow Theodora got scent of it, and wrote me a furious letter, full of denunciation—two of them—they hunted me everywhere, so I saw it was no use going there.'

'She is much hurt at your letter. I can see that she is, though she tries to hide her feelings. She was looking quite pale when we came home, and I can hardly bear to see the struggle to look composed when you are mentioned.'

This evidently produced some compunction, but Arthur tried to get rid of it. 'I am sure there was nothing to take to heart in it—was there, John?'

'I don't know. She had burnt it without letting any one see it; and it was only through my aunt that we learnt that she had received it.'

'Well! her temper is up, and I am sorry for it,' said Arthur. 'I forget what I said. I dare say it was no more than she deserved. I got one of these remonstrances of hers at Wrangerton, on the day before, and another followed me a couple of days after to Matlock, so I could not have that going on for ever, and wrote off to put a stop to it. But what does his lordship say?'

'Do you wish him to forgive or not?' said his brother, nearly out of patience.

'Of course—I knew he would, he can't leave us with nothing to live on. There's nothing to be done but to go through the forms, and I am quite ready. Come, what's the use of looking intensely disgusted? Now you have seen her, you don't expect me to profess that I am very sorry, and "will never do so no more."'

'I say nothing against her, but the way of doing it.'

'So much trouble saved. Besides, I tell you I am ready to make whatever apology my father likes for a preliminary.'

His brother looked vexed, and dropped the conversation, waiting to see more of the bride before he should form an opinion.

It was seeing rather than hearing, for she was in much awe of him, blushed more than she spoke, and seemed taken up by the fear of doing something inappropriate, constantly turning wistful inquiring looks towards her husband, to seek encouragement or direction, but it was a becoming confusion, and by no means lessened the favourable impression.

'The next morning Arthur was engaged, and left her to be the guide to the cathedral, whereat she looked shy and frightened, but Mr. Martindale set himself to re-assure her, and the polished gentleness of his manner soon succeeded.

They stood on the hill, overlooking the town and the vale of Itchen, winding away till lost between the green downs that arose behind their crested neighbour, St. Catherine's Hill, and in the valley beneath reposed the gray cathedral's lengthened nave and square tower, its lesser likeness, St. Cross, and the pinnacles of the College tower.

'A very pretty view,' said Mr. Martindale.

'The old buildings are very fine, but it is not like our own hills.'

'No, it is hard on Hampshire downs to compare them to Cumberland mountains.'

'But it is so sunny and beautiful,' said the bright young bride. 'See the sunshine on the green meadows, and the haymaking. Oh! I shall always love it.' John heard a great deal of happiness in those words. 'I never saw a cathedral before,' she added.

'Have you been over this one?'

'Yes, but it will be such a treat to go again. One can't take a quarter of it in at once.'

'No, it takes half a lifetime to learn a cathedral properly.'

'It is a wonderful thing,' she said, with the same serious face; then, changing her tone to one of eagerness, 'I want to find Bishop Fox's tomb, for he was a north-country bishop.'

John smiled. 'You are perfect in the cathedral history.'

'I bought a little book about it.'

Her knowledge was, he found, in a girlish state of keen interest, and not deficient, but what pleased him best was that, as they entered and stood at the west door, looking down the whole magnificent length of nave, choir, and chapel, the embowed roof high above, sustained on massive pillars, she uttered a low murmur of 'beautiful!' and there was a heart-felt expression of awe and reverence on her face, a look as of rapt thought, chased away in a moment by his eye, and giving place to quiet pensiveness. After the service they went over the building; but though eager for information, the gravity did not leave her, nor did she speak at once when they emerged into the Close.

'It is very impressive,' said John.

'I suppose you have seen a great many cathedrals?'

'Yes, many foreign ones, and a few English.'

'I wonder whether seeing many makes one feel the same as seeing one.'

'How do you mean?'

'I do not think I could ever care for another like this one.'

'As your first?'

'Yes; it has made me understand better what books say about churches, and their being like—'

'Like?'

She changed her sentence. 'It makes one think, and want to be good.'

'It is what all truly beautiful things should do' said John.

'Oh! I am glad you say so,' exclaimed Violet. 'It is like what Annette and I have wondered about —I mean why fine statues or pictures, or anything of that kind, should make one feel half sad and half thoughtful when one looks at them long.'

'Perhaps because it is a straining after the only true beauty.'

‘I must tell Annette that. It was she that said it was so,’ said Violet; ‘and we wondered Greek statues gave one that feeling, but I see it must be the reason.’

‘What statues have you seen?’

‘Those at Wrangerton House. Lord St. Erme is always sending cases home, and it is such a festival day to go up and see them unpacked, and Caroline and Annette go and take drawings, and I like to wander about the rooms, and look at everything,’ said Violet, growing talkative on the theme of home. ‘There is one picture I like above all, but that is a sacred subject, so no wonder it should have that feeling in it.’

‘What is it?’

‘It is a Madonna,’ she said, lowering her voice. ‘A stiff old-fashioned one, in beautiful, bright, clear colouring. The Child is reaching out to embrace a little cross, and his Mother holds him towards it with such a sad but such a holy face, as if she foreboded all, and was ready to bear it.’

‘Ah! that Ghirlandajo?’

‘That is the name!’ cried Violet, enchanted. ‘Have you seen it?’

‘I saw Lord St. Erme buy it.’

‘Do you know Lord St. Erme?’ said Violet, rather awe-struck.

‘I used to meet him in Italy.’

‘We wish so much that he would come home. We do so want to see a poet.’

John smiled. ‘Is he never at home?’

‘O, no, he has never been at Wrangerton since his father died, twelve years ago. He does not like the place, so he only comes to London when he is in England, and papa goes up to meet him on business, but he is too poetical to attend to it.’

‘I should guess that.’

‘I have done wrong, said Violet, checking herself; ‘I should not have said that. Mamma told us that we ought never to chatter about his concerns. Will you, please, not remember that I said it?’

As far as the outer world is concerned, I certainly will not,’ said John kindly. ‘You cannot too early learn discretion. So that picture is at Wrangerton?’

‘I am so glad you liked it.’

‘I liked it well enough to wish for a few spare hundreds, but it seems to have afforded no more pleasure to him than it has given to me. I am glad it is gone where there is some one who can appreciate it.’

‘Oh, said Violet,’ Matilda knows all about the best pictures. We don’t appreciate, you know, we only like.’

‘And your chief liking is for that one?’

‘It is more than liking,’ said Violet; ‘I could call it loving. It is almost the same to me as Helvellyn. Annette and I went to the house for one look more my last evening at home. I must tell her that you have seen it!’ and the springing steps grew so rapid, that her companion had to say, ‘Don’t let me detain you, I am obliged to go gently up-hill.’ She checked her steps, abashed, and presently, with a shy but very pretty action, held out her arm, saying timidly, ‘Would it help you to lean on me? I ought not to have brought you this steep way. Matilda says I skurry like a school-girl.’

He saw it would console her to let her think herself of service and accepted of the slender prop for the few steps that remained. He then went up-stairs to write letters, but finding no ink, came to the drawing-room to ask her for some. She had only her own inkstand, which was supplying her letter to Annette, and he sat down at the opposite side of the table to share it. Her pen went much faster than his. ‘Clifton Terrace, Winchester,’ and ‘My dear father—I came here yesterday, and was most agreeably surprised,’ was all that he had indited, when he paused to weigh what was his real view of the merits of the case, and ponder whether his present feeling was sober judgment, or the novelty of the bewitching prettiness of this innocent and gracious creature. There he rested, musing, while from her pen flowed a description of her walk and of Mr. Martindale’s brother. ‘If they are all like him, I

shall be perfectly happy,' she wrote. 'I never saw any one so kind and considerate, and so gentle; only now and then he frightens me, with his politeness, or perhaps polish is the right word, it makes me feel myself rude and uncourteous and awkward. You said nothing gave you so much the notion of high-breeding as Mr. Martindale's ease, especially when he pretended to be rough and talk slang, it was like playing at it. Now, his brother has the same, without the funny roughness, but the greatest gentleness, and a good deal of quiet sadness. I suppose it is from his health, though he is much better now: he still coughs, and he moves slowly and leans languidly, as if he was not strong. He is not so tall as his brother, and much slighter in make, and fairer complexioned, with gray eyes and brown hair, and he looks sallow and worn and thin, with such white long hands.'

Here raising her eyes to verify her description, she encountered those of its subject, evidently taking a survey of her for the same purpose. He smiled, and she was thereby encouraged to break into a laugh, so girlish and light-hearted, so unconscious how much depended on his report, that he could not but feel compassionate.

Alarmed at the graver look, she crimsoned, exclaiming, 'O! I beg your pardon! It was very rude.'

'No, no,' said John; it was absurd!' and vexed at having checked her gladsomeness, he added, 'It is I rather who should ask your pardon, for looks that will not make a cheerful figure in your description.'

'Oh, no,' cried Violet; 'mamma told me never to say anything against any of Mr. Martindale's relations. What have I said?'—as he could not help laughing—'Something I could not have meant.'

'Don't distress yourself, pray,' said John, not at all in a bantering tone. 'I know what you meant; and it was very wise advice, such as you will be very glad to have followed.'

With a renewed blush, an ingenuous look, and a hesitating effort, she said, 'INDEED, I have been telling them how very kind you are. Mamma will be so pleased to hear it.'

'She must have been very sorry to part with you,' said he, looking at the fair girl sent so early into the world.

'Oh, yes!' and the tears started to the black eyelashes, though a smile came at the same time; 'she said I should be such a giddy young housekeeper, and she would have liked a little more notice.'

'It was not very long?' said John, anxious to lead her to give him information; and she was too young and happy not to be confidential, though she looked down and glowed as she answered, 'Six weeks.'

'And you met at the ball!'

'Yes, it was very curious;' and with deepening blushes she went on, the smile of happiness on her lips, and her eyes cast down. 'Annette was to go for the first time, and she would not go without me. Mamma did not like it, for I was not sixteen then; but Uncle Christopher came, and said I should, because I was his pet. But I can never think it was such a short time; it seems a whole age ago.'

'It must,' said John, with a look of interest that made her continue.

'It was very odd how it all happened. Annette and I had no one to dance with, and were wondering who those two gentlemen were. Captain Fitzhugh was dancing with Miss Evelyn, and he —Mr. Martindale—was leaning against the wall, looking on.'

'I know exactly—with his arms crossed so—'

'Yes, just so,' said Violet, smiling; 'and presently Grace Bennet came and told Matilda who they were; and while I was listening, oh, I was so surprised, for there was Albert, my brother, making me look round. Mr. Martindale had asked to be introduced to us, and he asked me to dance. I don't believe I answered right, for I thought he meant Matilda. 'But,' said she, breaking off, 'how I am chattering and hindering you!' and she coloured and looked down.

'Not at all,' said John; 'there is nothing I wish more to hear, or that concerns me more nearly. Anything you like to tell.'

'I am afraid it is silly,' half-whispered Violet to herself; but the recollection was too pleasant not to be easily drawn out; and at her age the transition is short from shyness to confidence.

'Not at all silly,' said John. 'You know I must wish to hear how I gained a sister.'

Then, as the strangeness of imagining that this grave, high-bred, more than thirty-years-old gentleman, could possibly call her by such a name, set her smiling and blushing in confusion, he wiled on her communications by saying, 'Well, that evening you danced with Arthur.'

'Three times. It was a wonderful evening. Annette and I said, when we went to bed, we had seen enough to think of for weeks. We did not know how much more was going to happen.'

'No, I suppose not.'

'I thought much of it when he bowed to me. I little fancied—but there was another odd coincidence—wasn't it? In general I never go into the drawing-room to company, because there are three older; but the day they came to speak to papa about the fishing, mamma and all the elder ones were out of the way, except Matilda. I was doing my Roman history with her, when papa came in and said, we must both come into the drawing-room.'

'You saw more of him from that time?'

'O yes; he dined with us. It was the first time I ever dined with a party, and he talked so much to me, that Albert began to laugh at me; but Albert always laughs. I did not care till—till—that day when he walked with us in the park, coming home from fishing.'

Her voice died away, and her face burnt as she looked down; but a few words of interest led her on.

'When I told mamma, she said most likely he thought me a little girl who didn't signify; but I did not think he could, for I am the tallest of them all, and every one says I look as if I was seventeen, at least. And then she told me grand gentlemen and officers didn't care what nonsense they talked. You know she didn't know him so well then,' said Violet, looking up pleadingly.

'She was very prudent.'

'She could not know he did not deserve it,' said the young bride, ready to resent it for her husband, since his brother did not, then again excusing her mother. 'It was all her care for me, dear mamma! She told me not to think about it; but I could not help it! Indeed I could not!'

'No, indeed,' and painful recollections of his own pressed on him, but he could not help being glad this tender young heart was not left to pine under disappointment. 'How long ago was this?'

'That was six weeks ago—a month before our wedding-day,' said she, blushingly. 'I did wish it could have been longer. I wanted to learn, how to keep house, and I never could, for he was always coming to take me to walk in the park. And it all happened so fast, I had no time to understand it, nor to talk to mamma and Matilda. And then mamma cried so much! I don't feel to understand it now, but soon perhaps I shall have more quiet time. I should like to have waited till Lord Martindale came home, but they said that could not be, because his leave of absence would be over. I did wish very much though that Miss Martindale could have left her aunt to come to our wedding.'

John found reply so difficult, that he was glad to be interrupted by Arthur's return. He soon after set out to call upon Captain Fitzhugh, who had been at Wrangerton with Arthur.

From him more of the circumstances were gathered. Mr. Moss was the person universally given up to reprobation. 'A thorough schemer,' said the Irish captain. As to the Miss Mosses, they were lady-like girls, most of them pretty, and everywhere well spoken of. In fact, John suspected he had had a little flirtation on his own account with some of them, though he took credit to himself for having warned his friend to be careful. He ended with a warm-hearted speech, by no means displeasing to John, hoping he would make the best of it with Lord Martindale, for after all, she was as pretty a creature as could be seen, one that any man might be proud of for a daughter-in-law; and to his mind it was better than leaving the poor girl to break her heart after him when it had gone so far.

Arthur himself was in a more rational mood that evening. He had at first tried to hide his embarrassment by bravado; but he now changed his tone, and as soon as Violet had left the dining-room, began by an abrupt inquiry, 'What would you have me do?'

'Why don't you write to my father!'

Arthur writhed. ‘I suppose it must come to that,’ he said; ‘but tell me first the state of things.’

‘You could not expect that there would not be a good deal of indignation.’

‘Ay, ay! How did you get the news? Did Theodora tell you?’

‘No; there was a letter from Colonel Harrington; and at home they knew the circumstances pretty correctly through a cousin of Wingfield’s, who has a curacy in that neighbourhood.’

‘Oh! that was the way Theodora came by the news. I wish he had let alone telling her,—I could have managed her alone;—but there! it was not in human nature not to tell such a story, and it did not much matter how it was done. Well, and my aunt is furious, I suppose, but I’ll take care of her and of my lady. I only want to know how my father takes it.’

‘He cannot endure the notion of a family feud; but the first step must come from you.’

‘Very well:—and so you came to set it going. It is very good-natured of you, John. I depended on you or Theodora for helping me through, but I did not think you would have come in this way. I am glad you have, for now you have seen her you can’t say a word against it.’

‘Against her, certainly not. I have made acquaintance with her this morning, and—and there is everything to interest one in her:’ and then, as Arthur looked delighted, and was ready to break into a rhapsody—‘Her simplicity especially. When you write you had better mention her entire ignorance of the want of sanction. I cannot think how she was kept in such unconsciousness.’

‘She knows nothing of people’s ways,’ said Arthur. ‘She knew you were all abroad, and her own family told her it was all right. Her father is a bit of a tyrant, and stopped the mother’s mouth, I fancy, if she had any doubts. As to herself, it was much too pretty to see her so happy, to let her set up her little scruples. She did just as she was told, like a good child.’

‘O Arthur! you have undertaken a great responsibility!’ exclaimed John.

But Arthur, without seeming to heed, continued, ‘So you see she is quite clear; but I’ll write, and you shall see if it is not enough to satisfy my father, before he sets us going respectably.’

‘I can’t answer for anything of that sort.’

‘Something he must do,’ said Arthur, ‘for my allowance is not enough to keep a cat; and as to the ninth part of old Moss’s pickings and stealings, if I meant to dirty my fingers with it, it won’t be to be come by till he is disposed of, and that won’t be these thirty years.’

‘Then, he let you marry without settling anything on her!’

‘He was glad to have her off his hands on any terms. Besides, to tell you the truth, John, I am convinced he had no notion you would ever come home again. He knew I saw his game, and dreaded I should be off; so he and I were both of one mind, to have it over as soon as possible.’

‘I only hope you will make her happy!’ said John, earnestly.

‘Happy!’ exclaimed Arthur, surprised, ‘small doubt of that! What should prevent me?’

‘I think you will find you must make some sacrifices.’

‘It all depends on my father,’ said Arthur, a little crossly, and taking his writing-case from another table.

He was so well pleased with his performance that, as soon as he was alone with Violet, he began, ‘There, I’ve done it! John said it could not be better, and after the impression you have made, no fear but he will pacify the great folks.’

She was perplexed. ‘Who?’ said she; ‘not Lord and Lady Martindale? Oh! surely I have not done anything to displease them.’

‘You must have been ingenious if you had.’

‘Pray, do tell me! Why are they to be pacified? What is the matter? Do they think they shan’t like me? Ought I to do anything?’

‘My little bird, don’t twitter so fast. You have asked a dozen questions in a breath.’

‘I wish you would tell me what it means,’ said Violet, imploringly.

‘Well, I suppose you must know sooner or later. It only means that they are taken by surprise.’

Violet gazed at him in perplexity, then, with a dawning perception, 'Oh! surely you don't mean they did not approve of it.'

'Nobody asked them,' said Arthur, carelessly, then as she turned away, covering her face with her hands, 'But it is nothing to take to heart in that way. I am my own master, you know, you silly child, and you had plenty of consent, and all that sort of thing, to satisfy you, so you are quite out of the scrape.'

She scarcely seemed to hear.

'Come, come, Violet, this won't do,' he continued, putting his arm round her, and turning her towards him, while he pulled down her hands. 'This is pretty usage. You can't help it now if you would.'

'Oh! Mr. Martindale!'

'Ah! you don't know what I have saved you. I was not going to see all that pink paint worn off those cheeks, nor your life and my own wasted in waiting for them to bring their minds to it. I have seen enough of that. Poor John there—'

'How?—what?' said Violet, with alarmed curiosity.

'She died,' said Arthur.

'How long ago? What was her name?'

'Helen Fotheringham. She was our old parson's daughter. They waited eight years, and she died last summer. I see he wears his mourning still.'

Violet looked aghast, and spoke low. 'How very sad! Helen! That was the reason he looked up when he heard it was my name. Poor Mr. John Martindale! I saw the crape on his hat. Was that what made him so ill?'

'It nearly killed him last year, but he never had lungs good for anything. First, my aunt set my father against it, and when he gave in, she had a crabbed decrepit old grandfather, and between them they were the death of her, and almost of him. I never thought he would rally again.'

'Only last year?' exclaimed Violet. 'O dear! and there have I been telling him all about—about this spring. I would not have done it, if I had known. I thought he looked melancholy sometimes. Oh! I wish I had not.'

'You did, did you?' said Arthur, much amused. 'You chatterbox.'

'Oh! I am so sorry. I wish—'

'No, no, he only liked you the better for it. I assure you, Violet, he almost said so. Then that was what made him lay such stress on your being an innocent little victim.'

'Would you be so kind as to explain it to me?' said Violet, in such serious distress that he answered with less trifling than usual, 'There is nothing to tell. I knew how it would be if I asked leave, so I took it. That's all.'

'And—and surely they didn't know this at home?'

'The less said about that the better, Violet,' said Arthur. 'You are all right, you know, and in great favour with John. He can do anything with my father, and I have written. We shall be at home before the end of another month, and set going with a decent income in London. A house—where shall it be? Let me see, he can't give me less than £1000 a year, perhaps £1600. I vow I don't see why it should not be £2000. John wants no more than he has got, and will never marry now, and there is only Theodora. I was always my aunt's favourite, and if you mind what you are about we shall have our share of the old sugar-planter's hoards, better than the Barbuda property—all niggers and losses. I wash my hands of it, though by rights it should come to the second son.'

Neither understanding nor heeding all this, Violet interrupted by gasping out, 'Oh! I am so grieved.'

'Grieved!—say that again. Grieved to be Mrs. Arthur Martindale?'

'O no, no; but—'

'Grieved to have found such a fool as to risk everything, and run counter to all his friends for the sake of that silly little ungrateful face?'

She was coaxed out of vexation for the present; but she awoke the next morning with a feeling of culpability and dread of all the Martindale family.

John could not understand her altered manner and the timid bashfulness, greater than even at their first meeting. In fact, the history of his grief inspired her with a sort of reverential compassion for him, and the perception of the terms on which she stood, made her laugh of yesterday seem to her such unbecoming levity, that upon it she concentrated all her vague feelings of contrition.

When he came as before, to borrow some ink, as she gave it to him her hand shook, and her colour rose. After standing musing a little while, she said, mournfully, 'I am very sorry!'

'What is the matter?' said he, kindly.

'I am so vexed at what I did yesterday!'

'What do you mean?'

'For laughing,' said she, in a tone of distress. 'Indeed, indeed, I did not know,' and though she averted her face, he saw that the crimson had spread to her neck. He did not at once reply, and she went on incoherently. 'I did not know—I could not guess. Of course—I wondered at it all. I knew I was not fit—but they never told me—O, I am so much grieved.'

Most soothingly did John say, coming towards her, 'No, no, you need not distress yourself. No one can blame you.'

'But Lord Martindale'—she murmured.

'He will look on you like a daughter. I know I may promise you that. Yes, indeed, I have no doubt of it, my dear little sister,' he repeated, as she looked earnestly at him. 'I have told him how entirely you deserve his kindness and affection, and Arthur has written, such a letter as will be sure to bring his forgiveness.'

'Ah!' said Violet, 'it is all for my sake. No wonder they should be angry.'

'Don't fancy that any one is angry with you. We all know that you were ignorant how matters stood.'

'But I should have done the same if I had known. I could not have helped it,' said Violet.

'I know,' said John, 'no one could expect it of you. Arthur told me at once that you were free from any shadow of blame, and no one thinks of imputing any.'

'But are they very much displeased?' said poor Violet.

'Of course,' said John, after a little consideration, 'it was a shock to hear of such an important step being taken without my father's knowledge; but he is very anxious there should be no estrangement, and I am sure he will behave as if things had gone on in the usual course. You may have great confidence in his kindness, Violet.'

She was somewhat reassured, and presently went on—'I don't wonder they are vexed. I know how much beneath him I am, but I could not help that. Oh! I wish Matilda was here to tell me how to behave, that every one may not be ashamed of me and angry with him.'

'Don't be frightened' said John, 'you have pleased two of the family already; you know, and depend upon it, you will make them all like you in time as much as I do.'

'If YOU can overlook that laugh!' said Violet.

'I could say I liked you the better for it,' said John, pleasantly; 'only I don't know whether it would be a safe precedent. It has made us feel well acquainted, I hope. Don't make a stranger of me,' he continued, 'don't forget that we are brother and sister.

'I'm sure,'—and she broke off, unable to express herself; then added, 'Lady Martindale! I was frightened before at the thought of her, but it is much worse now.'

'You must not frighten yourself. You will find out how kind she is when you come to know her, and soon get over your first strangeness and shyness.'

'And there is your sister,' said Violet; 'Theodora—I do long to see her. Is she most like you or your brother?'

'Remarkably like him. She always makes children very fond of her,' he added, pausing to find something safe and yet encouraging; 'but I don't know half as much of her as Arthur does. We have not been as much together as I could wish.'

'I see now why she never wrote,' said Violet, with some shame, and yet glad to have it accounted for. 'But she will be sure to help me, and tell me how to behave. She will want them to be able to bear me for his sake.'

Without much reply, he applied himself to his letter, feeling that he could hardly give an impartial judgment. It had been a great effort to come to visit the bridal pair, but he found himself rewarded in a way he had not expected by the new pleasure given him by her engaging ways, her freshness and artlessness rousing him from long-continued depression of spirits.

After some pondering, she suddenly looked up, and exclaimed, 'Well, I'll try!'

'Try what, Violet!'

'I'll try to do my very best!' said she, cheerfully, though the tears still were in her eyes. 'I know I shall make mistakes, and I can never be like a great lady; but I'll do the best I can, if they will only bear with me, and not be angry with him.'

'I am sure you will do well, with such resolutions.'

'One thing I am glad of,' added she, 'that we came here just now. That old cathedral! I did not think much before—it was all strange and new, and I was too happy. But I shall never be so thoughtless now—or if I am! O, I know,' she exclaimed, with renewed energy, 'I'll buy one of those pretty white cups with views of the cathedral on them. Did you not see them in the shop-window? That will put me in mind if I am going to be careless of all my resolutions.'

'Resolutions so made are likely to be kept,' said John, and she presently left the room, recollecting that her store of biscuits needed replenishing before luncheon. She was putting on her bonnet to go to order them, when a doubt seized her whether she was transgressing the dignities of the Honourable Mrs. Martindale. Matilda had lectured against vulgarity when Arthur had warned her against ultra-gentility, and she wavered, till finding there was no one to send, her good sense settled the question. She walked along, feeling the cares and troubles of life arising on her, and thinking she should never again be gay and thoughtless, when she suddenly heard her husband's voice—'Ha! whither away so fast!' and he and Captain Fitzhugh overtook her.

'I was going into the town on an errand.'

'Just the moment I wanted you. There's a cricket match in the College Meads. Come along.'

And with her arm in his, Violet's clouds vanished, and she had no recollection of anxieties or vexations. The summer sky was overhead, the river shone blue and bright, the meadows smiled in verdure, the whole scene was full of animation, and the game, of which she knew nothing, was made charming by Arthur's explanations. Nearly an hour had passed before she bethought herself of suggesting it was almost time to go home.

'Presently,' said Arthur, 'let us see this fellow out.'

Another ten minutes. 'Would you look at your watch please? There's your brother waiting for his luncheon.'

'O, ay, 'tis nearly time,' and he was again absorbed. She thought he would not be pleased if she went home alone, nor was she sure of the way; so she waited in much annoyance, till at length he said, 'Now, Violet,' and they walked briskly home, all that she had endured passing entirely out of her mind.

She rejoiced to find Mr. Martindale unconscious that it was not far from two o'clock. He said he had been glad of time to finish his letters, and Arthur, as his eye fell on one of them, asked, 'What is Percy doing now?'

'He has been in Anatolia, going over some of the places we saw together. He has made some discoveries about the Crusades, and is thinking of publishing some of his theories.'

'Did I not hear of his writing something before this?'

'Yes; he sent some curious histories of the eastern Jews to some magazine. They are to be published separately, as they have been very successful; but I am glad this book is to be what he calls "self-contained." He is too good to be wasted upon periodicals.'

Violet, curious to know who was this literary correspondent, glanced at the letter, and read the address, to 'Antony Percival Fotheringham, Esquire, British Embassy, Constantinople.' She started to find it was the surname of that lost betrothed of whom she thought with an undefinable reverent pity.

All speculations were put to flight, however, by the entrance of the luncheon tray, containing nothing but slices of cold mutton and bread and butter. With a grievous look of dismay, and lamentable exclamation, she began to pour out explanations and apologies, but the gentlemen seemed too intent on conversing about Mr. Fotheringham either to hear her or to perceive anything amiss.

She remembered black looks and sharp words at home; and feeling dreadfully guilty at having failed immediately after her resolutions, she retreated to her room, and there Arthur found her in positive distress.

'Oh, I am so much concerned! It was so wrong to forget those biscuits. Your brother ate nothing else yesterday at luncheon!'

'Is that all?' said Arthur, laughing; 'I thought something had happened to you. Come, on with your bonnet. Fancy! John will actually walk with us to St. Cross!'

'Let me first tell you how it happened. There are a couple of ducks—'

'Let them be. No housekeeping affairs for me. Whatever happens, keep your own counsel. If they serve you up a barbecued puppy dog, keep a cool countenance, and help the company round. No woman good for anything mentions her bill of fare in civilized society. Mind that.'

Violet was left imagining her apologies a breach of good manners. What must Mr. Martindale think of her? Silly, childish, indiscreet, giggling, neglectful, underbred! How he must regret his brother's having such a wife!

Yet his pleasant voice, and her husband's drawing her arm into his, instantly dispelled all fear and regret, and her walk was delightful.

She was enchanted with St. Cross, delighted with the quadrangle of gray buildings covered with creepers, the smooth turf and gay flowers; in raptures at the black jacks, dole of bread and beer, and at the silver-crossed brethren, and eager to extract all Mr. Martindale's information on the architecture and history of the place, lingering over it as long as her husband's patience would endure, and hardly able to tear herself from the quiet glassy stream and green meadows.

'If Caroline were only here to sketch it!' she cried, 'there would be nothing wanting but that that hill should be Helvellyn.'

'You should see the mountain convents in Albania,' said John; and she was soon charmed with his account of his adventures there with Mr. Fotheringham. She was beginning to look on him as a perfect mine of information—one who had seen the whole world, and read everything. All that was wanting, she said, was Matilda properly to enter into his conversation.

Another day brought letters, inviting Arthur to bring home his bride for a fortnight's visit, as soon as he could obtain leave of absence.

CHAPTER 3

Who is the bride? A simple village maid,
Beauty and truth, a violet in the shade.
She takes their forced welcome and their wiles
For her own truth, and lifts her head and smiles.
They shall not change that truth by any art,
Oh! may her love change them before they part.
She turns away, her eyes are dim with tears,
Her mother's blessing lingers in her ears,
'Bless thee, my child,' the music is unheard,
Her heart grows strong on that remembered word.

FREDERICK TENNYSON

'Here we are!' said Arthur Martindale. 'Here's the lodge.' Then looking in his wife's face, 'Why! you are as white as a sheet. Come! don't be a silly child. They won't bite.'

'I am glad I have seen Mr. John Martindale,' sighed she.

'Don't call him so here. Ah! I meant to tell you you must not "Mr. Martindale" me here. John is Mr. Martindale.'

'And what am I to call you?'

'By my name, of course.'

'Arthur! Oh! I don't know how.'

'You will soon. And if you can help shrinking when my aunt kisses you, it will be better for us. Ha! there is Theodora.'

'O, where?'

'Gone! Fled in by the lower door. I wish I could have caught her.'

Violet held her breath. The grand parterre, laid out in regularly-shaped borders, each containing a mass of one kind of flower, flaming elscholchias, dazzling verbenas, azure nemophilas, or sober heliotrope, the broad walks, the great pile of building, the innumerable windows, the long ascent of stone steps, their balustrade guarded by sculptured sphinxes, the lofty entrance, and the tall powdered footmen, gave her the sense of entering a palace. She trembled, and clung to Arthur's arm as they came into a great hall, where a vista of marble pillars, orange trees, and statues, opened before her; but comfort came in the cordial brotherly greeting with which John here met them.

'She is frightened out of her senses,' said Arthur.

John's reply was an encouraging squeeze of the hand, which he retained, leading her, still leaning on her husband's arm, into a room, where an elderly gentleman was advancing; both her hands were placed within his by her supporters on either side, and he kissed her, gravely saying, 'Welcome, my dear.' He then presented her to a formal embrace from a tall lady; and Arthur saying, 'Well, Theodora! here, Violet,' again took her hand, and put it into another, whose soft clasp was not ready, nor was the kiss hearty.

Presently Violet, a little reassured by Lord Martindale's gentle tones, ventured on a survey. She was on the same sofa with Lady Martindale; but infinitely remote she felt from that form like an eastern queen, richly dressed, and with dark majestic beauty, whose dignity was rather increased than impaired by her fifty years. She spoke softly to the shy stranger, but with a condescending tone, that marked the width of the gulf, and Violet's eyes, in the timid hope of sympathy, turned towards the sister.

But, though the figure was younger, and the dress plainer, something seemed to make her still more unapproachable. There was less beauty, less gentleness, and the expression of her countenance had something fixed and stern. Now and then there was a sort of agitation of the muscles of the face, and her eyes were riveted on Arthur, excepting that if he looked towards her, she instantly looked out of the window. She neither spoke nor moved: Violet thought that she had not given her a single glance, but she was mistaken, Theodora was observing, and forming a judgment.

This wife, for whose sake Arthur had perilled so much, and inflicted such acute pain on her, what were her merits? A complexion of lilies and roses, a head like a steel engraving in an annual, a face expressing nothing but childish bashfulness, a manner ladylike but constrained, and a dress of studied simplicity worse than finery.

Lady Martindale spoke of dressing, and conducted her meek shy visitor up a grand staircase, along a broad gallery, into a large bed-room, into which the western sun beamed with a dazzling flood of light.

The first use Violet made of her solitude was to look round in amaze at the size and luxury of her room, wondering if she should ever feel at home where looking-glasses haunted her with her own insignificance. She fled from them, to try to cool her cheeks at the open window, and gaze at the pleasure-ground, which reminded her of prints of Versailles, by the sparkling fountain rising high in fantastic jets from its stone basin, in the midst of an expanse of level turf, bordered by terraces and stone steps, adorned with tall vases of flowers. On the balustrade stood a peacock, bending his blue neck, and drooping his gorgeous train, as if he was ‘monarch of all he surveyed.’

Poor Violet felt as if no one but peacocks had a right here; and when she remembered that less than twelve weeks ago the summit of her wishes had been to go to the Wrangerton ball, it seemed to be a dream, and she shut her eyes, almost expecting to open them on Annette’s face, and the little attic at home. But then, some one else must have been the fabric of a vision! She made haste to unclose them, and her heart bounded at thinking that he was born to all this! She started with joy as his step approached, and he entered the room.

‘Let us look at you,’ he said. ‘Have you your colour? Ay, plenty of it. Are you getting tamer, you startled thing?’

‘I hope I have not been doing wrong. Lady Martindale asked me to have some tea. I never heard of such a thing before dinner, but I thought afterwards it might have been wrong to refuse. Was it!’

He laughed. ‘Theodora despises nothing so much as women who drink tea in the middle of the day.’

‘I am so afraid of doing what is unladylike. Your mother offered me a maid, but I only thought of not giving trouble, and she seemed so shocked at my undoing my own trunk.’

‘No, no,’ said he, much diverted; ‘she never thinks people can help themselves. She was brought up to be worshipped. Those are her West Indian ways. But don’t you get gentility notions; Theodora will never stand them, and will respect you for being independent. However, don’t make too little of yourself, or be shy of making the lady’s maids wait on you. There are enough of them—my mother has two, and Theodora a French one to her own share.

‘I should not like any one to do my hair, if that is not wrong.’

‘None of them all have the knack with it you have, and it is lucky, for they cost as much as a hunter.’

‘Indeed, I will try to be no expense.’

‘I say, what do you wear this evening?’

‘Would my white muslin be fit?’

‘Ay, and the pink ribbons in your hair, mind. You will not see my aunt till after dinner, when I shall not be there; but you must do the best you can, for much depends on it. My aunt brought my mother up, and is complete master here. I can’t think how my father’—and he went on talking to

himself, as he retreated into his dressing-room, so that all Violet heard was, ‘wife’s relations,’ and ‘take warning.’

He came back to inspect her toilette and suggest adornments, till, finding he was overdoing them, he let her follow her own taste, and was so satisfied with the result, that he led her before the glass, saying, ‘There. Mrs. Martindale, that’s what I call well got up. Don’t you?’

‘I don’t mind seeing myself when I have you to look at.’

‘You think we make a handsome couple? Well, I am glad you are tall—not much shorter than Theodora, after all.’

‘But, oh! how shall I behave properly all dinner-time? Do make a sign if I am doing anything wrong.’

‘Nonsense!’

‘I know I shall make mistakes. Matilda says I shall. I had a letter from her this morning to warn me against “solecisms in etiquette,” and to tell me to buy the number of the “Family Friend” about dinner-parties, but I had not time, and I am sure I shall do wrong.’

‘You would be much more likely, if you had Matilda and her prig of a book,’ said Arthur, between anger and diversion. ‘Tell her to mind her own business—she is not your mistress now, and she shall not teach you affectation. Why, you silly child, should I have had you if you had not been “proper behaved”? You have nothing to do but to remember you are my wife, and as good as any of them, besides being twenty times prettier. Now, are you ready?’

‘Yes, quite; but how shall I find my way here again?’

‘See, it is the third door from the stairs. The rest on this side are spare rooms, except where you see those two green baize doors at the ends. They lead to passages, the wings on the garden side. In this one my aunt’s rooms are, and Miss Piper, her white nigger, and the other is Theodora’s.’

‘And all these opposite doors?’

‘Those four belong to my father and mother; these two are John’s. His sitting-room is the best in the house. The place is altogether too big for comfort. Our little parlour at Winchester was twice as snug as that overgrown drawing-room down-stairs.’

‘Dear little room! I hope we may go back to it. But what a view from this end window! That avenue is the most beautiful thing I have seen yet. It looks much older than the house.’

‘It is. My father built the house, but we were an old county family long before. The old Admiral, the first lord, had the peerage settled on my father, who was his nephew and head of the family, and he and my Aunt Nesbit having been old friends in the West Indies, met at Bath, and cooked up the match. He wanted a fortune for his nephew, and she wanted a coronet for her niece! I can’t think how she came to be satisfied with a trumpery Irish one. You stare, Violet; but that is my aunt’s notion of managing, and the way she meant to deal with all of us. She has monstrous hoards of her own, which she thinks give her a right to rule. She has always given out that she meant the chief of them for me, and treated me accordingly, but I am afraid she has got into a desperately bad temper now, and we must get her out of it as best we can.’

This not very encouraging speech was made as they stood looking from the gallery window. Some one came near, and Violet started. It was a very fashionably-dressed personage, who, making a sort of patronizing sweeping bend, said, ‘I was just about to send a person to assist Mrs. Martindale. I hope you will ring whenever you require anything. The under lady’s maid will be most happy to attend you.’

‘There,’ said Arthur, as the lady passed on, ‘that is the greatest person in the house, hardly excepting my aunt. That is Miss Altisidora Standaloft, her ladyship’s own maid.’

Violet’s feelings might somewhat resemble those of the Emperor Julian when he sent for a barber, and there came a count of the empire.

‘She must have wanted to look at you,’ proceeded Arthur, ‘or she would never have treated us with such affability. But come along, here is Theodora’s room.’

It was a cheerful apartment, hung with prints, with somewhat of a school-room aspect, and in much disorder. Books and music lay confused with blue and lilac cottons, patterns, scissors, and papers covered with mysterious dots; there were odd-looking glass bottles on the mantel-shelf with odder looking things in them, and saucers holding what Violet, at home, would have called messes; the straw-bonnet lay on the floor, and beside it the Scotch terrier, who curled up his lips, showed his white teeth, and greeted the invaders with a growl, which became a bark as Arthur snapped his fingers at him. 'Ha! Skylark, that is bad manners. Where's your mistress? Theodora!'

At the call, the door of the inner room opened, but only a little dark damsel appeared, saying, in a French accent, that Miss Martindale was gone to Miss Gardner's room.

'Is Miss Gardner here?' exclaimed Arthur.

'She is arrived about half an hour ago,' was the reply. Arthur uttered an impatient interjection, and Violet begged to know who Miss Gardner was.

'A great friend of Theodora's. I wish she would have kept further off just now, not that she is not a good-natured agreeable person enough, but I hate having strangers here. There will be no good to be got out of Theodora now! There are two sisters always going about staying at places, the only girls Theodora ever cared for; and just now, Georgina, the youngest, who used to be a wild fly-away girl, just such as Theodora herself, has gone and married one Finch, a miserly old rogue, that scraped up a huge fortune in South America, and is come home old enough for her grandfather. What should possess Theodora to bring Jane here now? I thought she would never have forgiven them. But we may as well come down. Here's the staircase for use and comfort.'

'And here is the hall! Oh!' cried Violet, springing towards it, 'this really is the Dying Gladiator. Just like the one at Wrangerton!'

'What else should he be like!' said Arthur, laughing. 'Every one who keeps a preserve of statues has the same.'

She would have liked to linger, recognizing her old friends, and studying this museum of wonders, inlaid marble tables, cases of stuffed humming birds, and stands of hot-house plants, but Arthur hurried her on, saying it was very ill-contrived, a draught straight through it, so that nothing warmed it. He opened doors, giving her a moment's glimpse of yellow satin, gilding and pictures, in the saloon, which was next to the drawing-room where she had been received, and beyond it the dining-room. Opposite, were the billiard-room, a library, and Lord Martindale's study; and 'Here,' said he, 'is where Theodora and I keep our goods. Ha!' as he entered, 'you here, Theodora! Hallo! what's this? A lot of wooden benches with their heels in the air. How is this? Have you been setting up a charity school in my room?'

'I found the children by the wood were too far from school, so I have been teaching them here. I came to see about taking the benches out of your way. I did not expect you here.'

'I was showing her our haunts. See, Violet, here's my double barrel, and here are the bows. I forget if you can shoot.'

'Matilda and Caroline do.'

'You shall learn. We will have the targets out. Where's the light bow you used to shoot with, Theodora?'

'It is somewhere,' said Theodora, without alacrity; 'no, I remember, I gave it to Mr. Wingfield's little nephew.'

'Unlucky! Yours will never do for those little fingers.' Theodora abruptly turned to Violet, and said,' She must be tired of standing there.' Violet smiled with pleasure at being addressed, thanked, and disclaimed fatigue.

'She is of your sort, and does not know how to be tired,' said Arthur. 'I wondered to hear your bosom friend was here. What brings her about now?'

'If you call her my bosom friend, you answer the question,' was the proud reply, and it provoked him to carry on the teasing process.

'I thought she was not THE friend,' he continued; 'I ought to have congratulated you on THE friend's capture. A goldfinch of the South American breed is a rare bird.'

Theodora drew up her head, and impetuously heaped some school-books together. 'Have you seen the pretty caged bird?'

'Never.'

In a soft tone, contrasting with the manner of his last sayings, Arthur invited his wife to come out on the lawn, and walked away with her. She was surprised and uneasy at what had taken place, but could not understand it, and only perceived he would prefer her not seeming to notice it.

It was all the strange influence of temper. In truth, Theodora's whole heart was yearning to the brother, whom she loved beyond all others; while on the other hand his home attachments centred on her, and he had come to seek her with the fixed purpose of gaining her good-will and protection for his young bride. But temper stepped between. Whether it began from Theodora's jealousy of the stranger, or from his annoyance at her cold haughty manner to his wife, he was vexed, and retaliated by teasing; she answered coldly, in proud suffering at being taunted on a subject which gave her much pain, and then was keenly hurt at his tone and way of leaving her, though in fact she was driving him away. She stood leaning against a pillar in the hall, looking after him with eyes brimming with tears; but on hearing a step approach, she subdued all signs of emotion, and composedly met the eye of her eldest brother. She could not brook that any one should see her grief, and she was in no mood for his first sentences: 'What are you looking at?' and seeing the pair standing by the fountain, 'Well, you don't think I said too much in her favour?'

'She is very pretty,' said Theodora, as if making an admission.

'It is a very sweet expression. Even as a stranger, it would be impossible not to be interested in her, if only for the sake of her simplicity.'

Theodora glanced at Violet's dress, and at the attitude in which she was looking up, as Arthur gathered some roses from a vase; then turned her eyes on John's thoughtful and melancholy countenance, and thought within herself, that every man, however wise, can be taken in by a fair face, and by airs and graces.

'Poor thing,' continued John, 'it must be very trying; you don't see her to advantage, under constraint, but a few kind words will set her at ease.'

He paused for an answer, but not obtaining one, said, 'I did not know you expected Miss Gardner to-day.'

She surprised him, by answering with asperity, prompted by a second attack on this subject, 'I can't help it. I could not put her off,—what objection can there be?'

'Nothing, nothing,—I meant nothing personal. It was only that I would have avoided having spectators of a family meeting like this. I am afraid of first impressions.'

'My impressions are nothing at all.'

'Well, I hope you will make friends—I am sure she will repay your kindness.'

'Do you know that you are standing in a tremendous draught?' interrupted Theodora.

'And there's my mother on the stairs. I shall go and call them in; come with me, Theodora.'

But she had turned back and joined her mother.

He found Violet all smiles and wonder: but she relapsed into constraint and alarm as soon as she entered the drawing-room. Miss Gardner presently came down,—a lady about five or six and twenty, not handsome, but very well dressed, and with an air of ease and good society, as if sure of her welcome. As Violet listened to her lively conversation with Lord Martindale, she thought how impossible it was that she should ever be equally at home there.

The grandeur of the dining-room was another shock, and the varieties of courses revived her remorse for the cold mutton. She sat between Lord Martindale and John, who talked to her as soon as he thought she could bear the sound of her own voice, and, with Arthur opposite, her situation

was delightful compared to the moment when, without either of her protectors, she must go with the imperial Lady Martindale to encounter the dreaded aunt.

When the time came, Arthur held open the door, and she looked up in his face so piteously, that he smiled, and whispered 'You goose,' words which encouraged her more than their tenor would seem to warrant.

Warm as it was, the windows were shut, and a shawl was round Mrs. Nesbit's tall, bending, infirm figure. Violet dared not look up at her, and thought, with mysterious awe, of the caution not to shrink if she were kissed, but it was not needed, Lady Martindale only said, 'My aunt, Mrs. Arthur Martindale,' and Mrs. Nesbit, half rising, just took her hand into her long skinny fingers, which felt cold, damp, and uncertain, like the touch of a lizard.

Violet was conscious of being scanned from head to foot—nay, looked through and through by black eyes that seemed to pierce like a dart from beneath their shaggy brows, and discover all her ignorance, folly, and unfitness for her position. Colouring and trembling, she was relieved that there was another guest to call off Mrs. Nesbit's attention, and watched the readiness and deference with which Miss Gardner replied to compliments on her sister's marriage; and yet they were not comfortable congratulations, thought Violet; at least they made her cheeks burn, and Theodora stood by looking severe and melancholy; but Miss Gardner seemed quite to enter into the sarcastic tone, and almost to echo it, as if to humour the old lady.

'Your sister acted very sensibly,' said Mrs. Nesbit, with emphasis. 'Very good management; though Theodora was somewhat taken by surprise.'

'Yes, I know we used her very ill,' said Miss Gardner; 'but people have unaccountable fancies about publishing those matters. Mr. Finch was in haste, and we all felt that it was best to have it over, so it was talked of a very short time previously.'

'Speed is the best policy, as we all know,' said Mrs. Nesbit; and Violet felt as if there was a flash of those eyes upon her, and was vexed with herself for blushing. She thought Miss Gardner's answer good-naturedly unconscious:

'Oh, people always shake together best afterwards. There is not the least use in a prolonged courtship acquaintance. It is only a field for lovers' quarrels, and pastime for the spectators.'

'By the bye,' said Mrs. Nesbit, 'what is become of your cousin, Mrs. George Gardner's son?'

'Mark! Oh, he is abroad. Poor fellow, I wish we could find something for him to do. Lady Fotheringham asked her nephew, Percival, if he could not put him in the way of getting some appointment.'

'Failed, of course,' said Mrs. Nesbit.

'Yes; I never expected much. Those diplomats are apt to be afraid of having their heels trodden upon; but it is a great pity. He is so clever, and speaks so many languages. We hope now that Mr. Finch may suggest some employment in America.'

'Highly advisable.'

'I assure you poor Mark would be glad of anything. He is entirely steadied now; but there are so few openings for men of his age.'

An interruption here occurring, Miss Gardner drew off to the window. Theodora sat still, until her friend said, 'How lovely it is! Do you ever take a turn on the terrace after dinner?'

Theodora could not refuse. Violet wished they had asked her to join them; but they went out alone, and for some moments both were silent. Miss Gardner first spoke, remarking, 'A beautiful complexion.'

There was a cold, absent assent; and she presently tried again, 'Quite a lady,' but with the same brief reply. Presently, however, Theodora exclaimed, 'Jane, you want me to talk to you; I cannot, unless you unsay that about Percy Fotheringham. He is not to be accused of baseness.'

‘I beg your pardon, Theodora, dear; I have no doubt his motives were quite conscientious, but naturally, you know, one takes one’s own cousin’s part, and it was disappointing that he would not help to give poor Mark another chance.’

‘That is no reason he should be accused of petty jealousies.’

‘Come, you must not be so very severe and dignified. Make some allowance for poor things who don’t know how to answer Mrs. Nesbit, and say what first occurs. Indeed, I did not know you were so much interested in him.’

‘I am interested in justice to the innocent.’

‘There! don’t annihilate me. I know he is a very superior person, the pride of Lady Fotheringham’s heart. Of course he would have recommended Mark if he had thought it right; I only hope he will find that he was mistaken.’

‘If he was, he will be the first to own it.’

‘Then I am forgiven, am I? And I may ask after you after this long solitary winter. We thought a great deal of you.’

‘I needed no pity, thank you. I was well off with my chemistry and the parish matters. I liked the quiet time.’

‘I know you do not care for society.’

‘My aunt is a very amusing companion. Her clear, shrewd observation is like a book of French memoirs.’

‘And you are one of the few not afraid of her.’

‘No. We understand each other, and it is better for all parties that she should know I am not to be interfered with. Positively I think she has been fonder of me since we measured our strength.’

‘There is a mutual attachment in determined spirits,’ said Miss Gardner.

‘I think there must be. I fancy it is resolution that enables me to go further with her than any one else can without offending her.’

‘She is so proud of you.’

‘What is strange is, that she is prouder of me than of mamma, who is so much handsomer and more accomplished,—more tractable, too, and making a figure and sensation that I never shall.’

‘Mrs. Nesbit knows better,’ said Miss Gardner, laughing.

‘Don’t say so. If John’s illness had not prevented my coming out last year, I might have gone into the world like other girls. Now I see the worth of a young lady’s triumph—the disgusting speculation! I detest it.’

‘Ah! you have not pardoned poor Georgina.’

‘Do you wish for my real opinion?’

‘Pray let me hear it.’

‘Georgina had a grand course open to her, and she has shrunk from it.’

‘A grand course!’ repeated Jane, bewildered.

‘Yes, honest poverty, and independence. I looked to her to show the true meaning of that word. I call it dependence to be so unable to exist without this world’s trash as to live in bondage for its sake. Independence is trusting for maintenance to our own head and hands.’

‘So you really would have had us—do what? Teach music?—make lace?’

‘If I had been lucky enough to have such a fate, I would have been a village school-mistress.’

‘Not even a governess?’

‘I should like the village children better; but, seriously, I would gladly get my own bread, and I did believe Georgina meant to wait to be of age and do the same.’

‘But, Theodora, seriously! The loss of position.’

‘I would ennoble the office.’

‘With that head that looks as if it was born in the purple, you would ennoble anything, dear Theodora; but for ordinary—’

'All that is done in earnest towards Heaven and man ennobles and is ennobled.'

'True; but it needs a great soul and much indifference to creature comforts. Now, think of us, at our age, our relations' welcome worn out—'

'I thought you were desired to make Worthbourne your home.'

'Yes, there was no want of kindness there; but, my dear, if you could only imagine the dulness. It was as if the whole place had been potted and preserved in Sir Roger de Coverley's time. No neighbours, no club-books, no anything! One managed to vegetate through the morning by the help of being deputy to good Lady Bountiful; but oh! the evenings! Sir Antony always asleep after tea, and no one allowed to speak, lest he should be awakened, and the poor, imbecile son bringing out the draught-board, and playing with us all in turn. Fancy that, by way of enlivenment to poor Georgina after her nervous fever! I was quite alarmed about her,—her spirits seemed depressed for ever into apathy!'

'I should think them in more danger now.'

'Oh! her Finch is a manageable bird. Her life is in her own power, and she will have plenty of all that makes it agreeable. It is winning a home instead of working for it; that is the common sense view—'

'Winning it by the vow to love, honour, and obey, when she knows she cannot?'

'Oh, she may in the end. He is tame, and kind, and very much obliged. My dear Theodora, I could feel with you once; but one learns to see things in a different light as one lives on. After all, I have not done the thing.'

'If you did not promote it, you justify it.'

'May I not justify my sister to her friend?'

'I do no such thing. I do not justify Arthur. I own that he has acted wrongly; but—No, I cannot compare the two cases. His was silly and bad enough, but it was a marriage, not a bargain.'

'Well, perhaps one may turn out as well as the other.'

'I am afraid so,' sighed Theodora.

'It has been a sad grief to you, so fond of your brother as you were.'

'Not that I see much harm in the girl,' continued Theodora; 'but—'

'But it is the loss of your brother! Do you know, I think it likely he may not be as much lost to you as if he had chosen a superior person. When the first fancy is over, such a young unformed thing as this cannot have by any means the influence that must belong to you. You will find him recurring to you as before.'

Meanwhile, Violet sat formal and forlorn in the drawing-room, and Lady Martindale tried to make conversation. Did she play, or draw? Matilda played, Caroline drew, she had been learning; and in horror of a request for music, she turned her eyes from the grand piano. Was she fond of flowers? O, yes! Of botany? Caroline was. A beautifully illustrated magazine of horticulture was laid before her, and somewhat relieved her, whilst the elder ladies talked about their fernery, in scientific terms, that sounded like an unknown tongue.

Perceiving that a book was wanted, she sprang up, begging to be told where to find it; but the answer made her fear she had been officious. 'No, my dear, thank you, do not trouble yourself.'

The bell was rung, and a message sent to ask Miss Piper for the book. A small, pale, meek lady glided in, found the place, and departed; while Violet felt more discomposed than ever, under the sense of being a conceited little upstart, sitting among the grand ladies, while such a person was ordered about.

Ease seemed to come back with the gentlemen. Lord Martindale took her into the great drawing-room, to show her Arthur's portrait, and the show of the house—Lady Martindale's likeness, in the character of Lalla Rookh—and John began to turn over prints for her, while Arthur devoted himself to his aunt, talking in the way that, in his schoolboy days, would have beguiled from her sovereigns and bank-notes. However, his civilities were less amiably received, and he met with nothing but hits in return. He hoped that her winter had not been dull.

Not with a person of so much resource as his sister. Solitude with her was a pleasure—it showed the value of a cultivated mind.

'She never used to be famous for that sort of thing,' said Arthur.

'Not as a child, but the best years for study come later. Education is scarcely begun at seventeen.'

'Young ladies would not thank you for that maxim.'

'Experience confirms me in it. A woman is nothing without a few years of grown-up girlhood before her marriage; and, what is more, no one can judge of her when she is fresh from the school-room. Raw material!'

Arthur laughed uneasily.

'There is Mrs. Hitchcock—you know her?'

'What, the lady that goes out with the hounds, and rides steeple-chases? I saw her ride through Whitford to-day, and she stared so hard into the carriage, that poor Violet pulled down her veil till we were out of the town.'

'Well, she was married out of a boarding-school, came here the meekest, shyest, little shrinking creature, always keeping her eyelids cast down, and colouring at a word.'

Arthur thought there was a vicious look at his bride's bending head, but he endured by the help of twisting the tassel of the sofa cushion, and with another laugh observed, 'that all the lady's shyness had been used up before he knew her.'

'Then there was Lord George Wilmot, who ran away with a farmer's daughter. She made quite a sensation; she was quite presentable, and very pretty and well-mannered—but such a temper! They used to be called George and the Dragon. Poor man! he had the most subdued air—'

'There was a son of his in the Light Dragoons—' began Arthur, hoping to lead away the conversation, 'a great heavy fellow.'

'Exactly so; it was the case with all of them. The Yorkshire farmer showed in all their ways, and poor Lord George was so ashamed of it, that it was positively painful to see him in company with his daughters. And yet the mother was thought ladylike.'

Arthur made a sudden observation on John's improved looks.

'Yes. Now that unhappy affair is over, we shall see him begin life afresh, and form new attachments. It is peculiarly important that he should be well married. Indeed, we see every reason to hope that—' And she looked significant and triumphant.

'Much obliged!' thought Arthur. 'Well! there's no use in letting oneself be a target for her, while she is in this temper. I'll go and see what I can make of her ladyship. What new scheme have they for John? Rickworth, eh?'

He was soon at his mother's side, congratulating her on John's recovery, and her looks were of real satisfaction. 'I am glad you think him better! He is much stronger, and we hope this may be the period when there is a change of constitution, and that we may yet see him a healthy man.'

'Has he been going out, or seeing more people of late?'

'No—still keeping in his rooms all the morning. He did drive one day to Rickworth with your father, otherwise he has been nowhere, only taking his solitary ride.'

'I never was more surprised than to see him at Winchester!'

'It was entirely his own proposal. You could not be more surprised than we were; but it has been of much benefit to him by giving his thoughts a new channel.'

'He likes her, too,' said Arthur.

'I assure you he speaks most favourably of her.'

'What did he say?' cried Arthur, eagerly.

'He said she was a lady in mind and manners, and of excellent principles, but he declared he would not tell us all he thought of her, lest we should be disappointed.'

'Are you?' said Arthur, with a bright, confident smile.

'By no means. He had not prepared me for so much beauty, and such peculiarly graceful movements. My drawing days are nearly past, or I should be making a study of her.'

'That's right, mother!' cried Arthur. 'What a picture she would make. Look at her now! The worst of it is, she has so many pretty ways, one does not know which to catch her in!'

Perhaps Lady Martindale caught her aunt's eye, for she began to qualify her praise. 'But, Arthur, excuse me, if I tell you all. There is nothing amiss in her manners, but they are quite unformed, and I should dread any contact with her family.'

'I never mean her to come near them,' said Arthur. 'Though, after all, they are better than you suppose. She has nothing to unlearn, and will pick up tone and ease fast enough.'

'And for education? Is she cultivated, accomplished?'

'Every man to his taste. You never could get learning to stick on me, and I did not look for it. She knows what other folks do, and likes nothing better than a book. She is good enough for me; and you must take to her, mother, even if she is not quite up to your mark in the ologies. Won't you? Indeed, she is a good little Violet!'

Arthur had never spoken so warmly to his mother, and the calm, inanimate dignity of her face relaxed into a kind response, something was faltered of 'every wish to show kindness;' and he had risen to lead his wife to her side, when he perceived his aunt's bead-like eyes fixed on them, and she called out to ask Lady Martindale if Lady Elizabeth Brandon had returned.

The young ladies came in late; and Arthur in vain tried to win a look from his sister, who kept eyes and tongue solely for Miss Gardner's service.

At night, as, after a conversation with his brother, he was crossing the gallery to his own room, he met her.

'Teaching my wife to gossip?' said he, well pleased.

'No, I have been with Jane.'

'The eternal friendship!' exclaimed he, in a changed tone.

'Good night!' and she passed on.

He stood still, then stepping after her, overtook her.

'Theodora!' he said, almost pleadingly.

'Well!'

He paused, tried to laugh, and at last said, rather awkwardly, 'I want to know what you think of her?'

'I see she is very pretty.'

'Good night!' and his receding footsteps echoed mortification.

Theodora looked after him. 'Jane is right,' she said to herself, 'he cares most for me. Poor Arthur! I must stand alone, ready to support him when his toy fails him.'

CHAPTER 4

They read botanic treatises
And works of gardeners through there,
And methods of transplanting trees
To look as if they grew there.

—A. TENNYSON

Theodora awoke to sensations of acute grief. Her nature had an almost tropical fervour of disposition; and her education having given her few to love, her ardent affections had fastened upon Arthur with a vehemence that would have made the loss of the first place in his love painful, even had his wife been a person she respected and esteemed, but when she saw him, as she thought, deluded and thrown away on this mere beauty, the suffering was intense.

The hope Jane Gardner had given her, of his return to her, when he should have discovered his error, was her first approach to comfort, and seemed to invigorate her to undergo the many vexations of the day, in the sense of neglect, and the sight of his devotion to his bride.

She found that, much as she had dreaded it, she had by no means realized the discomposure she secretly endured when they met at breakfast, and he, remembering her repulse, was cold—she was colder; and Violet, who, in the morning freshness, was growing less timid, shrank back into awe of her formal civility.

In past days it had been a complaint that Arthur left her no time to herself. Now she saw the slight girlish figure clinging to his arm as they crossed the lawn, and she knew they were about to make the tour of their favourite haunts, she could hardly keep from scolding Skylark back when even he deserted her to run after them; and only by a very strong effort could she prevent her mind from pursuing their steps, while she was inflicting a course of Liebig on Miss Gardner, at the especial instance of that lady, who, whatever hobby her friends were riding, always mounted behind.

Luncheon was half over, when the young pair came in, flushed with exercise and animation; Arthur talking fast about the covers and the game, and Violet in such high spirits, that she volunteered a history of their trouble with Skylark, and 'some dear little partridges that could not get out of a cart rut.'

In the afternoon Miss Gardner, 'always so interested in schools and village children,' begged to be shown 'Theodora's little scholars,' and walked with her to Brogden, the village nearly a mile off. They set off just as the old pony was coming to the door for Violet to have a riding lesson; and on their return, at the end of two hours, found Arthur still leading, letting go, running by the side, laughing and encouraging.

'Fools' paradise!' thought Theodora, as she silently mounted the steps.

'That is a remarkably pretty little hat,' said Miss Gardner. Theodora made a blunt affirmative sound.

'No doubt she is highly pleased to sport it. The first time of wearing anything so becoming must be charming at her age. I could envy her.'

'Poor old pony!' was all Theodora chose to answer.

'There, they are leaving off,' as Arthur led away the pony, and Violet began to ascend the steps, turning her head to look after him.

Miss Gardner came to meet her, asking how she liked riding.

'Oh, so much, thank you.'

'You are a good scholar?'

'I hope I shall be. He wants me to ride well. He is going to take me into the woods to-morrow.'

'We have been admiring your hat,' said Miss Gardner. 'It is exactly what my sister would like. Have you any objection to tell where you bought it?'

'I'll ask him: he gave it to me.'

'Dressing his new doll,' thought Theodora; but as Violet had not been personally guilty of the extravagance, she thought amends due to her for the injustice, and asked her to come into the gardens.

'Thank you, I should like it; but will he, will Mr.—will Arthur know what has become of me?'

'He saw you join us,' said Theodora, thinking he ought to be relieved to have her taken off his hands for a little while.

'Have you seen the gardens?' asked Jane.

'Are not these the gardens?' said Violet, surprised, as they walked on through the pleasure-ground, and passed a screen of trees, and a walk trellised over with roses.

There spread out before her a sweep of shaven turf, adorned with sparkling jets d'eau of fantastic forms, gorgeous masses of American plants, the flaming or the snowy azalea, and the noble rhododendron, in every shade of purple cluster among its evergreen leaves; beds of rare lilies, purely white or brilliant with colour; roses in their perfection of bloom; flowers of forms she had never figured to herself, shaded by wondrous trees, the exquisite weeping deodara, the delicate mimosa, the scaly Himalaya pines, the feathery gigantic ferns of the southern hemisphere.

Violet stood gazing in a silent trance till Arthur's step approached, when she bounded back to him, and clinging to his arm exclaimed, so that he alone could hear, 'Oh, I am glad you are come! It was too like enchanted ground!'

'So you like it,' said Arthur, smiling.

'I did not know there could be anything so beautiful! I thought the pleasure-ground finer than anything—so much grander than Lord St. Erme's; but this! Did you keep it to the last to surprise me!'

'I forgot it,' said Arthur, laughing to see her look shocked. 'It is not in my line. The natives never have any sport out of a show-place.'

'It is simply a bore,' said Theodora, 'a self-sacrifice to parade.'

'To the good of visitors,' replied Miss Gardner, smiling, to Violet, who, fearing her own admiration was foolish, was grateful to hear her say, 'And in that capacity you will allow Mrs. Martindale and me to enjoy.'

'Did not I bring you to make the grand tour!' said Theodora. 'Come, prepare to be stifled. Here are all the zones up to the equator,' and she led the way into the conservatory.

Arthur's protection and his satisfaction in Violet's pleasure set her at ease to enter into all the wonders and beauties; but he did not know one plant from another, and referred all her inquiries to his sister, who answered them in a cold matter-of-fact way that discouraged her from continuing them, and reduced her to listening to the explanations elicited by Jane Gardner, until a new-comer met them, thus greeted by Arthur—'Ah! here is the authority! Good morning, Harrison. Mrs. Martindale wants to know the name of this queer striped thing.'

He bowed politely, and Violet, as she bent and smiled, supposed they were too familiar for the hand-shake, while he went on to name the plant and exhibit its peculiarities. Her questions and remarks seemed to please him greatly, and while he replied graciously with much curious information, he cut spray after spray of the choicest flowers and bestowed them upon her, so that when the tour was completed, and he quitted them, she said, with smiling gratitude, 'It is the most exquisite bouquet I ever saw.'

'A poor thing, 'was the proud humility answer, 'but honoured by such hands!'

'Well done, Harrison!' ejaculated Arthur, as soon as he was out of ear-shot.

'Who is he?' asked Violet, still blushing; then, as the truth dawned on her, 'can he be the gardener? I thought him some great botanist allowed to study here.'

'Pray tell Miss Piper, Theodora,' said Arthur. 'If it goes round to him, Violet will never want for flowers.'

'It is so exactly what he considers himself,' said Jane.

'Except his being allowed,' said Arthur. "Tis we that are there on sufferance.'

Miss Piper was seen advancing on the same walk, and Violet was uncomfortable, dreading to see her treated as an inferior; but to her great satisfaction, Arthur addressed the little lady in his cordial manner, and Theodora congratulated her on being out of doors on this fine evening.

'Mrs. Nesbit wished me to ask Mr. Harrison for a frond of the new Trichomanes,' said Miss Piper.

'You will find him somewhere near the forcing-house,' said Theodora; 'but pray don't hurry in. I am going to my aunt's room, and you should go and look at the Japan lilies, they are fine enough to make even me admire them.' Then running after her to enforce her words, 'mind you stay out—be quite at rest till dinner-time—I have scarcely been with my aunt to-day. I am sure a walk will do you good.'

The kind solicitude went deep into the affections of the lonely little woman. Violet longed for anything like such notice; then, in a state between wonder, delight, and disappointment, went to her room to attempt a description of the fairy land which she had been visiting, and to enjoy the splendours by thinking how much it would gratify her mother and sisters to hear of her sharing them.

Mrs. Nesbit greeted Theodora with exclamations on Miss Piper's tardiness, and she explained in the authoritative way which she alone ventured to use towards her aunt; then, in a tone of conciliation, spoke of the garden and the beauty of the Japan lilies.

'Harrison grows too many; they are losing their rarity, and look like a weed.'

'They are hardy, are they not?' said Theodora, maliciously. 'I shall get some for my school garden.'

'That is your way of making everything common, and depreciating all that is choice.'

'No,' said Theodora, 'I would have beauty as widely enjoyed and as highly appreciated as possible.'

'And pray, if all privileges are extended to the lower classes, what is left to the higher orders?'

'Themselves,' said Theodora, proudly. 'No, aunt, we only lower ourselves by exclusiveness. It is degrading to ourselves and our tastes to make them badges of vanity. Let them be freely partaken, we shall be first still. The masses cannot mount higher without raising us.'

'A levelling theory,' said Mrs. Nesbit.

'No, exalting. Has Latin and Greek made Harrison a gentleman? Can even dress in better taste make Pauline look as much a lady as Miss Piper?'

'There is a good deal in that,' said Mrs. Nesbit. 'Even Lady Elizabeth Brandon cannot hide her good blood, though she does her best to do so.'

'And so does Emma,' said Theodora.

'Foolish girl,' said Mrs. Nesbit, 'I would have given anything to see her attractive.'

'Too late now!' said Theodora, with a look of repressed scorn and triumph.

'Too late for ARTHUR,' replied Mrs. Nesbit, with emphasis. 'And you'll never, never succeed in the other quarter!'

'Young people always have those fancies. I know what you would say, but John is not so young now. It is just the time of life when men take a turn. Depend upon it, now he has had his boy's romance, he is not going to play the disconsolate lover for the rest of his life. No! that girl shall never be Lady Martindale.'

'Well, I shan't dispute' said Theodora; 'but—'

'Believe when you see, said Mrs. Nesbit.

'And so you mean it to be Emma Brandon,' said Theodora, with the same sarcastic incredulity.

'Let me tell you there are things more unlikely. John thinks much of Lady Elizabeth, and is just one of the men to marry a plain quiet girl, fancying she would be the more domestic; and for yourself, you would find Emma very accommodating—never in your way.'

'No indeed,' said Theodora.

'Nothing could give your mother more pleasure. It is more than ever important now. What have you seen of Arthur's piece of wax? He seems to have been playing with her all day long.'

'Yes, poor fellow,' said Theodora, sighing. 'However, it might have been worse. I believe she is an innocent child, and very ladylike.'

'There is an instance of the effect of your dissemination notions! This would never have happened if every country attorney did not bring up his daughters to pass for ladies!'

'I am glad she is nothing outwardly to be ashamed of.'

'I had rather that she was than for her to have the opportunity of worming herself into favour! Those modest airs and her way of peeping up under her eyelashes seem to make a great impression,' said Mrs. Nesbit, with a sneer.

'Really, I think she is simple and shy.'

Mrs. Nesbit laughed. 'You, too! What has she to do with shyness? She has had her lesson; but you are like the rest! Your mamma actually proposing to take her likeness, but I told her it was not to be thought of. There will be plenty to fill her with presumption.'

'And papa—what does he think?' said Theodora, who was wont to obtain the family politics from her aunt.

'Oh! men are sure to be caught by a pretty face, and they cannot make enough of her. I thought your father had more sense, but since John has had his ear, everything has been past my management. I cannot bear to see Arthur's cool way—but no wonder. There will be no end to their expectations, treated as they are.'

'Then papa means to do something for them?'

'I cannot tell. He may do as he pleases. It is no affair of mine. They cannot touch my property. Your father may try how he likes supporting them.'

'He will then?'

'He cannot help it, after having invited them here.'

Theodora could no longer bear to hear Arthur thus spoken of, and began to read aloud, relieved in some degree by finding Arthur was not to suffer poverty. If he had been persecuted, she must have taken his part; now she could choose her own line. However, the world must not suppose that she disapproved of his wife, and she was grateful to the unmeaning words amiable and ladylike, especially when she had to speak to Mr. Wingfield. He observed on the lady's beauty, and hoped that the affair was as little unsatisfactory as possible under the circumstances, to which she fully agreed. They proceeded to parish matters, on which they had so much to say to each other, that Violet thus reflected—'Ah! it is just as Mr. Martindale used to sit with me in the window at home! She is going to give up all her grandeur for the sake of this good clergyman! How good she is! If she could only like me one little bit.'

For the present this mattered the less to Violet, as she was extremely happy out of doors with her husband, who took up her time so exclusively, that she scarcely saw the rest, except at meals and in the evening. Then, though less afraid of 'solecisms in etiquette,' she made no progress in familiarity, but each day revealed more plainly how much too lowly and ignorant she was to be ever one of the family.

Mrs. Nesbit was always formidable and sarcastic, alarming her the more because she could not understand her irony, though conscious it was levelled against her; Lady Martindale always chilling in condescending courtesy, and daily displaying more of the acquirements that frightened Violet by their number and extent; Theodora always gravely and coldly polite and indifferent. Miss Gardner was her great resource. Her pleasant manners and ready conversation were universally liked, and more than once she dexterously helped Violet out of a state of embarrassment, and made a connecting link, through which she ventured to talk to the other ladies.

With the gentlemen she was happier. Lord Martindale was kind in manner, and she improved in the power of speaking to him, while John was, as she knew, her best friend; but she saw very little

of him, he lived apart from the family, often not meeting them till dinner-time, and she began to understand Arthur's surprise at his doings at Winchester, when she found that his usual habits were so solitary that his father was gratified if he joined him in a ride, and his mother esteemed it a favour if he took a turn in the garden with her.

The parish church was so distant that the carriage was always used to convey thither the ladies, except Theodora, who ever since her fourteenth year had made it her custom to walk early to the school, and to remain there in the interval between the services. It was believed that she enjoyed a wet Sunday, as an occasion for proving her resolution, now so well established that no one thought of remonstrance, let the weather be what it might. The first Sunday of Violet's visit happened to be showery, and in the afternoon, Lord Martindale had gone to John's room to dissuade him from going to church a second time, when, as the door stood open, they heard Arthur's voice in the gallery.

'Hollo! you are not setting out in these torrents!'

'Do let me, please!' returned the pleading note.

'Why, the avenue is a river, and you are not a real goose yet, you know.'

'We never did miss church for weather, and it is further off at Wrangerton.'

'Nobody is going, I tell you. It is not in common sense. You are as bad as Theodora, I declare.'

'I don't mean to be wilful!' said she, piteously; 'I won't go if you tell me not, but please don't. I have no Sunday-book, and nothing to do, and I should feel wrong all the week.'

'To be sure you can't smoke a cigar,' said Arthur, in a tone of commiseration; 'so wilful will to water! Now for an aquatic excursion!'

Their steps and voices receded, and the father and brother looked amused. 'A good honest child!' 'She will do something with him after all!' and Lord Martindale (for Arthur had made too broad an assertion in declaring no one was going) followed them down, and showed positively paternal solicitude that Violet should be guarded from the rain, even sending to Pauline for a cloak of Miss Martindale's.

It was early when they reached the village, and Lord Martindale, saying he must speak to a workman, took them through a pretty garden to a house, the front rooms of which were shut up; they entered by the back door, and found themselves in a kitchen, where a couple of labouring people were sitting, in church-going trim. While Violet shook off the rain, and warmed herself at the fire, Lord Martindale spoke to the man; and then opening a door, called her and Arthur to look.

There were several rooms, without trace of ever having been inhabited, and not looking very inviting. The view of the park, which Violet would fain have admired, was one gush of rain.

'This might be made something of,' said Lord Martindale. 'It was built at the same time as the house. There was some idea of Mrs. Nesbit's living here; and of late years it has been kept empty for poor John.'

He broke off. Violet wondered if it was to be her abode, and whether those empty rooms could ever be as pleasant as the parlour at Winchester; but no more passed, and it was time to go into church.

After this, Lord Martindale pressed to have their stay prolonged; which Arthur could not persuade his wife to believe a great compliment to her, though she was pleased, because he was, and because she hoped it was a sign that she was tolerated for his sake. Personally, she could have wished that his leave of absence might not be extended, especially when she found that by the end of the next two months it was likely that the regiment would be in London, so that she had seen the last of her dear Winchester lodging; but she had so little selfishness, that she reproached herself even for the moment's wish, that Arthur should not remain to be happy at his own home.

It was a great loss to her that Miss Gardner was going away, leaving her to the unmitigated coldness and politeness of the other ladies. She grieved the more when, on the last morning, Jane made positive advances of friendship, and talked affectionately of meeting in London.

'My home is with my sister, and we shall be delighted to see you. You will be fixed there, no doubt.'

'Thank you. I cannot tell; but I shall be so glad to see you!'

'And I shall be delighted to introduce you to my sister. I know you will be great friends. What a season it will be! Two such sisters as Mrs. and Miss Martindale making their appearance together will be something memorable.'

Violet blushed excessively, and made some inarticulate disavowals. She felt it presumption to let her name be coupled with Miss Martindale's, and there was a sense of something dangerous and wrong in expecting admiration.

Miss Gardner only smiled encouragingly at her youthfulness. 'I will not distress you, though I look forward to what I shall hear. I shall feel that I have a right to be proud of you, from priority of acquaintance.'

'You are very kind; but, please, don't talk so. It is bad, I know, for me.'

'You are very right, I quite agree with you. No doubt it is the wisest way; but so very few feel as you do. I wish more were like you, or, indeed, like Theodora, who is positively displeased with me for speaking of her making a sensation.'

'Oh! of course she does not care,' said Violet. 'So very good as she is.'

'Appallingly so, some people say,' returned Jane, with a peculiar look; 'but, I know her well, though she was more my sister's friend than mine.'

'Then you have known her a long time?'

'All her life. We used to meet every day in London, when she and my sister were two madcaps together, playing endless wild pranks. We used to tell her she ruled the governesses, and no one could control her—nor can—'

'But she is very good,' repeated Violet, puzzled.

'Ah! she took a serious turn at about fourteen, and carried it out in her own peculiar way. She has worked out a great deal for herself, without much guidance. She has a standard of her own, and she will not acknowledge a duty if she does not intend to practise it.'

'I don't understand,' said Violet. 'I thought if one saw a duty one must try to practise it.'

'I wish all the world went upon your principles' said Miss Gardner, with a sigh. 'I am afraid you will find many not half so consistent with their own views as yourself, or Theodora.'

'Oh! of course one must fail,' said Violet. 'One cannot do half one means, but Theodora seems so strong and resolute.'

'Ay, no one has been able to cope with her, not even Mrs. Nesbit; who, as a kindred spirit, might have had a chance!'

'Mrs. Nesbit has had a great deal to do with her education?'

'I dare say you have found out the real head of the family. I see you are very acute, as well as very guarded.'

'Oh dear! I hope I have said nothing I ought not,' cried Violet, in a fright.

'No, indeed, far from it. I was admiring your caution.'

Violet thought she had done wrong in betraying her dislike; she knew not how; and trying to ascribe all to shyness, said, 'It was so strange and new; I have never been out till now.'

'Yes, if you will allow me to say so, I thought you got on admirably, considering how trying the situation was.'

'Oh! I was very much frightened; but they are very kind—Mr. Martindale especially.'

'Poor Mr. Martindale! I wish he could recover his spirits. He has never held up his head since Miss Fotheringham's death. He is an admirable person, but it is melancholy to see him spending his life in that lonely manner.'

'It is, indeed. I often wish anything would cheer him!'

'All the family are devoted to him, if that would comfort him. It is the only point where Lady Martindale is not led by her aunt, that she almost worships him!'

'I thought Mrs. Nesbit was fond of him.'

'Did you ever hear that Percy Fotheringham once said of her, "That woman is a good hater"? She detested the Fotheringham family, and Mr. Martindale, for his engagement. No, he is out of her power, and she cannot endure him; besides, he is a rival authority—his father listens to him.'

'I suppose Mrs. Nesbit is very clever.'

'She has been one of the cleverest women on earth. She formed her niece, made the match, forced her forward into the very highest society—never were such delightful parties—the best music—every lion to be met with—Lady Martindale herself at once a study for beauty, and a dictionary of arts and sciences—Mrs. Nesbit so agreeable. Ah! you cannot judge of her quite, she is passee, broken, and aged, and, poor thing! is querulous at feeling the loss of her past powers; but there used to be a brilliance and piquancy in her conversation that has become something very different now.'

Violet thought it most prudent only to remark on Lady Martindale's varied accomplishments.

'She has carried them on much longer than usual. People generally give them up when they marry, but she has gone on. I am not sure whether it was the wisest course. There is much to be said on both sides. And I have sometimes thought Theodora might have been a little less determined and eccentric, if she had not been left so much to governesses, and if her affections had had more scope for development.'

Theodora came in, and Violet blushed guiltily, as if she had been talking treason.

Miss Gardner's object in life, for the present, might be said to be to pick up amusement, and go about making visits; the grander the people the better, adapting herself to every one, and talking a sort of sensible scandal, with a superior air of regret; obtaining histories at one house to be detailed at another, and thus earning the character of being universally intimate. The sentiments of the young bride of Martindale had been, throughout her visit, matter of curiosity; and even this tete-a-tete left them guess work. Theodora's were not so difficult of discovery; for, though Jane had never been the same favourite with her as her more impetuous sister, she had, by her agreeable talk and show of sympathy, broken down much of the hedge of thorns with which Theodora guarded her feelings.

'I have been talking to Mrs. Martindale,' Jane began, as they went up-stairs together. 'She is a graceful young thing, and Georgina and I will call on her in London. Of course they will be settled there.'

'I don't know,' said Theodora. 'A notion has been started of his leaving the Guards, and their coming to live at the cottage at Brogden.'

'Indeed!' exclaimed Miss Gardner.

'It is not settled, so don't mention it. I doubt how it would answer to set Arthur down with nothing to do.'

'I doubt, indeed! I have seen a good deal of families living close together.'

'Nothing shall make me quarrel with Arthur, or his wife. You smile, but it needs no magnanimity to avoid disputes with anything so meek and gentle.'

'You can't judge of her; a girl of sixteen in a house full of strangers! Give her a house of her own, and she will soon learn that she is somebody. As long as your eldest brother is unmarried, she will expect to be looked upon as the wife of the heir. She will take offence, and your brother will resent it.'

'And there will be discussions about her,' said Theodora.

'Depend upon it, 'tis easier to keep the peace at a distance. Fancy the having to call for her whenever you go out to dinner. And oh! imagine the father, mother, and half-dozen sisters that will be always staying there.'

'No, Arthur has not married the whole family, and never means them to come near her.'

'There are two words to that question,' said Miss Gardner, smiling. 'Quiet as she seems now, poor thing she has a character of her own, I can see, and plenty of discernment. To be so guarded, as she is, at her age, shows some resolution.'

'Guarded! has she been saying anything?'

'No, she is extremely prudent.'

'Inferring it, then,' exclaimed Theodora. 'Well, her expectations must be high, if she is not satisfied; one comfort is, the Brogden scheme is only John's and papa's. My aunt can't bear it, because it seems quite to give up the chance of John's marrying.'

'Well, Georgina and I will do the best we can for her. I suppose you wish it to be understood that you approve.'

'Of course: you can say everything with truth that the world cares for. She is pleasing, and amiable, and all that.'

'She will be extremely admired.'

'And her head so much turned as to ruin all the sense there may be in it! I hate the thought of it, and of what is to become of Arthur when he wakes from his trance.'

'He will find that he has a sister,' said Jane, who had learnt that this was the secret of consolation; and, accordingly, a softer 'Poor Arthur!' followed.

'And will you write, dear Theodora?'

'I don't promise. I hardly ever write letters.'

'And you will not send your love to poor Georgina?'

'I forgive her for having pained and disappointed me. I hope she will be happy, but I am very much afraid she has not gone the right way to be so.'

'Am I to tell her so?'

'I dare say you will, but don't call it my message. If she makes a good use of her means, I shall try to forget the way she obtained them.'

'I only hope, with your notions, that you will not get into a scrape yourself. I'm a little afraid of that curate.'

'We both know better,' said Theodora.

Jane departed, and Violet felt as if she had a friend and protector the less. She was sitting forlorn in the great drawing-room, waiting for Arthur, who was trying horses; presently Theodora came in, and with something of compassion, said, 'I hope you have an entertaining book there.'

Oh yes, thank you, "La Vie de Philippe Auguste". I like it very much; it is as amusing as "Philip Augustus" itself.'

'James's novel, you mean?'

'Have you read it?'

'His novels are exactly alike,' said Theodora, leaving the room, but checked by the thought that it would be merciful to take her into her room. 'No, nonsense,' said second thoughts; 'I shall have nothing but chatter ever after, if I establish her coming to me when Arthur is out; and if this cottage scheme comes to pass, she will be marching up whenever she has nothing better to do. Give an inch, and she will take an ell.'

She was interrupted by a diffident, hesitating call, and, looking back, as she was mounting the stairs, beheld Violet, who changed the appellation into 'Miss Martindale.'

'Well!' said she, feeling as if her citadel were in jeopardy.

'Would you—would you be so very kind as to lend me a French dictionary?'

'Certainly; I'll give you one in a moment,' said Theodora; with so little encouragement as would have deterred a person bent on gaining the entree. Violet stood meekly waiting till she brought the book, and received it with gratitude disproportionate to the favour conferred.

CHAPTER 5

Some heavy business hath my lord in hand,
And I must know it, else he loves me not.

—King Henry IV

Miss Gardner's departure threw the rest of the party more together, and Theodora did not hold herself as much aloof as before. Indeed she perceived that there were occasions when Arthur seemed to be returning to his preference for her. She had more conversation, and it often fell on subjects of which the bride had no knowledge, while the sister was happy in resuming old habits. Sometimes Violet was entertained; but one day when they were riding, the talk was going on eagerly on some subject of which she knew nothing, while they rode faster than she liked, and she fancied she was insecure in her saddle. Twice she timidly called Arthur; but he was too much absorbed to attend to her, without a degree of scream, which she did not feel would be justified. Each moment she grew more alarmed and miserable, and though at last, when he perceived that she wanted him, he was off his horse in a moment and set all to rights, she completely forgot her distress,—the charm had been broken, she was no longer his first thought.

The sensation of loneliness often returned during the next few weeks; there was no real neglect, and she would not so have felt it if she had not depended on him alone, and so long enjoyed his exclusive attention. His fondness and petting were the same, but she perceived that he found in his sister a companionship of which she did not feel capable. But to Theodora herself, whenever she succeeded in engrossing Arthur, it seemed a victory of sisterly affection and sense over beauty and frivolity.

Arthur was anxious to know the family politics, and resumed the habit of depending on his sister for gathering intelligence from Mrs. Nesbit. On her he bestowed his complaints that his father would not see things as he wished, and with her talked over his projects. In truth, he could not bear to disclose to his wife the footing on which he stood,—looking on her as a mere child, sure to be satisfied, and not requiring to be consulted.

Theodora gave him tidings of the proposal that he should settle in the village, and finding him undecided, threw all her weight into the opposite scale. She sincerely believed she was consulting his happiness and the harmony of the family by speaking of the irksomeness of living there with nothing to do, and by assisting him in calculating how large an income would be necessary to enable him to keep hunters, go from home, &c., without which he declared it would be intolerable, and as there was little probability of his father allowing him so much, continuing in his profession was the only alternative.

Violet saw them in frequent consultation, and once John said something to her of his hopes of seeing her at Brogden; then, finding her in ignorance, drew back, but not till he had said enough to make her restless at hearing no more. She would, of course, have preferred living in the country; but when she figured to herself Arthur always with Theodora, and herself shut up in the little parlour she had seen in the rain, she grew extremely disconsolate.

One morning, unable to read or sit quiet under these anticipations, she went out to dispel them by a turn among the flowers, and a conversation with the peacock. At the corner of the lawn, she heard Arthur's voice—'Exactly so; two thousand is the very least. Ha, Violet!' as he and Theodora emerged from a shady alley.

'Oh, I did not mean to interrupt you,' said Violet, confused; 'I only came out for some fresh air.'

'Unbonneted, too, do you want to get roasted brown?' said Arthur.

'I never am burnt,' said Violet; 'but I will not be in your way, I'll go.'

'Nonsense,' said he, drawing her arm into his. 'Come in good time,' and he yawned, tired of the discussion. 'Ha, Mr. Peacock, are you there?'

'He always follows me,' said Violet. 'Miss Piper showed me where his food is kept, and I can almost get him to eat out of my hand.'

Theodora walked off, thinking there was an end of her brother's sense, and Violet looked after her rather sadly, thinking, while exhibiting to Arthur her friendship with the peacock, 'he consults her, he only plays with me. Perhaps it is all I am good for; but I wish we were at Winchester.'

As Theodora went up-stairs, she saw her eldest brother standing at the south window of the gallery. He called to her, saying, 'Here's a pretty picture, Theodora.'

In front of the sparkling crystal arches of the fountain stood Violet, bending forward, and holding out her hand full of grain to invite the beautiful bird, which now advanced, now withdrew its rich blue neck, as in condescension, then raised its crested head in sudden alarm, its train sweeping the ground in royal splendour. Arthur, no unpicturesque figure in his loose brown coat, stood by, leaning against the stand of one of the vases of plants, whose rich wreaths of brightly coloured blossoms hung down, making a setting for the group; and while Violet by her blandishments invited the peacock to approach, he now and then, with smiling slyness, made thrusts at it with her parasol, or excited Skylark to approach.

'A pretty scene, is it not?' said John.

'Like a Sevres china cup,' Theodora could not help saying.

'Fountain and peacock, and parasol for shepherd's crook, forming a French Arcadia,' said John, smiling. 'I suppose it would hardly make a picture. It is too bright.'

Theodora only answered by a sigh, and was turning away, when John added, 'I am glad she has him at last, I was afraid she had a long solitary morning while you were out with him. I saw you walking up and down so long.'

'He was talking over his plans,' said Theodora, with an assumption of sullen dignity.

'I have been wishing to speak to you about that very thing,' said John. 'I think you may be in danger of putting yourself between him and his wife.'

It was a new thing to her to hear that this was a danger, but, in an offended manner, she replied, 'I can hardly be accused of that. He ceases all rational talk about his most important concerns to go to child's play with her.'

'But why keep her out of the rational talk?'

'That is his concern. He knows what she is capable of, I suppose.'

'I doubt whether he does,' said John; 'but I don't want to interfere with his behaviour, only to give you a caution. It is natural that you should wish to have him what he was before. I knew his marriage was a great blow to you.'

'I knew he would marry,' said Theodora, coldly; for she could not bear compassion. 'It is the common course of things.'

'And that the wife should be first.'

'Of course.'

'Then would it not be better to bear that in mind, and make up your mind to it, rather than try to absorb his confidence?'

'He is not bound to consult no one but that child. You would not drive him back to her if he came to you for advice.'

'I should not pass her over; I should assume that her opinion was to be respected.'

'I can't be untrue.'

'Then try to make it valuable.'

'He wants no help of mine to make him fond of her!' cried Theodora. 'Does not he dote on her, and make himself quite foolish about her complexion and her dress!'

'That is a different thing. She cannot be always a toy; and if you want to do the most inestimable service to Arthur, it would be by raising her.'

'Trying to educate a married sister-in-law! No, thank you!'

'I don't see what is to become of them,' said John, sadly. 'He will be always under some influence or other, and a sensible wife might do everything for him. But she is a child; and he is not the man to form her character. He would have spoilt her already if she did not take his admiration, for mere affection; and just at the age when girls are most carefully watched, she is turned out into the world without a guide! If he ceases to be happy with her, what is before them? You think he will fall back on you; but I tell you he will not. If you once loosen the tie of home, and he seeks solace elsewhere, it will be in the pursuits that have done him harm enough already.'

'He has given up his race-horses,' said Theodora.

The luncheon-bell interrupted them; but as they were going down, John added, 'I hope I have said nothing to vex you. Indeed, Theodora, I feel much for your loss.'

'I am not vexed,' was her haughty reply, little guessing how, in her pursuit of the brother who had escaped her, she was repelling and slighting one who would gladly have turned to her for sisterly friendship. His spirits were in that state of revival when a mutual alliance would have greatly added to the enjoyment of both; but Theodora had no idea of even the possibility of being on such terms. He seemed like one of an elder generation—hardly the same relation as Arthur.

'So, Lady Elizabeth comes,' said Lady Martindale, as they entered the room.

'Is she coming to stay here!' asked John.

'Yes; did you not hear that we have asked her to come to us for the Whitford ball?'

'Oh, are we in for the Whitford ball?' said Theodora, in a tone of disgust that checked the delighted look on Violet's face.

'Yes, my dear; your papa wishes us to go.'

'What a bore!' exclaimed Theodora.

'Yes,' sighed Lady Martindale; 'but your papa thinks it right.'

'A necessary evil—eh, Violet?' said Arthur.

'I hope you don't mind it?' said Violet, looking anxiously at him.

'Ah, you will enjoy it,' said her ladyship, graciously regarding her folly.

'Oh, yes, thank you,' said Violet, eagerly.

'Have you been to many balls?'

'Only to one;' and she blushed deeply, and cast down her eyes.

'And so the Brandons are coming to stay! For how long, mamma?' proceeded Theodora.

'From Wednesday to Saturday,' said Lady Martindale. 'I have been writing cards for a dinner-party for Wednesday; and your father says there are some calls that must be returned; and so, my dear, will you be ready by three?'

'You don't mean me, mamma?' said Theodora, as nobody answered.

'No; you are a resolute rebel against morning visits. You have no engagement for this afternoon, my dear?'

Violet started, saying, 'I beg your pardon; I did not know you meant me. Oh, thank you! I am very much obliged.'

'I suppose you will not go with us, Arthur?'

He looked as if he did not like it, but caught a beseeching glance from his wife, and was beginning to consent, when Theodora exclaimed, 'Oh, Arthur, don't; it will be such a famous opportunity for that ride.'

'Very well; you know where my cards are, Violet!'

'Yes,' she answered, submissively, though much disappointed, and in dread of the drive and of the strangers.

'Really, I think you had better go, Arthur,' said John, greatly displeased at Theodora's tone. 'It is the sort of occasion for doing things regularly.'

'Indeed, I think so,' said Lady Martindale; 'I wish Arthur would go with us this once. I doubt if it will be taken well if he does not.'

'You will find no one at home. His going won't make a bit of difference,' said Theodora, who now regarded keeping him as a matter of power.

'Surely your ride might wait,' said her mother. 'No, it won't, mamma. It is to see that old man, Mary's father.'

'What Mary, my dear?'

'The scullery-maid. I want to speak to him about her confirmation; and the only way is over Whitford Down—all manner of leaping places, so we must go without Violet.'

Violet feared there was little hope for her, for Arthur looked much invited by the leaping places, but John made another effort in her favour, and a great one for him.

'Suppose you accept of me for your escort, Theodora?' Every one looked astonished, Lady Martindale positively aghast.

'Were you ever on Whitford Down, John?' said Arthur.

'Why, yes,—in old times; I know the place, I believe.'

'You talk of knowing it, who never hunted!' said Arthur. 'No, no; you are a great traveller, John, but you don't know the one horse-track on Whitford Down that does not lead into a bog—'

'Theodora does, I dare say.'

'Yes, I know it, but it is too far for you, John, thank you, and not at all what would suit you. I must give it up, if Arthur prefers playing the disconsolate part of a gentleman at a morning call.'

'Do you really dislike going without me?' asked Arthur, and of course nothing was left for Violet to say but, 'O, thank you, pray don't stay with me. Indeed, I had much rather you had your ride.'

'You are sure?'

'O yes, quite. I shall do very well' and she smiled, and tried to make a show of ease and confidence in his mother, by looking towards her, and asking upon whom they were to call.

Lady Martindale mentioned several ladies who had left their cards for Mrs. Arthur Martindale, adding that perhaps it would be better to leave a card at Rickworth Priory.

'Is that where Lady Elizabeth Brandon lives?' asked Violet.

'Yes,' said Lady Martindale. 'It belongs to her daughter. Lady Elizabeth is a highly excellent person, for whom Lord Martindale has a great regard, and Miss Brandon is one of Theodora's oldest friends.'

'Hum!' said Theodora.

'My dear, she is a very nice amiable girl—just your own age, and admirably brought up.'

'Granted,' said Theodora.

'I cannot see that Emma Brandon wants anything but style and confidence,' proceeded Lady Martindale, 'and that I believe to be entirely poor Lady Elizabeth's fault for keeping her so much in retirement. That German finishing governess, Miss Ohnglaube, whom we were so sorry to lose, would have been the person to teach her a little freedom and readiness of manner. I wish we could have kept her a little longer.'

'I told Lady Elizabeth about her,' said Theodora; but Lady Martindale, without hearing, said she must go to her aunt, and renewing injunctions to Violet to be ready by three, left the room.

'You did not astonish her weak mind with the ghost story?' said Arthur.

'With its cause.'

'You would not have thought, Violet,' continued Arthur, 'that we had a ghost in the north wing.'

'What was it?' said Violet. 'You don't mean really?'

'Only a Turk's-head broom, with phosphorus eyes, and a sheet round the handle,' said Theodora. 'It had a grand effect when Arthur stood on the second landing-place, and raised it above the balusters —a sort of bodilessness rising from vacancy.'

'Didn't she faint?' said Arthur.

'No, I was afraid she would, and then it would have been all over with us; but I dragged her safe into the school-room, and there she was so hysterical that I nearly relented.'

'Then was it all in play?' said Violet.

'In earnest,' said Arthur. 'It was the only way of getting quit of mademoiselle.'

'That lady who used to talk metaphysics and sing!' said John. 'I remember the lamentations at her not choosing to remain. Why was she victimized?'

'There was no help for it,' said Theodora. 'She considered the book of Genesis as a "sehr schone mythische Geschichte", and called the Patriarchs the Hebrew Avatars.'

'Theodora! You don't mean it!' exclaimed John.

'I do, but I had my revenge, for, after the Turk's-head adventure, she never slept without my Bible under her pillow. If by broad daylight she would have renounced the Avatar theory, I really would have forgiven her, for she was very good-natured, and she admired "the high Roman fashion" so much, I was half afraid she might follow it herself if we tormented her much more.'

'But why keep it to yourself! I can hardly believe it possible! Why play these tricks instead of telling all?'

'I did tell Aunt Nesbit, but Miss Ohnglaube was always reading Jean Paul with her and mamma; they were in raptures with her, and my aunt only said I was too well instructed to be misled.'

'How old were you?'

'About fifteen.'

'It is beyond belief. Why could you not tell my father?' said John.

'I hardly saw him—I never spoke to him.'

'Was not I at home!'

'Yes, shut up in your room. I never thought of speaking to you. All I could do was to be as restive as possible, and when she did not care for that, there was nothing for it but playing on her German superstition. So Arthur told her some awful stones about whipping blacks to death, and declared West Indian families were very apt to be haunted; but that it was a subject never to be mentioned to mamma nor my aunt.'

'And having paved the way, we treated her to the Turk's-head,' concluded Arthur. 'I would do it again to hear her sigh and scream, and see Theodora acting as coolly as if she was in daily intercourse with the defunct nigger. If mademoiselle had not been frightened out of her senses, her self-possession would have betrayed us.'

'I could not act fright,' said Theodora.

'And this was the best plan you could devise for getting rid of an infidel governess!' said John.

And as they dispersed, he stood looking after his sister, thinking that there was more excuse for her inconsistencies than he had yet afforded her, and that, in fact, she deserved credit for being what she was. His aunt had done even more harm than the ruin of his happiness.

Theodora triumphed, and carried Arthur off, but Violet found the reality of the expedition less formidable than the anticipation. She knew her mother would have enjoyed seeing her well dressed, and setting forth in that style; the drive was agreeable, and Lady Martindale kind and gracious. Alone with her, she lost much of her dread, and felt better acquainted; but all froze up into coldness when they came home.

The ladies at Rickworth had not been at home; and as they did not arrive on the Wednesday till Violet had gone to dress, she had time to frighten herself by imagining an heiress on the pattern of Lady Martindale, and an earl's daughter proportionably unapproachable. Her trepidation was

increased by Arthur's not coming in, though she heard guests arriving, and when at last he appeared, it was so late, that he desired her to go down and say he was 'just ready.'

It was a serious thing to encounter alone that great saloon full of strangers, and with cheeks of the brightest carnation Violet glided in, and after delivering her message to Lord Martindale, was glad to find herself safely seated on an ottoman, whence she looked for the chief guests. In the distance, beside Lady Martindale, sat a quiet elderly lady in black; Theodora was paying a sort of scornful half-attention to a fine showy girl, who was talking rather affectedly; and, thought Violet, no one but an heiress could wear so many bracelets.

Her survey completed, she became conscious that a small, fair-haired, pale girl was sitting near her, looking so piteously shy and uncomfortable, that she felt bound to try and set her at ease, and ventured an observation on the weather. It was responded to, and something about the harvest followed; then, how pretty the country, and, thereupon, Violet said it only wanted mountains to be beautiful.

'Ah! when one has once seen a mountain one cannot forget it.'

'Never!' said Violet. 'I miss Helvellyn every morning when I look out of window.'

'Do you know the Lake country?' said the young lady.

'My home—my old home—is within sight of the Westmoreland hills. Have you been there?'

'Mamma and I once spent a month there, and enjoyed it exceedingly.'

'Oh! and did you go up Helvellyn!'

'Yes, that we did, in spite of the showers; and what a view we had!'

They were surprised to find that dinner had been announced. Violet was placed next to Mr. Martindale, and was able to ask the name of her new acquaintance.

'Miss Brandon, you mean.' 'O no, not Miss Brandon, but that light pale girl in the lilac worked muslin, who was talking to me!'

'I saw you talking to Miss Brandon.'

'Could it be? She looked all astray and frightened, like me!'

'That description answers to Emma Brandon,' said John, smiling.

'Who would have thought it! I should never have begun talking to her if I had guessed who she was. I only did it because she looked so uncomfortable. I hope it was not being forward.'

'Not in the least. You know you are at home here,—it was a great kindness.'

'Do you like her?' said Violet.

'I believe she is a very good kind of girl, and her mother is one of our oldest friends. They are very excellent sensible people, and do a great deal of good in their own parish.'

'And only think! She has been in Westmoreland! She has seen Helvellyn!'

Violet was the only person who ever spoke to John in that hearty confidence of sympathy in rejoicing; and quite refreshed by her bright looks, he led her into a history of an ascent of Helvellyn, which had, until this spring, been the great event of her life.

On coming into the drawing-room, Miss Brandon shrank up to her mother's side. Violet wished she had a mother to protect her; and not daring to place herself among the great ladies, stood in the group of younger ones, with whom Theodora was keeping up a cold formal converse. Country neighbours thought much of being asked to Martindale; but the parties there were of the grandest and stiffest. Moreover, every one had to give their friends a description of the bride; and the young ladies were more inclined to study her appearance than to find conversation, regarding her as an object of curiosity, as well as with some of their general dread of the house of Martindale.

After an awkward ten minutes, Lady Martindale came towards her, and said, 'My dear, Lady Elizabeth Brandon wishes to be introduced to you.'

'To me!' and Violet followed her, blushed and bent, then found her hand cordially shaken, and a most comfortable voice addressing her. Room was made for her on the sofa, between Lady Elizabeth and her daughter, and she was supremely happy in talking about her own dear lake country. Arthur

smiled, and looked well pleased to see her in such company; and Mr. Martindale came and talked to Lady Elizabeth all the evening.

Violet expected Theodora to monopolize Miss Brandon the next morning, but Theodora had reasons of her own for not breaking her habit of spending the morning in her own occupations. She knew Lady Elizabeth to be perfectly guiltless of manoeuvring; but from the time she had become conscious of Mrs. Nesbit's designs on Rickworth, first for Arthur and now for John, it had been her decided purpose to give no colour for throwing the heiress in their way by any friendship of hers; and as she considered Emma one of the dullest and most silly girls of her acquaintance, it was very pleasant to be justified in neglecting her.

The office of companionship to the younger visitor fell to Mrs. Martindale. She showed off the peacock, and they wandered happily in the gardens, most amiably received by Mr. Harrison, who delighted in displaying his treasures, and almost overwhelmed Violet with his graciousness, when she shyly asked if he could spare her a few of his white roses for her hair.

Miss Brandon groaned and sighed about the ball, declaring it her detestation; she should be tired to death; she hated dancing; and above all, there was the nuisance of dressing.

'Oh! I am sorry you don't like it,' said Violet, 'but that is the way with all sensible people.'

'No; mamma says it is not being sensible, but because I don't dance well, and she wishes I did.'

'I am glad of that. My mamma does not think it foolish.'

'Do you like dancing, then?'

'That I do,' cried Violet, making a few steps; 'I only wish I might dance with him still!'

This was the only difference of opinion—on school-teaching books—heroes, historical and fictitious—on the "Bridal of Triermain"—and Wordsworth's Waggoner, their sentiments accorded exactly. Perhaps Emma's mind was the more formed and cultivated, but Violet's was the more discerning and diffident in judgment.

Emma took the first opportunity of pouring out to her mother a perfect rapture about Mrs. Martindale, dwelling on her right views, and all that showed she had been well brought up.

'She is a sweet-looking creature,' said Lady Elizabeth, 'and I do hope she is all she seems. Lord Martindale has been telling me how entirely the marriage was her father's doing, and that she was perfectly ignorant and innocent, poor thing.'

'She looks as if she could never do anything wrong. Mamma, I hardly know whether you would like me to make friends with her, but I could not help it, and she said such nice things that I knew you would like her. I never could get on with any one before, you know, but, from the moment she came blushing in, and spoke to me in that sweet low voice, I felt as if I most be fond of her—before I made out who she was—and even then I could not like her less.'

'She is so unaffected and unassuming!' said Lady Elizabeth. 'I little expected Arthur Martindale's marriage to have turned out so well.'

'I don't wonder at his falling in love at first sight! I don't see how he could help it. I am sure I should!'

'I think you have, said Lady Elizabeth, smiling.

'Wasn't it charming, mamma? Theodora never came near us all the morning, and very soon got out of my way in the afternoon, so we were so comfortable!'

'Take care what you say about her, my dear.'

'Oh, yes. We never spoke of her at all. I wonder what Mrs. Martindale does here! It is a dreadful place, and they are all one more stately than the other,'

'Not the sons.'

'Oh! poor Mr. Martindale is worse than stately. There's something in that gentle melancholy tone of his that is so different from other people—and he looks so refined and thoughtful. He frightens me more than any of them!'

'I hope he is in rather better spirits. I have had a good deal of talk with him this evening. Indeed, his father told me he had been roused by all this affair about his brother. But, Emma, my dear, you have not rung all this time! Here am I almost dressed. I shall have to fulfil my threat, and leave you to come down alone.'

It had to be fulfilled. Emma left insufficient time for her maid to try to set out her soft light scanty hair, to make her satin and gauze look anything but limp and flabby, and to put on her jewels, in the vain hope of their making her seem well dressed. Whatever was ordained for her to wear, Emma always looked exactly the same. She opened her door at the same moment as Violet advanced into the gallery, her tall taper figure arrayed in bridal lace, not much whiter than her long neck and rounded arms, a wreath of roses around her dark tresses, brilliant flowers in her hand, her soft eyes bright with pleasure, and her beauteous complexion deepened by bashfulness.

Emma could not repress her delight. 'Oh!' she exclaimed, 'you can't think how beautiful you are!'

'Isn't she?' said a proud, playful voice. 'Thank you;' but seeing Emma disconcerted, Arthur hastened down-stairs.

'Oh, I didn't know he was there!'

'Never mind!' said Violet, among her blushes. 'I'm glad he was. He liked it.'

'I could not help it,' said Emma. 'You are so like a story! I can hardly believe you are real!'

Violet felt familiar enough to prove herself substantial by a playful pinch. 'But look here! See what I found on my table.'

'One of those serpent bracelets. It is very pretty!'

'Was not it kind of Lord Martindale?'

'You have to thank him for it! Oh! dreadful!'

'I don't mind speaking to him. It is so kind. "Mrs. A. Martindale, from her affectionate father," the direction said. Oh! it is so very, very pleasant that he should be so kind to me. Is not it a beautiful creature! Look at its scales and its crown, and eyes. Arthur says they are sapphires.'

'Yes, I never saw a prettier one.'

'I wish Annette could see it, and all at home. Is it not like a creature in a fairy tale?'

'Like Zelinda's singing serpents?'

'Just like them. Do you know, I sometimes think I have got into a fairy tale. Everything is so beautiful and so bewildering, and unlike what I fancied.'

'Because you are so like a fairy princess yourself. Are you sure you have not a talisman ring!'

'I think I have,' and Violet pulled off her glove. 'There—that forget-me-not—the first ring I ever had. From the day he gave me that it has all been so strange, that now and then I have been almost afraid to awake, for fear it should not be true. But may I look at that diamond butterfly of yours? It shines as if it would flash in the dark.'

'Never mind mine. Stupid things that came as heir-looms, and have no pleasure belonging to them. The only thing I do care for is this'—and she drew out a locket from within her dress. 'There, that is my father's hair, and that is my little brother's. They both died before I can remember; and there is dear mamma's nice pepper-and-salt lock round them.'

Theodora swept by in black lace, her coronal of hair wreathed with large pearls, and her lofty air like the Tragic Muse.

'Comparing ornaments! Worthy of such a friendship,' thought she, as she held back, and made them go down before her, Emma glad to hold by Violet's arm for protection.

Mrs. Nesbit was in the drawing-room talking to Lady Elizabeth, and with her keen piercing eyes watching John, who was reading the newspaper by the table. She was pleased to see him lay it aside, look up, and smile, as the two friends entered, but she could have beaten them both, the one for her insignificance, and the other for her radiant loveliness; and she was still further provoked to see Miss Brandon sit down as near her mother as possible, while Violet went up to him to show

him her bracelet. She stood by him for some little time, while he was examining and praising it, and congratulating her on the choice bouquet that Harrison had bestowed on her, but surprised to see her eyes cast pensively down, and a grave look on that fair young face. He little suspected that she was saddened by the contrast between her joys and his sorrow and ill health, and thought it unkind to speak of her delight to one so far removed from it.

Theodora began to indulge in a hearty grumbling.

'Well, my dear,' said Mrs. Nesbit, 'you will only show yourselves there, and go home. Miss Brandon is not more inclined to Whitford balls than you are.'

'No, I am rather surprised at having dragged Emma so far,' said Lady Elizabeth. 'I hope they will both find it turn out better than they expect. You must teach them,' and she looked smilingly at Violet.

Mrs. Nesbit was extremely annoyed at the quantity of notice Violet had lately received, and was the more resolved to put her down. 'No one can expect them to like country balls,' she said. 'One attends them as a duty, for the sake of the neighbourhood; but as to pleasure in them, that is only for the young ladies of the place on the look-out for the military.'

She had fulfilled her purpose of making every one uncomfortable, except one—namely, Violet. John looked at her, and perceived she was too innocent and clear in conscience to understand or appropriate the taunt, so he thought it better to leave the field open to Lady Elizabeth's calm reply, 'Well, I used to enjoy country balls very much in my time.'

Arthur evaporated his indignation by shaking his foot, and murmuring, not so low but that his sister heard it, 'Old hag!'

Lord and Lady Martindale came in together, and Violet's blushing gratitude was so pretty and bright that it made Lord Martindale smile, and silence it by a kiss, which perhaps surprised and gratified her more than the bracelet did.

Lady Elizabeth begged to have her in her carriage; and growing intimate in the sociable darkness, she found out that the mother was as loveable as the daughter, and was as much at home with them as if she had known them for years.

The evening exceeded even Violet's anticipations, though her one former ball had been such as could never be equalled. Lord Martindale wished every one to know how entirely he accepted his new daughter, so he gave his arm to her, and presented her to the principal ladies, while she felt herself followed by her husband's encouraging and exulting eye. It certainly was a very different thing to go into society as Miss Violet Moss or as Mrs. Arthur Martindale, and there was a start of fear as the thought crossed her—was her pleasure pride and vanity?

She was chiefly sorry that she could not see Miss Brandon enjoy herself: all that could be extracted from her by the most animated appeal was a resigned smile, and a little quizzing of some of the sillier young ladies. She professed, however, that she had never disliked any ball so little, since she had the pleasure of watching Mrs. Martindale, hearing how universally she was acknowledged to be the prettiest person present, and telling Arthur all that was said of her.

Miss Brandon and Arthur had for some years past kept at a respectful distance, each in dread of designs of the other; but now they were fast resuming the childish familiarity of tone of the ancient times, when the rough but good-natured, gentlemanlike boy had been a companion much preferred to the determined, domineering girl. They danced a quadrille, and talked a great deal of Violet. Emma began to think much better of his capacity.

As to Theodora, she was talking, laughing, dancing, and appearing so full of spirits, that Violet could not help venturing a remark, that she surely liked it better than she expected.

'Not at all,' was the answer; 'but if one is to make oneself absurd, it is as well not to do so by halves.'

So far was she from doing so by halves, that when her mother was ready to go home, she was engaged so many deep, that it was settled she should be left with Arthur and Violet. She danced indefatigably till morning shone into the room, and was handed into the carriage by a gentleman who,

it was the private opinion of her young chaperone, had, like Arthur, fallen in love at first sight. Poor man! it was a pity he could not know about Mr. Wingfield; or she could almost suppose that Theodora did not care so much for Mr. Wingfield, after all.

The drive home was very amusing. Violet was so tired that it was a trouble to speak; but she liked to hear the brother and sister discuss the ball, and laugh over the people; and leant back in her corner so comfortably, that she only dreaded the moment of rousing herself to walk up-stairs.

Theodora never stopped talking all the way, sprung nimbly out of the carriage, ran up the steps, and admired the morning sky; and Violet believed she did not go to bed at all, for it seemed a very short time before the distant notes of the singing class were heard; yet she looked as fresh and blooming as ever when they met at breakfast, and did not flag in any of her usual employments.

The other ladies were capable of nothing but loitering; and it was a day for making great advances in intimacy. Most delightful was that first friendship, as they wandered arm-in-arm, talked gravely or gaily, and entered more and more into each other’s minds. Theodora held aloof, despising their girlish caressing ways, and regarding the intimacy with the less toleration because it was likely to serve as a pretext to Mrs. Nesbit for promoting her views for John; and though the fewest words possible had passed between him and Miss Brandon, she found that Mrs. Nesbit was building hopes on the satisfaction he showed in conversing with Lady Elizabeth. The visit ended with a warm invitation to Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Martindale to come and stay at Rickworth before they left the country.

CHAPTER 6

Is it that they have a fear
Of the dreary season near,
Or that other pleasures be
Sweeter even than gaiety?

—WORDSWORTH

Were they to leave the country? This was still under consideration. The next fortnight made some difference in Theodora's wishes respecting Brogden Cottage. Violet becoming less timid, ventured to show that she took interest in poor people; and Theodora was pleased by finding her able to teach at school, and to remember the names of the children. Especially her sweet looks and signs gained the heart of little Charley Layton, the dumb boy at the lodge—the creature on whom Theodora bestowed the most time and thought. And on her begging to be shown the dumb alphabet, as the two sisters crossed fingers, they became, for one evening, almost intimate.

Theodora began to think of her as not only harmless, but likely to be useful in the parish; and could afford to let Arthur have her for a plaything, since he made herself his confidante. She withdrew her opposition; but it was too late. Arthur had declared that he could not live there without £2500 a year, and this his father neither could nor would give him. The expense of building the house, and the keeping up of such a garden and establishment, did not leave too much available of the wealth Lady Martindale had brought, nor was the West Indian property in a prosperous state; the demand was preposterous; and Theodora found herself obliged to defend poor Violet, who, her aunt declared, must have instigated it in consequence of the notice lavished upon her; while, as Theodora averred with far more truth, 'it was as much as the poor thing did to know the difference between a ten-pound note and a five.' Twelve hundred pounds a year, and the rent of a house in London, was what his elder brother would have married upon; and this, chiefly by John's influence, was fixed as the allowance, in addition to his pay; and as his promotion was now purchased for him, he had far more than he had any right to expect, though he did not seem to think so, and grumbled to Theodora about the expense of the garden, as if it was consuming his patrimony.

How the income would hold out, between his carelessness and her inexperience, was a question over which his father sighed, and gave good advice, which Arthur heard with the same sleepy, civil air of attention, as had served him under the infliction many times before.

John gave only one piece of advice, namely, that he should consign a fixed sum for household expenses into his wife's hands; so that he might not be subject to continued applications.

On this he acted; and subtracting to himself, wine, men, and horses, the full amount of his bachelor income, he, for the first time, communicated to Violet the result of the various consultations.

'So the upshot of it all is, that we are to have a house somewhere in Belgravia,' he began.

'That is near Lord Martindale's London house, is it not?'

'Yes; you will be in the way of all that is going on.'

'Do we go there next month?'

'I suppose so.'

'Oh! I am glad.'

'Are you? I thought you liked being here.'

'Yes, yes, of course, that I do; but it will be so pleasant to be at home, and to have you all to myself.'

She repented the next moment, as if it had been a complaint; but he was gratified, and called her a little monopolist.

'Oh, I don't mean to be troublesome to you,' said she, earnestly; 'I shall have so much more to do in our own house, that I shall not miss you so much when you are out; besides, we can have Annette to stay with us.'

'We'll see about that. But look here,' laying a paper with some figures before her; 'that's all my father leaves me for you to keep house with. I put it into your hands, and you must do the best you can with it.'

'You don t mean to put all that into my hands!' exclaimed Violet in alarm. 'What a sum!'

'You won't think so by the end of the year; but mind, this must do; it will be of no use to come to me for more.'

'Then is it little?' asked Violet.

'See what you think of it by and by; you won't find it such an easy thing to make both ends meet.'

'I will write and ask mamma to tell me how to manage.'

'Indeed,' said Arthur, with sharpness such as she had never seen in him before, 'I beg you will not. I won't have my affairs the town talk of Wrangerton.' But seeing her look frightened, and ready to cry, he softened instantly, and said, affectionately, 'No, no, Violet, we must keep our concerns to ourselves. I don't want to serve for the entertainment of Matilda's particular friends.'

'Mamma wouldn't tell—'

'I'll trust no house of seven women.'

'But how am I to know how to manage?'

'Never mind; you'll get on. It comes as naturally to women as if it was shooting or fishing.'

'I wonder how I shall begin! I don't know anything.'

'Buy a cookery book.'

'Aunt Moss gave me one; I didn't mean that. But, oh, dear, there's the hiring of servants, and buying things!'

'Don't ask me: it is woman's work, and always to be done behind the scenes. If there's a thing I mortally hate, it is those housekeeper bodies who go about talking of their good cooks.'

Violet was silenced, but after much meditation she humbly begged for answers to one or two questions. 'Was she to pay the servants' wages out of this?'

'Your maids—of course.'

'And how many are we to have?'

'As many as will do the work.'

'A cook and housemaid—I wonder if that would be enough?'

'Don't ask me, that's all'

'I know you don't like to be teased,' she said, submissively; 'but one or two things I do want to know. Is James to be in the house?'

'Why, yes; he is a handy fellow. We will have him down for Simmonds to give him some training.'

'Then ought we to have two maids or three?'

He held up his hands, and escaped.

That morning John, happening to come into the drawing-room, found Violet disconsolately covering a sheet of paper with figures.

'Abstruse calculations?' said he.

'Yes, very,' said she, sighing, with the mystified face of a child losing its way in a long sum.

He did not like to leave her in such evident difficulties, and said, with a smile, 'Your budget? Are you good at arithmetic?'

'I can do the sums, if that was all, but I don't know what to set out from, or anything about it. Mamma said she could not think how I should keep house.'

'She would be the best person to give you counsel, I should think.'

'Yes, but—' and she looked down, struggling with tears, 'I must not write to ask her.'

'How so!'

'Arthur says the Wrangerton people would gossip, and I should not like that,' said she; 'only it is very hard to make out for myself, and those things tease Arthur.'

'They are not much in his line,' said John; 'I don't know,' he added, hesitating, 'whether it would be of any use to you to talk it over with me. There was a time when I considered the management of such an income; and though it never came to practice, mine may be better than no notions at all.'

'Oh, thank you!' said Violet, eagerly; then, pausing, she said, with a sweet embarrassment, 'only —you can't like it.'

'Thank you,' replied he, with kind earnestness; 'I should like to be of use to you.'

'It is just what I want. I am sure Arthur would like me to do it. You see this is what he gives me, and I am to buy everything out of it.'

'The best plan,' said John; 'it never answers to be always applying for money.'

'No,' said Violet, thoughtfully, as she recollected certain home scenes, and then was angry with herself for fancying Arthur could wear such looks as those which all the house dreaded.

Meanwhile John had perceived how differently Arthur had apportioned the income from what his own intentions had been. He had great doubts of the possibility of her well-doing, but he kept them to himself. He advised her to consider her items, and soon saw she was more bewildered than helpless. He knew no more than Arthur on the knotty point of the number of maids, but he was able to pronounce her plan sensible, and her eyes brightened, as she spoke of a housemaid of mamma's who wanted to better herself, and get out of the way of the little ones, 'who were always racketing.'

'And now,' said John, 'we passed over one important question—or is that settled otherwise? —your own pocket-money!'

'Oh! I have plenty. Arthur gave me fifty pounds when we went through London, and I have twelve left.'

'But for the future! Is it included here?'

'I should think so. Oh!' shocked at the sum he set down, 'a quarter of that would be enough for my dress.'

'I don't think Miss Standaloft would say so,' said John, smiling.

'But Arthur said we must economize, and I promised to be as little expense as possible. Please let me write down half that.'

'No, no,' said John, retaining the pencil, 'not with my consent. Leave yourself the power of giving. Besides, this is to cover all the sundries you cannot charge as household expenses. Now let me mark off another hundred for casualties, and here is what you will have for the year. Now divide.'

'Surely, two people and three servants can't eat all that in one week.'

'Fires, candles,' said John, amused, but poor Violet was quite overpowered.

'Oh, dear! how many things I never thought of! Mamma said I was too young! These coals. Can you tell me anything about them?'

'I am afraid not. You are getting beyond me. If you wanted to know the cost of lodgings in Italy or the south of France, I could help you; but, after all, experience is better bought than borrowed.'

'But what shall I do? Suppose I make Arthur uncomfortable, or spend his money as I ought not when he trusts me?'

'Suppose you don't,' said John. 'Why should you not become an excellent housewife? Indeed, I think you will' he proceeded, as she fixed her eyes on him. 'You see the principle in its right light. This very anxiety is the best pledge. If your head was only full of the pleasure of being mistress of a house, that would make me uneasy about you and Arthur.'

'Oh! that would be too bad! Mamma has talked to me so much. She said I must make it a rule never to have debts. She showed me how she pays her bills every week, and gave me a great book like hers. I began at Winchester.'

'Why, Violet, instead of knowing nothing, I think you know a great deal!'

She smiled, and said something about mamma. ‘I don’t say you will not make mistakes,’ he continued, ‘but they will be steps to learn by. Your allowance is not large. It seems only fair to tell you that it may not be sufficient. So, if you find the expenses exceed the week’s portion, don’t try to scramble on; it will only be discomfort at the time, and will lead to worse. Go boldly to Arthur, and make him attend; it is the only way to peace and security.’

‘I see,’ said Violet, thoughtfully. ‘Oh, I hope I shall do right. One thing I should like. I mean, I thought one ought to set apart something for giving away.’

‘That is one use in reserving something for yourself,’ said John, in his kindest manner. ‘Of the rest, you are only Arthur’s steward.’

‘Yes, I hope I shall manage well.’

‘You will if you keep your present frame of mind.’

‘But I am so young and ignorant. I did not think enough about it when I was married,’ said Violet, sorrowfully, ‘and how it seems all to come on me. To have all his comfort and the well-being of a whole house depending on such as I am.’

‘I can only say one thing in answer, Violet, what I know was the best comfort to one who, without it, would have sunk under the weight of responsibility.’ His whole countenance altered, his voice gave way, a distressing fit of coughing came on, the colour flushed into his face, and he pressed his hand on his chest. Violet was frightened, but it presently ceased, and after sitting for a few moments, exhausted, with his head resting on his hand, he took up the pencil, and wrote down—‘As thy day, so shall thy strength be’—pushed it towards her, and slowly left the room.

Violet shed a few tears over the paper, and was the more grieved when she heard of his being confined to his room by pain in the side. She told Arthur what had passed. ‘Ah! poor John,’ he said, ‘he never can speak of Helen, and any agitation that brings on that cough knocks him up for the rest of the day. So he has been trying to “insense” you, has he? Very good-natured of him.’

‘I am so grieved. I was afraid it would be painful to him. But what was the responsibility he spoke of?’

‘Looking after her grandfather, I suppose. He was imbecile all the latter part of his life. Poor John, they were both regularly sacrificed.’

John took the opportunity of a visit from his father that afternoon to tell him how much good sense and right feeling Violet had shown, and her reluctance to appropriate to herself what he had insisted on as absolutely necessary.

‘That is only inexperience, poor girl,’ said Lord Martindale. ‘She does not know what she will want. If it is not confidential, I should like to know what she allows herself.’

John mentioned the sum.

‘That is mere nonsense!’ exclaimed his father. ‘It is not half as much as Theodora has! And she living in London, and Arthur making such a point about her dress. I thought you knew better, John!’

‘I knew it was very little, but when I considered the rest, I did not see how she could contrive to give herself more.’

‘There must be some miscalculation,’ said Lord Martindale. ‘There is not the least occasion for her to be straitened. You thought yourself the allowance was ample.’

‘That it is; but you know Arthur has been used to expensive habits.’

‘More shame for him.’

‘But one can hardly expect him to reduce at once. I do think he is sincere in his promises, but he will be careless, even in ordinary expenditure. I don’t say this is what ought to be, but I fear it will be. All the prudence and self-denial must be upon her side.’

‘And that from a girl of sixteen, universally admired! What a business it is! Not that I blame her, poor thing, but I don’t see what is to become of them.’

The conversation was not without results. Lord Martindale, some little time after, put into Violet’s hand an envelope, telling her she must apply the contents to her own use; and she was

astounded at finding it a cheque for £100. He was going to London, with both his sons, to choose a house for Arthur, and to bid farewell to John, who was warned, by a few chilly days, to depart for a winter in Madeira.

Violet was, during her husband's absence, to be left at Rickworth; and in the last week she had several other presents, a splendid dressing-case from Lady Martindale, containing more implements than she knew how to use, also the print of Lalla Rookh; and even little Miss Piper had spent much time and trouble on a very ugly cushion. Theodora declared her present should be useful, and gave all the household linen, for the purpose of having it hemmed by her school-children;—and this, though she and Miss Piper sat up for three nights till one o'clock to hasten it, was so far from ready, that Captain and Mrs. Martindale would have begun the world without one table-cloth, if old Aunt Moss had not been hemming for them ever since the day of Arthur's proposal.

Theodora was weary and impatient of the conflict of influence, and glad to be left to her own pursuits, while she thought that, alone with Violet, Arthur must surely be brought to a sense of his mistake.

Violet's heart bounded at the prospect of a renewal of the happy days at Winchester, and of a release from the restraint of Martindale, and the disappointment of making no friends with the family,—Mr. Martindale was the only one of them with whom she was sorry to part; and she had seen comparatively little of him. Indeed, when the three gentlemen set out, she thought so much of Arthur's being away for a week, that she could not care for John's voyage to Madeira, and looked preoccupied when he affectionately wished her good-bye, telling her to watch for him in the spring, —her house would be his first stage on his return. Then, as he saw her clinging to Arthur to the last moment, and coming down with him to the bottom of the long steps, he thought within himself, 'And by that time there will be some guessing how much strength and stability there is with all that sweetness, and she will have proved how much there is to trust to in his fondness!'

There was not much time for bewailing the departures before Emma Brandon came to claim her guest; and the drive was pleasant enough to make Violet shake off her depression, and fully enjoy the arrival at Rickworth, which now bore an aspect so much more interesting than on her former drive.

The wooded hills in the first flush of autumn beauty sloped softly down to the green meadows, and as the carriage crossed the solid-looking old stone bridge, Violet exclaimed with transport, at a glimpse she caught of a gray ruin—the old priory! She was so eager to see it that she and Emma left the carriage at the park gate, and walked thither at once.

Little of the building remained, only a few of the cloister arches, and the stumps of broken columns to mark the form of the chapel; but the arch of the west window was complete, and the wreaths of ivy hid its want of tracery, while a red Virginian creeper mantled the wall. All was calm and still, the greensward smooth and carefully mown, not a nettle or thistle visible, but the floriated crosses on the old stone coffin lids showing clearly above the level turf, shaded by a few fine old trees, while the river glided smoothly along under the broad floating water-lily leaves, and on its other side the green lawn was repeated, cattle quietly grazing on the rich pasture, shut in by the gently rising woods. The declining sun cast its long shadows, and all was peace,—the only sounds, the robin's note and the ripple of the stream.

Violet stood with her hands resting on Emma's arm, scarcely daring to break the silence. 'How lovely!' said she, after a long interval. 'O Emma, how fond you must be of this place!'

'Yes, it is beautiful,' said Emma, but with less satisfaction than Violet expected.

'It is worth all the gardens at Martindale.'

'To be sure it is,' said Emma, indignantly.

'It puts me in mind of St. Cross.'

'But St. Cross is alive, not a ruin,' said Emma, with a sigh, and she asked many questions about it, while showing Violet the chief points of interest, where the different buildings had been, and the tomb of Osyth, the last prioress. Her whole manner surprised Violet, there was a reverence as if

they were actually within a church, and more melancholy than pleasure in the possession of what, nevertheless, the young heiress evidently loved with all her heart.

Turning away at length, they crossed the park, and passed through the garden, which was gay with flowers, though much less magnificent than Mr. Harrison's. Emma said, mamma was a great gardener, and accordingly they found her cutting off flowers past their prime. She gave Violet a bouquet of geranium and heliotrope, and conducted her to her room with that motherly kindness and solicitude so comfortable to a lonely guest in a strange house.

Not that the house could long seem strange to Violet. It was an atmosphere of ease, where she could move and speak without feeling on her good behaviour. Everything throughout was on an unpretending scale, full of comfort, and without display, with a regularity and punctuality that gave a feeling of repose.

Violet was much happier than she had thought possible without Arthur, though her pleasures were not such as to make a figure in history. There were talks and walks, drives and visits to the school, readings and discussions, and the being perfectly at home and caressed by mother and daughter. Lady Elizabeth had all the qualities that are better than intellect, and enough of that to enter into the pursuits of cleverer people. Emma had more ability, and so much enthusiasm, that it was well that it was chastened by her mother's sound sense, as well as kept under by her own timidity.

It was not till Violet was on the point of departure that she knew the secret of Emma's heart. The last Sunday evening before Arthur was to fetch her away, she begged to walk once more to the Priory, and have another look at it. 'I think,' said she, 'it will stay in my mind like Helvellyn in the distance.'

Emma smiled, and soon they stood in the mellow light of the setting sun, beside the ruin. 'How strange,' said Violet, 'to think that it is three hundred years since Sunday came to this chapel.'

'I wonder' said Emma, breaking off, then beginning, 'O Violet, it is the wish of my heart to bring Sundays back to it.'

'Emma! but could it be built up again?'

'Mamma says nothing must be done till I am twenty-five—almost six years hence. Not then, unless I am tame and sober, and have weighed it well.'

'Restore it?—build a church?'

'I could have a sort of alms-house, with old people and children, and we could look after them ourselves.'

'That would be delightful. Oh, I hope you will do it.'

'Don't think of it more than as a dream to myself and mamma. I could not help saying it to you just then; but it is down too deep generally even for mamma. It must come back somehow to God's service. Don't talk of it any more, Violet, dearest, only pray that I may not be unworthy.'

Violet could hardly believe a maiden with such hopes and purposes could be her friend, any more than Prioress Osyth herself; and when, half-an-hour afterwards, she heard Emma talking over the parish and Sunday-school news in an ordinary matter-of-fact way, she did not seem like the same person.

There were many vows of correspondence, and auguries of meeting next spring. Lady Elizabeth thought it right that her daughter should see something of London life, and the hope of meeting Violet was the one thing that consoled Emma, and Violet talked of the delight of making her friend and Annette known to each other.

To this, as Lady Elizabeth observed, Arthur said not a word. She could not help lecturing him a little on the care of his wife, and he listened with a very good grace, much pleased at their being so fond of her.

She wished them good-bye very joyously, extremely happy at having her husband again, and full of pleasant anticipations of her new home.

PART II

There’s pansies for you, that’s for thoughts.

—*Hamlet*

CHAPTER 1

How far less am I blest than they,
Daily to pine, and waste with care,
Like the poor plant, that from its stem
Divided, feels the chilling air.

—MICKLE'S Cumnor Hall

Arthur and Violet arrived at their new home in the twilight, when the drawing-room fire burnt brightly, giving a look of comfort. The furniture was good; and by the fire stood a delightful little low chair with a high back, and a pretty little rosewood work-table, on which was a coloured glass inkstand, and a table-stand of books in choice bindings.

'Arthur, Arthur, how charming! I am sure this is your doing.'

'No, it is John's; I can't devise knick-knackeries, but he is a thorough old bachelor, and has been doing all sorts of things to the house, which have made it more tolerable.'

'How very kind he is! The books—how beautiful! Just what I wanted. That one he lent me—he talked to me of that. This Emma has—I saw your sister reading that, and wished to see more of it. But I can't look at them all now; I must see Sarah, she was to bring something from home.'

A Wrangerton face had great charms, though it was starched and severe, without one smile in answer to the joyous greeting, 'Well, Sarah, I am glad you could come. How are they all?'

'Thank you, ma'am, Mr. and Mrs. Moss, and the young ladies, and Mr. Albert, are all very well, and desires their love,' replied a voice solemn enough for the announcement that they were all at the point of death. Violet's spirits would have been damped but for the sight of the table spread with parcels directed in dear familiar writing, and she was pouncing on them when Sarah began her grave requests for orders, and Violet felt her own ignorance and incapacity growing more patent every moment as questions about arrangements beset and tormented her on every side. At last she was left to enjoy the out-spreading of the precious gifts, the devices characteristic of the kind hands that had prepared them, and all her own private possessions—a welcome sight.

It was a happy evening, and the days that followed were full of pleasure and occupation—in settling her treasures and making purchases. When she seated herself in her own carriage, she thought now indeed it would be delightful to show herself to her mother and sisters. She had no relation in London but an uncle, a solicitor, fond and proud of her, but too sensible to wish to frequent her house. He gave her a silver tea-pot; and being asked to dinner now and then on Sunday was all the attention he required. Her brother Albert did, indeed, sometimes come to town on business; and Violet, after many hopes, was, one evening, charmed at seeing him make his appearance. Arthur asked him to stay to dinner, after which they were going to a party.

Albert, a spruce, good-looking youth, had been too grand to make friends with so young a sister; but, now that she was a person of consequence, his tone was different. He talked his best, and she had a perfect feast of Wrangerton news—showed him all her presents, and enjoyed the thought of Annette's smile at hearing of her little Violet stepping into her carriage for a party at a countess's.

Arthur said London was empty, but Violet thought her visitors innumerable, and, as the autumn advanced towards winter, had many invitations. She enjoyed going out; her shyness had nearly worn off; and she was everywhere received so as to make Arthur, proud and pleased. Indeed she had doubts whether she was not growing too gay, and if it was right to pay so much attention to her appearance. She asked Arthur, and was laughed at for her pains.

However, Violet was not without her troubles from the first. She was very much afraid of Sarah, and never spoke to her without shrinking back into Miss Violet, and being conscious that it was mere

presumption in her to try to order one so much wiser than herself. The cook, a relation of Miss Standaloft, was much more smooth and deferential, full of resources, which seemed to come from Mrs. Martindale herself; and though the weekly bills always exceeded her reckonings, so many things were wanting, as Mrs. Cook observed, just getting into a house. The first time of having any guests at dinner, Violet was in much anxiety, but all went off to general satisfaction until the bills came in on Monday morning. The cost was beyond her calculations, exceeded her week's portion, and devoured the savings of the days when they had not dined at home. Invitations had been sent out for another party, and Violet tried to bring it within bounds; but the cook was civilly superior—'It was always so in the first families, such as she was accustomed to, but if Mrs. Martindale liked to have things in a different style—'

She knew Arthur would consent to no external change, and all she could do was to look at the price of all she ordered, reject sundry expensive delicacies, and trust to living on the relics of the feast for the rest of the week; but, behold! they scarcely served for one luncheon, and on Monday the bills had mounted up in an inexplicable manner. There were no savings left, and she made up the deficiency from her own resources. A third party was impending, and she strove more resolutely for frugality. 'Well, ma'am, if you choose, it must be so; but it was not what I was used to in the families such as I have lived in.'

But Violet was firm, whereupon the cook harassed her with contrarieties; and late hours and London air had so far told upon her that she could not shake off her cares cheerfully. She knew all would turn out ill—tormented herself—brought on a headache, and looked unwell when the evening came. The cook sent up the dinner with just enough want of care to keep her in such continual apprehension that she could hardly attend to the conversation.

'You did not make such a good hand of it to-day,' said Arthur, when the guests were gone; 'that soup was ditch-water, and—'

Violet was so worn out that she burst into tears. 'Hey? What's the matter now? I said nothing to cry for.'

She tried to speak, but the tears would not let her.

'Well, if you can't bear to be told everything is not perfection, I don't know what is to be done.' And Arthur, in displeasure, took up a candle and walked off to smoke a cigar in his sitting-room down-stairs.

Her tears were checked by consternation, and, earnest to be forgiven, she followed; then, as he turned impatiently, said, in a trembling pleading voice, 'Dear Arthur, I've done crying. I did not mean to be cross.'

'Well, that's enough, never mind,' said he, not unkindly, but as if in haste to dismiss the subject, and be left to the peaceful enjoyment of his cigar.

'And you forgive me?'

'Forgive? nonsense—only don't begin crying about nothing again. There's nothing more intolerable than for a woman to be always crying, whenever one speaks to her.'

"Twas not so much that,' said Violet, meekly, 'as that I was vexed at the dinner not looking well, and it won't, without spending such quantities of money!'

'Quantities—what do you call quantities?'

She named the cost of the last dinner, and he laughed at her horror; then, when she was going to prove that it was disproportionate to their means, he silenced her:

'Well, well, never mind; we are not going to give any more dinners just yet; but when we do, have done with pinching and squeezing. Why, you don't look fit to be seen after it.'

'I'm only tired.'

'Ay, with worrying. Go to bed and to sleep, and forget it all!'

She was consoled for that time; but the perplexity continued. She strove to reduce the ordinary expenditure, but Arthur had a fashion of bringing home a friend to dinner without notice; and she

underwent indescribable miseries, while reflecting on her one chicken, or five mutton chops; and though something was sure to be extemporized by the cook, the result was that these casual guests were as expensive as a banquet. She ventured to beg Arthur to tell her when he was going to ask any one, but he was vexed, and said he liked to bring home a man by chance; there need be nothing out of the common way, and a dinner for two was a dinner for three. Poor Violet thought, 'Ah! this is not like the time at Winchester. It is my own fault, I am not companion, enough.'

She began to grow tired of going out in the evening; late hours tried her; she felt listless and unwell; and her finances could not support the dress expenses, but when she tried to excuse herself, she found Arthur determined on taking her out, though he had previously grumbled, and declared he only went for her sake. When she looked pale and languid he seemed annoyed, in a way that gave her the impression that he valued nothing but her beauty. She believed he found home dull, and her not what he expected.

The truth was, perhaps, that Violet's spirits were naturally not strong, and she was scarcely equal to the cares that had come on her. She missed the companionship of the large family at home; and a slight degree of indisposition or of anxiety was sufficient to set her tormenting herself with every imaginable fear and grief; above all, the dread that he was not pleased with her.

She believed herself to have strictly adhered to the rule of paying for everything at once; but she was dismayed by a shower of bills at Christmas, for things ordered by the cook without her knowledge, several of which she disowned altogether; and several that her memory and 'great book' both declared she had paid; though the tradesmen and the cook, through whom the money had been sent, stoutly denied it. She was frightened, paid the sums, and so went the last remains of Lord Martindale's present.

Sure that the woman was dishonest, yet not knowing how to prove it; afraid to consult Arthur on the household concerns, that he detested; and with a nervous dread of a disturbance, Violet made arrangements for conveying no more payments through Mrs. Cook; and, for the rest, thought she must go on as she could, till the time should come, when, near the end of May, she reckoned on having her mother with her. She would repair her mistakes, make her feel herself mistress in her own house, and help her to all she wanted to know, without fear of Wrangerton gossip. That hope strengthened and cheered her in all her troubles; and oh! suppose Annette came too!

Poor Violet! the first time she referred to her mother's coming, Arthur looked annoyed, gave a sort of whistle, and said, as if searching for an excuse, 'Why, they never could spare her from Wrangerton.'

'O, that they would,' said Violet, eagerly; 'or if not mamma herself, at least, I am sure, Matilda would come to me, or Annette.'

'Whew!' again whistled Arthur; 'I don't know whether that will do.'

'Arthur!'

'There will be my mother close by, and Lady Elizabeth. No, no, you won't want to have any one up from there.'

'May I not have my own mamma?' pleaded poor Violet, urged into something like pertinacity.

But Arthur cut her short; his great dislike to what he had to say making him speak the more ungraciously: 'I don't want to vex you, Violet, but once for all we must come to an understanding. You must not expect to have your family here. They are good sort of people, and all that style of thing,'—he faltered at her looks of imploring consternation, and tried to work himself into anger in order to be able to finish. 'It is of no use looking wretched, I tell you, you must put it out of your head. They belong to a different set altogether, and it won't do any way. There now, don't go and be nervous about yourself; Theodora shall see to you, and you'll do very well, I have no doubt.'

With these words he hastily quitted her, that he might not witness the distress he had occasioned, though he had not the least idea what his refusal was to her.

The sense of her own helplessness and inexperience, and the prospect of illness, without mother or sister, were lost in the more overpowering sorrow at his unkindness. How could he love her if he denied her this at such a time, and in such a manner?' He is ashamed of my family! ashamed of me! He is disappointed in me! I can't make it pleasant to him at home. I am not even good-tempered when I am not well, and I am not half as pretty as I used to be! Oh! if he had but married me for anything but my prettiness! But I was not worth vexing every one for! I am only a plague and trouble! Well, I dare say I shall die, now there is no one to take care of me, and then, perhaps, he will be sorry for me. Just at last, I'll tell him how I did mean to be a good wife, and tried all I could.'

But then poor Violet fell into a maze of terror. She roused herself and dried her tears on hearing some one approaching. It was James, bringing in a parcel. It contained a beautiful and costly silk dress. After the first glance she pushed it from her, and her grief burst forth again. 'Does he think that can make up to me for my mother? How silly he must think me! Yet he is kind and tries to please me still, though I am so troublesome! Dear, dear Arthur!'

She took it back upon her lap, and tried to admire, but her heart failed her; and she could not look at it till the sound of his entrance revived her; she felt as if she had been injuring him, and recalling her smiles, met him with what he thought delighted gratitude.

He was relieved to find the late subject blown over, and only wishing to keep it out of her mind, he invited her to take a walk.

Violet had begun to dread his walks, for he was a loiterer, apt to go further and stay out longer than he intended, and she could not bear to tease him by hints of fatigue; but to-day she could not demur at anything he asked, and she only observed that they had better not go far, as they had an engagement for the evening.

At first the air and his attention did her good; but when she saw Captain Fitzhugh approaching, she knew that Arthur's arm was the only further use she should have of him, and there would be an endless sauntering and talk about horses or fishing, while he would all the time fancy himself going home.

The consequence was, that she was obliged to go at once to bed on coming in, and was declared by Arthur to have been very silly never to have mentioned her fatigue; while Sarah, bestowing grim and sour looks upon them both, attended on her with the most assiduous and minute care. Arthur was greatly concerned, and very unwilling to go to the party alone, but Violet persuaded him, and he promised to return early; then found the evening pleasant, and never knew how time went, while she was lying awake, imagining that something dreadful had happened to him, and mourning over her grievances.

The effects of that over-fatigue did not pass away, and she was forced to give up all evening engagements. He meant to be kind, but was too ignorant and inconsiderate not to do her as much harm as good. One day he almost overwhelmed her with attentions, the next left her to herself. He offered to refuse all invitations for her sake, but it ended in her spending more than half her evenings alone; and when the horse was wanted for him in the evening, she lost her drive. Very soon she fell out of the habit of going out, for now that she was no companion for his long rambles, he found other ways of disposing of his afternoons; and she was still so countrified as to dislike and dread walking alone, even in the quiet Belgravian regions, so that she was always relieved to decide that the gray mist was such as could do no one any good, or that she really was not well enough for a walk.

She did not know the use of change of scene, and the bracing effect of resolution,—she had no experience of self-management, and had not learnt that it was a duty not to let herself pine. Though most conscientious, she had not yet grown up to understand religion as a present comfort. To her it was a guide and an obligation, and as such she obeyed its dictates, to the best of her power, but only as an obedient child, without understanding the immediate reward in this life, namely, confidence, support, and peace. It is a feeling generally belonging to an age beyond hers, though only to be won by faithful discipline. She was walking in darkness, and, by and by, light might come. But there was

one omission, for which she long after grieved; and which, though she knew it not, added to her present troubles.

All heart and hope had been taken from her since she had been forbidden to see her mother and sister. The present was dreary, the future nothing but gloom and apprehension, and she had little to distract her attention. She strove hard to fulfil what she knew were duties, her household concerns and the readings she had fixed as tasks; but these over, she did not try to rouse her mind from her cares; nor had she perhaps the power, for her difficulties with the cook were too much for her, and it was very trying to spend so many hours of the dingy London day and long evening in solitude.

Her amusing books were exhausted, and she used to lie forlorn on the sofa, with her needlework, hearing the roar of carriage-wheels, and, her mind roaming from the perplexities of her accounts to her sad forebodings and her belief in Arthur's coldness, till her heart seemed ready to break,—and her tears gathered, first in solitary drops, then in floods. She had no one to cheer her spirits, to share her hopes and fears. Her plans and employments were tedious to her husband, and he must not be troubled with them,—and so, locked up within herself, they oppressed her with care and apprehension. In letter-writing there was only pain; she could not bear to be supposed unwell or unhappy, and, above all, dreaded saying what might lead to an offer from her mother to come to her. Her letters became mere comments on home news; she wrote less frequently, feared they would think her grown too fine to care for them, and then wept and sobbed with home sickness. There was a little more comfort in writing to Rickworth, for she expected the Brandons early in May, and her only hope was in Lady Elizabeth for care and counsel: for as to Arthur's dependence, his mother and sister, she felt as if the fear and restraint of their presence would be unbearable.

Her husband never guessed how she languished. In his presence she was a different creature, forgetting her griefs in the one wish of pleasing him. No matter what she had been undergoing in his absence, his knock raised her spirits, in a moment life darted into her limbs and colour into her cheeks. She had no notion of complaining. Her mother had always been silent, though often with greater cause for remonstrance; and poor Violet, imagining herself a burden, would not for the world have made herself more troublesome than she could help. Her whole desire was to win a smile, a fond word, a caress, and she sat watching as if those were life to her; her cheeks burning with eagerness so much that Arthur little guessed how wan they were in his absence.

The colour was heightened by warm rooms, for Arthur was of a chilly race, and could not understand how oppressive the close atmosphere of London was to one used to mountain breezes. He would come in shivering, and be provoked to find her sitting by the smallest of fires; till she learnt that their estimate of heat was so different, that the only safety was in keeping the room like an oven. The folding doors into the back drawing-room had a trick of opening of their own accord; and the trouble given her by this draught-trap, as Arthur called it, can hardly be estimated, especially one windy week in March, when he had a cold.

She had never been wont to think seriously of colds but when it came to coughing and feverishness all night, and Arthur, with his hand on his chest, persisted that it was all in his throat and told her to send for a blister, she grew alarmed, but this only displeased him. He disdained her entreaty that he would remain in bed; and said women always made a fuss about nothing, when she timidly suggested sending for 'some one.'

For three deplorable days he sat over the fire, with a distaste for everything, while she did her utmost to make him comfortable, and when she failed, thought it her own fault, reproached herself for her inefficiency, and imagined that he was going to be as ill as his brother, and that she should be of no use to him. How hard on him to have such a bad wife! She could not even entertain him while he was kept indoors—for she could not find anything to talk about, so long was it since she had been out, or read anything amusing.

However, on the third afternoon, he brightened up, found the soup good, talked and laughed, and declared that if to-morrow was fine, he should be out again. And the next day she was so delighted

to find his cough was gone—more quickly than he had ever known so severe a cold depart—that it was not till he was out of the house that she remembered that she was condemned to solitude for many hours.

Here was quarter-day, bringing fresh confusion, in those inexplicable household expenses, and a miserable sense of wastefulness, and unfaithfulness to her charge. She thought of John's advice, to make her husband attend, if she found her means insufficient; and set herself to draw up a statement of the case, to lay before him; but she grew more and more puzzled; the cook's dishonesty weighed on her, and her fears of taking any measures increased. Her calculations always ended in despairing tears.

She was lying on her bed, recovering from one of these almost hysterical fits, when she was roused from a doze by a knock at her door; and started up, trying to hide that anything had been the matter, as Sarah came in, and said, with a tone of authority,

'Mrs. Finch and Miss Gardner, ma'am! but I will say you are not well enough to see them.'

'O no, Sarah, I am quite well, I was only asleep.'

'You had better not go down,' sternly repeated Sarah. 'You had much best lie down, and have your sleep out, after being kept awake till two o'clock last night, with Captain Martindale not coming home. And you with the pillow all awry, and that bit of a shawl over you! Lie you down, and I'll set it straight.'

But Violet was on her feet—the imputation on Captain Martindale had put her on her mettle. 'Thank you, I don't want anything; I am going down directly.'

Sarah shook her head, and looked significantly at the glass; and there, indeed, Violet perceived that her eyes bore traces of recent weeping; but, still, she would do anything rather than own her tears. 'My head aches a little—that makes my eyes heavy,' said she. 'It will do me good to see Miss Gardner. I knew her at Martindale.'

But when Violet found herself in the presence of Miss Gardner, and of a tall fashionable lady, she did not like the recollection that she had been talked of as a beauty.

She was glad to meet Miss Gardner, but Mrs. Finch's style was dashing and almost boisterous, and her voice quick and loud, as she seized on her hand, exclaiming, 'I want no introduction, I have heard so much of you! I know we shall be excellent friends. I must hear of Theodora. You know she is the greatest ally I have on earth. When did you hear of her last? When are they coming to town! I would not miss Theodora's first appearance for all the world.'

Violet felt overpowered by the torrent; but thought it was giving no right impression of her husband to look disconsolate, and exerted herself to be cheerful, and answer.

But they would speak of Martindale, and oblige her to expose her ignorance. She did not know when the family were coming to town, nor had she heard when Mr. Martindale's return might be expected.

If Miss Gardner had been alone, she thought she might have got on better; but the quieter elder sister hardly put in a word, so unceasing was the talk of the younger; whose patronage became oppressive, when she began on Mrs. Martindale herself; told her she was lazy, taking too much care, and growing nervous: and even declared she should come some day, take her by storm, and carry her out for a drive in the park.

Poor Violet felt as if to be shut up in the carriage with this talking lady would kill her outright; begged she would not take the trouble; but only met with smiles, and declarations that Theodora would scold her well when she came.

The next afternoon Violet listened with dread to the sounds of wheels, and was not at all inclined to blame a headache, which was sufficient excuse for sending down thanks and refusal. On the following, she had just made up her mind that the danger was over for that day, when her alarm was excited by a thundering knock, and in walked her brother.

'Well, Violet, I have caught you at home. I'm come to town about Lord St. Erme's business—go back by the mail train. Are you dining at home? Can you give me a dinner?'

'Oh, yes!' said Violet; but fears came over her of Arthur's not being pleased, especially supposing he should bring back any one with him. And therewith came dismay at finding herself giving no better welcome to her own brother, and she eagerly asked for all at home.

'In a high state of preservation. And how are you? You don't look quite the thing.'

'Oh, yes, I am, thank you.'

'And how is Martindale?'

'He would not call him so to his face!' thought the wife. 'Oh! I wish he would sit anywhere but in Arthur's chair, and not fidget me with playing with that horrid little piece of watch-chain!' 'He is very well, thank you. He had a bad cold last week, but it is quite gone now. I hope he will soon come in.'

'I am not sorry to have found you alone. I want to hear something of these relations of yours.'

'Oh! I shall be sure to say something wrong!' thought she, and as the best thing to put forward, announced that they would soon be in London.

'And they are not high with you? I hear fine accounts of their grandeur,—they say the lady and her daughter are eaten up with pride, and think no one fit to speak to.'

'Miss Martindale has the plainest ways in the world. She will do anything for the poor people.'

'Ay, ay, that's the way with fine ladies,—they like to be condescending and affable. And so you say they receive you well? make you one of the family—eh?'

Violet hoped it was not wrong to utter a faint 'yes.'

'Does Martindale's sister write to you?'

'No; she does not write letters much. But I told you how very kind they are—Mr. Martindale, his brother, especially.'

'Ay!' said Albert, 'he disconcerted our calculations. He seems to have taken out a new lease.'

'He is a great deal better.'

'But he has no lungs left. His life can't be worth a year's purchase, by what the governor heard. He would never have let Martindale have you on such easy terms if he had not looked on you as good as her ladyship.'

Such shame and disgust came over Violet that she felt unworthy to sit on John Martindale's chair, and moved to the sofa, trying to change the subject; but Albert persisted in inquiries about Mr. Martindale's age, health, and the likelihood of his marrying, till she could no longer be without the perception that not only had her husband been to blame for their marriage—her father's part had been far worse.

Albert hoped the old lord was coming down handsomely and tried to make her tell their income. She was glad not to know and he began calculating it from their style of living, with such disregard to her feelings, as made her contrast his manners with those of the true gentlemen to whom she was now accustomed, and feel sadly that there was reason in her husband's wish to keep her family at a distance. There was no checking or silencing this elder brother; she could only feel humiliated by each proof of his vulgarity of mind, and blame herself, by turns, for churlishness to him, and for permitting conversation Arthur would so much dislike.

Why would not Arthur come and put a stop to it! It was not the first time she had waited dinner for him in vain, and though she tried to make Albert think she liked it, she knew she was a very bad dissembler.

When she at length ordered in dinner, the conversation changed to Wrangerton doings, the Christmas gaieties, jokes about her sisters and their imputed admirers, and a Miss Louisa Davies —a new-comer, about whom Albert seemed to wish to be laughed at himself. But poor Violet had no spirits even to perceive this,—she only thought of home and the familiar scenes recalled by each name. What a gulf between her and them! In what free, careless happiness they lived! What had her father done in thrusting her into a position for which she was unfit,—into a family who did not want her, and upon one to whom she was only a burthen! At home they thought her happy and fortunate! They should never guess at her wretchedness.

But when the time for Albert's departure came, Violet forgot his inconvenient questions, and would have given the world to keep him. He was her own brother—a part of home; he loved her—she had felt inhospitable to him, and perhaps she should never see him again.

When he recurred to her pale looks and languid manner, and expressed concern, it was all she could do to keep from bursting into tears, and telling all her griefs; and she could not control the rapid agitated tones that belied her repeated assurances that nothing was amiss, and that he must not give a bad account of her and alarm her mother.

She could hardly let him go; and when he bade her goodbye, there was a moment's intense desire to be going with him, from this lonely room, home to her mother and Annette, instantly followed by a horror at such a wish having occurred, and then came the sobs and tears. She dreaded that Arthur might be displeased at the visit; but he came home full of good humour, and on hearing of it, only hoped she had good news from Wrangerton, and said he was glad he had been out of the way, so that she had been able to have her brother all to herself.

Her fears of the effect of Albert's account of her were better founded; for two mornings after, on coming down to breakfast, she found a letter from her mother to exhort her to be careful, assuring her that she need have no scruple in sending for her, and betraying so much uneasiness as to add to all her terrors. She saw this in one glance; for she knew that to dwell on the tender affectionate letter would bring on a fit of weeping, and left it and the dreadful consideration of her reply till Arthur should be gone, as he was to spend the day in fishing with a friend in the country. He had come home late last night, and was not yet dressed, and she waited long, gazing at the gleams of sunshine on the square gardens, thinking how bright this second day of April must be anywhere but here, where it was close and oppressive, and wondering whether Helvellyn was beginning to lose his snow; then, as Helvellyn brought the sensation that led to tears, she took the newspaper, and had read more than she cared for before Arthur appeared, in the state of impatience which voluntary lateness is sure to produce.

She gave him his tea as quickly as she could, but all went wrong: it was a horrid cold day, ALL east wind—there was a cold wind coming in somewhere.

'The back drawing-room window! I'm sorry I did not see it was open.'

'What makes you go to shut it?' said he, hastily marching across the room, and closing it and the doors. 'I shall be gone in a moment, and you may let in a hurricane if you like. Have you seen my cigar-case!'

'It was on the ledge of your wardrobe.'

'Some of your maids have been and hid it.'

'I told Sarah never to put your things away. I think I could find it.'

'No, don't go, I have looked everywhere.'

As he never found things, even when before his eyes, this was not conclusive; and she undertook the search in spite of another careless 'No, no, don't,' knowing it meant the contrary.

She could not find it in his dressing-room, and he looked annoyed, again accusing the maids. This made her feel injured, and though growing exhausted, as well she might, as she had not even begun breakfast, she said she would look in the sitting-room. He half remonstrated, without looking up from the paper, but she hoped to be gladdened by thanks, hunted in all his hiding-places in vain, and found she must give it up, after a consultation with Sarah, who resentfully denied all knowledge of it, and told her she looked ready to drop.

Dolefully coming into the hall, she saw Arthur's black travelling-bag. Was it for more than the day? The evenings were bad enough—but a desolate night! And he had never told her!'

'I suppose you have not found it?'

'No; I wish I could!'

'Never mind; it will turn up. You have tired yourself.'

'But, Arthur, are you not coming home to-night?'

‘Didn’t I tell you? If I can’t get away by the seven o’clock train, I thought of sleeping there. Ten o’clock, I declare! I shall miss the train!’

She came to the head of the stairs with him, asking plaintively, ‘When DO you come home? To-morrow, at latest?’

Perhaps it was her querulous tone, perhaps a mere boyish dislike to being tied down, or even it might be mere hurry, that made him answer impatiently, ‘I can’t tell—as it may happen. D’ye think I want to run away! Only take care of yourself.’

This was in his coaxing voice; but it was not a moment when she could bear to be turned aside, like an importunate child, and she was going to speak; but he saw the wrong fishing-rod carried out, called hastily to James, ran down-stairs, and was gone, without even looking back at her.

The sound of the closing door conveyed a sense of utter desolation to her over-wrought mind—the house was a solitary prison; she sank on the sofa, sobbing, ‘Oh, I am very, very miserable! Why did he take me from home, if he could not love me! Oh, what will become of me? Oh, mamma! mamma!’

CHAPTER 2

What is so shrill as silent tears?

—GEORGE HERBERT

Arthur came home late in the afternoon of the following day. The door was opened to him by his brother, who abruptly said, 'She is dying. You must not lose a moment if you would see her alive.'

Arthur turned pale, and gave an inarticulate exclamation of horror-stricken inquiry —'Confined?'

'Half-an-hour ago. She was taken ill yesterday morning immediately after you left her. She is insensible, but you may find her still living.'

Nothing but strong indignation could have made John Martindale thus communicate such tidings. He had arrived that day at noon to find that the creature he had left in the height of her bright loveliness was in the extremity of suffering and peril—her husband gone no one knew whither; and the servants, too angry not to speak plainly, reporting that he had left her in hysterics. John tried not to believe the half, but as time went on, bringing despair of the poor young mother's life, and no tidings of Arthur; while he became more and more certain that there had been cruel neglect, the very gentleness and compassion of his nature fired and glowed against him who had taken her from her home, vowed to cherish her, and forsaken her at such a time. However, he was softened by seeing him stagger against the wall, perfectly stunned, then gathering breath, rush up-stairs without a word.

As Arthur pushed open the door, there was a whisper that it was he, too late, and room was made for him. All he knew was, that those around watched as if it was not yet death, but what else did he see on those ashy senseless features?

With a cry of despair he threw himself almost over her, and implored her but once to speak, or look at him. No one thought her capable even of hearing, but at his voice the eyelids and lips slightly moved, and a look of relief came over the face. A hand pressed his shoulder, and a spoon containing a drop of liquid was placed in his fingers, while some one said, 'Try to get her to take this.'

Scarcely conscious he obeyed, and calling her by every endearing name, beyond hope succeeded in putting it between her lips. Her eyes opened and were turned on him, her hand closed on his, and her features assumed a look of peace. The spark of life was for a moment detained by the power of affection, but in a short space the breath must cease, the clasp of the hand relax.

Once more he was interrupted by a touch, and this time it was Sarah's whisper—'The minister is come, sir. What name shall it be!'

'Anything—John,' said he, without turning his head or taking in what she said.

The clergyman and John Martindale were waiting in the dressing-room, with poor Violet's cathedral cup filled with water.

'She does not know him?' asked John, anxiously, as Sarah entered.

'Yes, sir, she does,' said Sarah, contorting her face to keep back the tears. 'She looked at him, and has hold of his hand. I think she will die easier for it, poor dear.'

'And at least the poor child is alive to be baptized?'

'O, yes, sir, it seems a bit livelier now,' said Sarah, opening a fold of the flannel in her arms. 'It is just like its poor mamma.'

'Is it a girl?' he inquired, by no means perceiving the resemblance.

'A boy, sir. His papa never asked, though he did say his name should be John.'

'It matters little,' said John, mournfully, for to his eye there was nothing like life in that tiny form. 'And yet how marvellous,' thought he, 'to think of its infinite gain by these few moments of unconscious existence!'

At the touch of the water it gave a little cry, which Sarah heard with a start and glance of infinite satisfaction.

She returned to the chamber, where the same deathly stillness prevailed; the husband, the medical men, the nurse, all in their several positions, as if they had neither moved nor looked from the insensible, scarcely breathing figure.

The infant again gave a feeble sound, and once more the white features moved, the eyes opened, and a voice said, so faintly, that Arthur, as he hung over her, alone could hear it, 'My baby! O, let me see it!'

'Bring the child,' and at the sound of those words the gleam of life spread over her face more completely.

He could not move from her side, and Sarah placed the little creature upon his broad hand. He held it close to her. 'Our baby!' again she murmured, and tried to kiss it, but it made another slight noise, and this overcame her completely, the deathly look returned, and he hastily gave back the infant.

She strove hard for utterance, and he could hardly catch her gasping words, 'You'll be fond of it, and think of me.'

'Don't, don't talk so, dearest. You will soon be better. You are better. Let me give you this.'

'Please, I had rather lie still. Do let me.' Then again looking up, as if she had been losing the consciousness of his presence, 'Oh! it is you. Are you come? Kiss me and wish me good-bye.'

'You are better—only take this. Won't you? You need not move; Violet, Violet, only try. To please me! There, well done, my precious one. Now you will be more comfortable.'

'Thank you, oh no! But I am glad you are come. I did wish to be a good wife. I had so much to say to you—if I could—but I can't remember. And my baby; but oh, this is dying,' as the sinking returned. 'O, Arthur, keep me, don't let me die!' and she clung to him in terror.

He flung his arm closer round her, looking for help to the doctors. 'You shall not, you will not, my own, my darling.'

'You can't help it,' sighed she. 'And I don't know how—if some one would say a prayer?'

He could only repeat protests that she must live, but she grew more earnest. 'A prayer! I can't recollect—Oh! is it wicked? Will God have mercy? Oh! would you but say a prayer?'

'Yes, yes, but what? Give me a book.'

Sarah put one into his hand, and pointed to a place, but his eyes were misty, his voice faltered, broke down, and he was obliged to press his face down on the pillows to stifle his sobs.

Violet was roused to such a degree of bewildered distress and alarm at the sight of his grief, that the doctors insisted on removing him, and almost forced him away.

There had been prayers offered for her, of which she knew nothing.

The clergyman was gone, and John had despatched his melancholy letter to Lord Martindale, when he heard the steps on the stairs. Was it over! No, it was only one of the doctors with Arthur, and they did not come to him, but talked in the back drawing-room for some moments, after which the doctor took leave, repeating the words in John's hearing, that Arthur must compose himself before returning to her—agitation would be at once fatal. Arthur had thrown himself on the sofa, with his face hidden in his hands, in such overpowering distress, that his brother's displeasure could not continue for a moment, and he began to speak soothingly of the present improvement.

'It cannot last,' said Arthur. 'They say it is but a question of minutes or hours,' and again he gave way to a burst of grief, but presently it changed to an angry tone. 'Why was I never sent for?'

John explained that no one knew whither to send. He could hardly credit this, and his wrath increased at the stupidity of the servants; it seemed to relieve him to declaim against them.

'Then you left her well?'

'Of course I did. She had been searching over the house for that abominable cigar-case of mine, which was in my pocket all the time! I shall never bear to see it again,' and he launched it into the fire

with vehemence. 'I suppose that upset her! Why did I not prevent her? Fool that I was not to know it was not fit for her, though she chose to do it. But I never took care of her.'

'She is so very unselfish,' said John.

'That was it. I thought women always looked out for themselves. I should have known I had one not like the rest! She had never one thought for herself, and it is killing her, the sweetest, loveliest, best—my precious Violet! John, John! is there nothing that can be done for her?' cried he, starting up in a tumultuous agony of grief, and striking his foot on the floor.

'Could we not send for her mother? Brown might set off at once to fetch her.'

'Thank you, but no, it is of no use. No railroad within forty miles of the place. She could not be here till—till—and then I could not see her.' He was pacing the room, and entangled his foot in Violet's little work-table, and it fell. Her work-box flew open, and as they stooped to pick up the articles, Arthur again wept without control as he took up a little frock, half made, with the needle hanging to it. The table-drawer had fallen out, and with it the large account-book, the weekly bills, and a sheet of paper covered with figures, and blotted and blistered with tears. The sight seemed to overwhelm him more than all. 'Crying over these! My Violet crying! Oh! what have I been doing?'

'And why? What distressed her?'

'It was too much for her. She would plague herself with these wretched household accounts! She knew I hated the sound of them. I never let her bring them to me; but little did I think that she cried over them alone!'

'She was cheerful with you?'

'Was not she?' I never saw that dear face without its sweet smile, come when I would. I have never heard a complaint. I have left her to herself, madman as I was, when she was unwell and anxious! But—oh! if she could only recover, she should see—Ha! Sarah, can I come?'

'Yes, sir, she is asking for you; but, if you please, sir, Mr. Harding says you must come very quiet. She seems wandering, and thinking you are not come home, sir,' said Sarah, with a grisly satisfaction in dealing her blow home.

John tried to rectify the confusion in the work-box with a sort of reverential care; not able to bear to leave it in disorder, whether its mistress were ever to open it again or not, yet feeling it an intrusion to meddle with her little feminine hoards of precious trifles.

'Poor Arthur!' said he to himself, 'he may fairly be acquitted of all but his usual inconsiderateness towards one too tender for such treatment. He deserves more pity than blame. And for her—thank Heaven for the blessing on them that mourn. Innocent creature, much will be spared her; if I could but dwell on that rather than on the phantom of delight she was, and my anticipations of again seeing the look that recalls Helen. If Helen was here, how she would be nursing her!'

John saw his brother no more that evening—only heard of Violet 'as barely kept alive, as it seemed, by his care.' Each report was such that the next must surely be the last; and John sat waiting on till his servant insisted on his going to bed, promising to call him if his brother needed him.

The night passed without the summons, and in the morning there was still life. John had been down-stairs for some little time, when he heard the medical man, who had spent the night there, speaking to Arthur on the stairs. 'A shade of improvement' was the report. 'Asleep now; and if we can only drag her through the next few days there may be hope, as long as fever does not supervene.'

'Thank Heaven!' said John, fervently. 'I did not venture to hope for this.'

But Arthur was utterly downcast, and could not take heart. It was his first real trouble, and there was little of the substance of endurance in his composition. That one night of watching, grief, and self-reproach, had made his countenance so pale and haggard, and his voice so dejected and subdued, that John was positively startled, as he heard his answer—

'I never saw any one so ill.'

'Come and have some breakfast, you look quite worn out'

'I cannot stay,' said he, sitting down, however. 'She must not miss me, or all chance would be over. You don't mind the door being open?'

'No, indeed. Is she sensible now?'

'Clear for a minute, if she has my hand; but then she dozes off, and talks about those miserable accounts—the numbers over and over again. It cuts me to the heart to hear her. They talk of an over-strain on the mind! Heigh-ho! Next she wakes with a dreadful frightened start, and stares about wildly, fancying I am gone.'

'But she knows you,' said John, trying to speak consolingly.

'Yes, no one else can do anything with her. She does not so much as hear them. I must be back before she wakes; but I am parched with thirst. How is this? Where is the tea?'

'I suppose you put in none. Is this the chest?'

Arthur let his head drop on his hand, helpless and overcome, as this little matter brought home the sense of missing his wife, and the remembrance of the attentions he had allowed her to lavish upon him. His brother tried the tea-chest, and, finding it locked, poured out some coffee, which he drank almost unconsciously, then gave his cup for more, sighed, pushed his hair back, and looked up somewhat revived. John tended him affectionately, persuading him to take food; and when he had passively allowed his plate to be filled, his appetite discovered that he had tasted nothing since yesterday morning, and therewith his spirits were refreshed; he looked up cheerfully, and there was less despondency in his tone as he spoke of her sleep towards morning having been less disturbed.

'The child woke her with a squall, and I thought we were undone, but no such thing. I declare nothing has done her so much good; she had him brought, and was so happy over him, then went off to sleep again.'

'This is a great relief,' said John. 'From your manner, I dreaded to ask for him, but I hope he may be doing well.'

'I am sure I hope so, or it would be all over with her. I believe both their lives hang on one thread. To see her with him this morning—I did not know such fondness was in women. I declare I never saw anything like it; and she so weak! And such a creature as it is; the smallest thing that ever was born, they say, and looking—like nothing on earth but young mice.'

John could not help smiling: 'That is better than yesterday, when I could scarcely believe he was alive.'

'What! did you see him?'

'When he was baptized.'

'Was he? What did you call him?'

'You sent word to name him John.'

'Did I? I had not the least recollection of it. I forgot all about him till he made himself heard this morning, and she wanted to know whether he was boy or girl.'

'A son and heir,' said John, glad to see the young father able to look gratified.

'Well, it is the best name; I hope she will like it. But, hollo, John, where did you drop from?' as it suddenly occurred to him to be surprised.

'I came home on some business of Fotheringham's. I landed early yesterday, and came up from Southampton.'

'A fine state of things to come to,' sighed Arthur. 'But you will not go away?'

'Certainly not till she is better.'

'Ah! you were always fond of her; you appreciated her from the first. There is no one whom I should have liked so well to have here.' Then, with a pause, he added, in a tone of deep feeling: 'John, you might well give me that warning about making her happy; but, indeed, I meant to do so!' and his eyes filled with tears.

'As far as affection could go, you have done so,' said John, 'or you could not have recalled her to life now.'

'You little know,' said Arthur sadly; 'Heaven knows it was not want of affection; but I never guessed what she underwent. Sarah tells me she spent hours in tears, though she would never allow them to be noticed.'

'Poor Violet! But what could be her trouble?'

'Her household affairs seem to have overpowered her, and I never would attend to them; little thinking how she let them prey upon her. I never thought of her being lonely; and her sweet, bright face, and uncomplaining ways, never reminded me. There never was any one like her; she was too good for me, too good to live, that is the truth; and now I must lose her!'

'Do not think so, Arthur; do not give way. The getting through this night is more than could have been hoped. Happiness is often the best cure; and if she is able to take so much pleasure in you, and in the child, it is surely a hopeful sign.'

'So they said; that her noticing the child made them think better of her. If she can but get over it, she shall see. But you will stay with me, John,' said he, as if he clung to the support.

'That I will, thank you. I could not bear to go. I can sleep in Belgrave Square, if you want my room for her mother.'

'We shall see how it is by post-time. I tried whether it would rouse her to tell her I would write to Mrs. Moss, but she took no heed, and the old nurse looked daggers at me.'

He was interrupted; Violet had awakened in an alarming fit of trembling, imploring to be told why he was angry, and whether he would ever come back.

So glimmered the feeble ray of life throughout the day; and when the post went out, the end was apparently so near, that it was thought in vain to send for Mrs. Moss; whom Arthur shrank from seeing, when it should be too late. He was so completely overwhelmed with distress, that in the short intervals he spent out of the sick-room, it was his brother's whole work to cheer and sustain him sufficiently to perform those offices, which Violet was incapable of receiving from any one else.

It was no wonder he broke down; for it was a piteous sight to see that fair young mother, still a child in years, and in her exhausted state of wavering consciousness, alive only through her fond affections; gleams of perception, and momentary flashes of life, called forth only by her husband, or by the moanings of the little frail babe, which seemed to have as feeble and precarious a hold of life as herself. The doctors told John that they were haunted through the day by the remembrance of her face, so sweet, even in insensibility, and so very lovely, when the sound of her babe's voice, for a moment, lighted up the features. Their anxiety for her was intense; and if this was the case with strangers, what must it not have been for her husband, to whom every delirious murmur was an unconscious reproach, and who had no root of strength within himself! The acuteness of his grief, and his effectiveness as a nurse, were such as to surprise his brother, who only now perceived how much warmth of heart had been formerly stifled in a cold, ungenial home.

Sustained from hour to hour by his unremitting care, she did, however, struggle through the next three days; and at last came a sounder sleep, and a wakening so tranquil, that Arthur did not perceive it, till he saw, in the dim lamp-light, those dark eyes calmly fixed upon him. The cry of the infant was heard, and she begged for it, fondling it, and murmuring over it with a soft inarticulate sound of happiness.

'You purr like an old cat over her kitten,' said Arthur, longing to see her smile once more; and he was not disappointed; it was a bright, contented, even joyous smile, that played on the colourless features, and the eyes beamed softly on him as she said, 'Kiss him, papa.'

He would have done anything for her at that moment, and another bright look rewarded him.

'Does mamma know about this dear little baby?' she said, presently.

'Yes, dearest, I have written every day. She sends you her love;' and as Violet murmured something of 'Dear mamma—'

'Do you wish to have her here?'

'No, indeed, I don't wish it now,' said Violet; 'you do make me so very happy.'

She was returning to her full self, with all her submission to his will, and in fact she did not wish for any change; her content in his attention was so complete, so peaceful, that in her state of weakness there was an instinctive dread of breaking the charm. To lie still, her babe beside her, and Arthur watching her, was the perfect repose of felicity, and imperceptibly her faculties were, one by one, awakening. Her thoughtfulness for others had revived; Arthur had been giving her some nourishment, and, for the first time, she had taken it with a relish, when it so chanced that the light fell for a moment on his face, and she was startled by perceiving the effects of anxiety and want of sleep. In vain he assured her there was nothing the matter. She accused herself of having been exacting and selfish, and would not be comforted, till he had promised to take a good night's rest. He left her, at length, nearly asleep, to carry the tidings to his brother, and enjoy his look of heart-felt rejoicing. Never had the two very dissimilar brothers felt so much drawn together; and as John began, as usual, to wait on him, and to pour out his coffee, he said, as he sat down wearied, 'Thank you, John, I can't think what would have become of me without you!'

'My father would have come to you if I had not been here.'

'Where's his letter?—I forgot all about it. Is there none from Theodora?'

'No; I suppose she waited for further accounts.'

Arthur began reading his father's letter. 'Very kind! a very kind letter indeed,' said he, warmly. '"Earned so high a place in our regard—her sweetness and engaging qualities,"—I must keep that to show her. This is very kind too about what it must be to me. I did not think he had appreciated her so well!'

'Yes, indeed, he did,' said John. 'This is what he says to me. "Never have I seen one more gentle and engaging, and I feel sure she would have gained more on our affections every day, and proved herself a treasure to the family."'

'That is right,' said Arthur. 'He will get to know her well when they come to London! I'll write to him to-morrow, and thank him, and say, no need for him to come now! "Hopes his grandson will live to be a comfort to me!"' and Arthur could not help laughing.

'Well, I am not come to that yet!'

'He is much pleased at its being a son,' said John.

'Poor little mortal!' said Arthur, 'if he means to be a comfort I wish he would stop that dismal little wail—have one good squall and have done with it. He will worry his mother and ruin all now she takes more notice. So here's Mrs. Moss's letter. I could not open it this morning, and I have been inventing messages to Violet from her—poor woman! I have some good news for her now. It is all about coming, but Violet says she does not want her. I can't read it all, my eyes are so weak! Violet said they were bloodshot,' and he began to examine them in the glass.

'Yes, you are not equal to much more nursing; you are quite done for.'

'I am!' said Arthur, stretching. 'I'm off to bed, as she begged me; but the worst is over now! We shall do very well when Theodora comes; and if she has a taste for the boy, she and Violet will make friends over him,—good night.'

With a long yawn, Arthur very stiffly walked up-stairs, where Sarah stood at the top waiting for him. 'Mrs. Martindale is asleep, sir; you had best not go in,' said she. 'I have made up a bed in your dressing-room, and you'd best not be lying down in your clothes, but take a good sleep right out, or you'll be fit for nothing next. I'll see and call if she wants you.'

'Thank you, Sarah; I wonder how long you have been up; you will be fit for nothing next.'

'It don't hurt me,' said Sarah, in disdain; and as Arthur shut his door, she murmured to herself, 'I'm not that sort to be knocked up with nothing; but he is an easy kind-spoken gentleman after all. I'll never forget what he has done for missus. There is not so much harm in him neither; he is nothing but a great big boy as ought to be ashamed of hisself.'

The night passed off well; Violet, with a great exertion of self-command, actually composed herself on awaking in one of her nervous fits of terror; prevented his being called; and fairly deserved all the fond praise he lavished on her in the morning for having been so good a child.

'You must not call me child now,' said she, with a happy little pride. 'I must be wiser now.'

'Shall I call you the prettiest and youngest mamma in England?'

'Ah! I am too young and foolish. I wish I was quite seventeen!'

'Have you been awake long?'

'Yes; but so comfortable. I have been thinking about baby's name.'

'Too late, Violet; they named him John: they say I desired it.'

'What! was he obliged to be baptized? Is he so delicate? Oh, Arthur! tell me; I know he is tiny, but I did not think he was ill.'

Arthur tried to soothe her with assurances of his well-doing, and the nurse corroborated them; but though she tried to believe, she was not pacified, and would not let her treasure be taken from within her arms till Mr. Harding arrived—his morning visit having been hastened by a despatch from Arthur, who feared that she would suffer for her anxiety. She asked so many questions that he, who last night had seen her too weak to look up or speak, was quite taken by surprise. By a little exceeding the truth, he did at length satisfy her mind; but after this there was an alteration in her manner with her baby; it was not only the mere caressing, there was a sort of reverence, and look of reflection as she contemplated him, such as made Arthur once ask, what she could be studying in that queer little red visage?

'I was thinking how very good he is!' was her simple answer, and Arthur's smile by no means comprehended her meaning.

Her anxious mind retarded her recovery, and Arthur's unguarded voice on the stairs having revealed to her that a guest was in the house, led to inquiries, and an endless train of fears, lest Mr. Martindale should be uncomfortable and uncared for. Her elasticity of mind had been injured by her long course of care, and she could not shake off the household anxieties that revived as she became able to think.

Indeed there were things passing that would have greatly astonished her. Sarah had taken the management of everything, including her master; and with iron composure and rigidity of demeanour, delighted in teasing him by giving him a taste of some of the cares he had left her mistress to endure. First came an outcry for keys. They were supposed to be in a box, and when that was found its key was missing. Again Arthur turned out the unfortunate drawer, and only spared the work-box on John's testifying that it was not there, and suggesting Violet's watch-chain, where he missed it, and Sarah found it and then, with imperturbable precision, in spite of his attempts to escape, stood over him, and made him unlock and give out everything himself. 'If things was wrong,' she said, 'it was her business that he should see it was not owing to her.'

Arthur was generally indifferent to what he ate or drank,—the reaction, perhaps, of the luxury of his home; but having had a present of some peculiar trout from Captain Fitzhugh, and being, as an angler, a connoisseur in fish, many were his exclamations at detecting that those which were served up at breakfast were not the individuals sent.

Presently, in the silence of the house, John heard tones gradually rising on the stairs, till Arthur's voice waxed loud and wrathful 'You might as well say they were red herrings!'

Something shrill ensued, cut short by, 'Mrs. Martindale does as she pleases. Send up Captain Fitzhugh's trout.'

A loud reply, in a higher key.

'Don't tell me of the families where you have lived—the trout!'

Here John's hand was laid upon his arm, with a sign towards his wife's room; whereupon he ran down-stairs, driving the cook before him.

Soon he came hastily up, storming about the woman's impertinence, and congratulating himself on having paid her wages and got rid of her.

John asked what was to be done next? and was diverted with his crestfallen looks, when asked what was to become of Violet.

However, when Sarah was consulted, she gravely replied, 'She thought as how she could contrive till Mrs. Martindale was about again;' and the corners of her mouth relaxed into a ghastly smile, as she replied, 'Yes, sir,' in answer to her master's adjurations to keep the dismissal a secret from Mrs. Martindale.

'Ay!' said John, 'I wish you joy of having to tell her what revolutions you have made.'

'I'll take care of that, if the women will only hold their tongues.'

They were as guarded as he could wish, seeing as plainly as he did, how fretting over her household matters prolonged her state of weakness. It was a tedious recovery, and she was not able even to receive a visit from John till the morning when the cough, always brought on by London air, obliged him reluctantly to depart.

He found her on the sofa, wrapped in shawls, her hair smoothed back under a cap; her shady, dark eyes still softer from languor, and the exquisite outline of her fair, pallid features looking as if it was cut out in ivory against the white pillows. She welcomed him with a pleased smile; but he started back, and flushed as if from pain, and his hand trembled as he pressed hers, then turned away and coughed.

'Oh, I am sorry your cough is so bad,' said she.

'Nothing to signify,' he replied, recovering. 'Thank you for letting me come to see you. I hope you are not tired?'

'Oh, no, thank you. Arthur carried me so nicely, and baby is so good this morning.'

'Where is he? I was going to ask for him.'

'In the next room. I want to show him to you, but he is asleep.'

'A happy circumstance,' said Arthur, who was leaning over the back of her sofa.

'No one else can get in a word when that gentleman is awake.'

'Now, Arthur, I wanted his uncle to see him, and say if he is not grown.'

'Never mind, Violet,' said Arthur. 'Nurse vouches for it, that the child who was put through his mother's wedding-ring grew up to be six feet high!'

'Now, Arthur! you know it was only her bracelet.'

'Well, then, our boy ought to be twelve feet high; for if you had not stuffed him out with long clothes, you might put two of him through your bracelet.'

'If nurse would but have measured him; but she said it was unlucky.'

'She would have no limits to her myths; however, he may make a show in the world by the time John comes to the christening.'

'Ah!' said Violet, with a sweet, timid expression, and a shade of red just tinting her cheek as she turned to John. 'Arthur said I should ask you to be his godfather.'

'My first godchild!' said John. 'Thank you, indeed; you could hardly have given me a greater pleasure.'

'Thank you,' again said Violet. 'I like so much for you to have him,—you who,' she hesitated, unable to say the right words, 'who DID IT before his papa or I saw the little fellow;' then pausing—' Oh, Mr. Martindale, Sarah told me all about it, and I have been longing to thank you, only I can't!' and her eyes filling with tears, she put her hand into his, glancing at the cathedral cup, which was placed on the mantel-shelf. 'It was so kind of you to take that.'

'I thought you would like it,' said John; 'and it was the most ecclesiastical thing I could find.'

'I little thought it would be my Johnnie's font,' said Violet, softly. 'I shall always feel that I have a share in him beyond my fellow-sponsors.'

'O, yes, he belongs to you,' said Violet; 'besides his other godfather will only be Colonel Harrington, and his godmother—you have written to ask your sister, have you not, Arthur?'

'I'd as soon ask Aunt Nesbit,' exclaimed Arthur, 'I do believe one cares as much as the other.'

'You must send for me when you are well enough to take him to church,' said John.

'That I will. I wish you could stay for it. He will be a month old to-morrow week, but it may wait, I hope, till I can go with him. I must soon get down-stairs again!'

'Ah! you will find the draught trap mended,' said Arthur. 'Brown set to work on it, and the doors shut as tight as a new boot.'

'I am often amused to see Brown scent out and pursue a draught,' said John.

'I have been avoiding Brown ever since Friday,' said Arthur; 'when he met me with a serious "Captain Martindale, sir," and threatened me with your being laid up for the year if I kept you here. I told him it was his fault for letting you come home so early, and condoled with him on your insubordination.'

'Ah! Violet does not know what order Sarah keeps you in?' retorted John.

'I am afraid you have both been very uncomfortable!'

'No, not in the least, Sarah is a paragon, I assure you.'

'She has been very kind to me, but so has every one. No one was ever so well nursed! You must know what a perfect nurse Arthur is!'

Arthur laughed. 'John! Why he would as soon be nursed by a monkey as by me. There he lies on a perfect bank of pillows, coughs whenever you speak to him, and only wants to get rid of every one but Brown. Nothing but consideration for Brown induces him to allow my father or Percy Fotheringham now and then to sit up.'

'A comfortable misanthropical picture,' said John, 'but rather too true. You see, Violet, what talents you have brought out.'

Violet was stroking her husband's hand, and looking very proud and happy. 'Only I was so selfish! Does not he look very pale still?'

'That is not your fault so much as that of some one else,' said John. 'Some one who declares smoking cigars in his den down-stairs refreshes him more than a sensible walk.'

'Of course,' said Arthur, 'it is only ladies, and men who have nursed themselves as long as you have, who ever go out for a constitutional.'

'He will be on duty to-morrow,' said Violet, 'and so he will be obliged to go out.'

'And you will write to me, Violet,' said John, 'when you are ready? I wish I could expect to hear how you get on, but it is vain to hope for letters from Arthur.'

'I know,' said Violet; 'but only think how good he has been to write to mamma for me. I was so proud when he brought me the letter to sign.'

'Have you any message for me to take?' said John, rising.

'No, thank you—only to thank Lord and Lady Martindale for their kind messages. And oh'—but checking herself—'No, you won't see them.'

'Whom?'

'Lady Elizabeth and Emma. I had such a kind letter from them. So anxious about me, and begging me to let some one write; and I am afraid they'll think it neglectful; but I turn giddy if I sit up, and when I can write, the first letter must be for mamma. So if there is any communication with Rickworth, could you let them know that I am getting better, and thank them very much!'

'Certainly. I will not fail to let them know. Good-bye, Violet, I am glad to have seen you.'

'Good-bye. I hope your cough will be better,' said Violet.

He retained her hand a moment, looked at her fixedly, the sorrowful expression returned, and he hastened away in silence.

Arthur followed, and presently coming back said, 'Poor John! You put him so much in mind of Helen.'

'Poor Mr. Martindale!' exclaimed Violet. 'Am I like her?'

'Not a bit,' said Arthur. 'Helen had light hair and eyes, a fat sort of face, and no pretence to be pretty—a downright sort of person, not what you would fancy John's taste. If any one else had compared you it would have been no compliment; but he told me you had reminded him of her from the first, and now your white cheeks and sick dress recalled her illness so much, that he could hardly bear it. But don't go and cry about it.'

'No, I won't,' said Violet, submissively, 'but I am afraid it did not suit him for us to be talking nonsense. It is so very sad.'

'Poor John! so it is,' said Arthur, looking at her, as if beginning to realize what his brother had lost. 'However, she was not his wife, though, after all, they were almost as much attached. He has not got over it in the least. This is the first time I have known him speak of it, and he could not get out her name.'

'It is nearly two years ago.'

'Nearly. She died in June. It was that cold late summer, and her funeral was in the middle of a hail-storm, horridly chilly.'

'Where was she buried?'

'At Brogden. Old Mr. Fotheringham was buried there, and she was brought there. I came home for it. What a day it was—the hailstones standing on the grass, and I shall never forget poor John's look—all shivering and shrunk up together.' He shivered at the bare remembrance. 'It put the finishing touch to the damage he had got by staying in England with her all the winter. By night he was frightfully ill—inflammation worse than ever. Poor John! That old curmudgeon of a grandfather has much to answer for, though you ought to be grateful to him, Violet; for I suppose it will end in that boy of yours being his lordship some time or other.'

The next morning was a brisk one with Violet. She wished Arthur not to be anxious about leaving her, and having by no means ceased to think it a treat to see him in uniform, she gloried in being carried to her sofa by so grand and soldierly a figure, and uttered her choicest sentence of satisfaction—'It is like a story!' while his epaulette was scratching her cheek.

'I don't know how to trust you to your own silly devices,' said he, laying her down, and lingering to settle her pillows and shawls.

'Wise ones,' said she. 'I have so much to do. There's baby—and there's Mr. Harding to come, and I want to see the cook—and I should not wonder if I wrote to mamma. So you see 'tis woman's work, and you had better not bring your red coat home too soon, or you'll have to finish the letter!' she added, with saucy sweetness.

On his return, he found her spread all over with papers, her little table by her side, with the drawer pulled out.

'Ha! what mischief are you up to? You have not got at those abominable accounts again!'

'I beg your pardon,' said she, humbly. 'Nurse would not let me speak to the cook, but said instead I might write to mamma; so I sent for my little table, but I found the drawer in such disorder, that I was setting it to rights. Who can have meddled with it!'

'I can tell you that,' said Arthur. 'I ran against it, and it came to grief, and there was a spread of all your goods and chattels on the floor.'

'Oh! I am so glad! I was afraid some of the servants had been at it.'

'What! aren't you in a desperate fright? All your secrets displayed like a story, as you are so fond of saying—what's the name of it—where the husband, no, it was the wife, fainted away, and broke open the desk with her head.'

'My dear Arthur!' and Violet laughed so much that nurse in the next room foreboded that he would tire her.

'I vow it was so! Out came a whole lot of letters from the old love, a colonel in the Peninsula, that her husband had never heard of,—an old lawyer he was.'

'The husband? What made her marry him?'

'They were all ruined horse and foot, and the old love was wounded, "kilt", or disposed of, till he turned up, married to her best friend.'

'What became of her?'

'I forget—there was a poisoning and a paralytic stroke in it.'

'Was there! How delightful! How I should like to read it. What was its name?'

'I don't remember. It was a green railway book. Theodora made me read it, and I should know it again if I saw it. I'll look out for it, and you'll find I was right about her head. But how now. Haven't you fainted away all this time?'

'No; why should I?'

'How do you know what I may have discovered in your papers? Are you prepared? It is no laughing matter,' added he, in a Blue Beard tone, and drawing out the paper of calculations, he pointed to the tear marks. 'Look here. What's this, I say, what's this, you naughty child?'

'I am sorry! it was very silly,' whispered Violet, in a contrite ashamed way, shrinking back a little.

'What business had you to break your heart over these trumpery butchers and bakers and candlestick makers?'

'Only candles, dear Arthur,' said Violet, meekly, as if in extenuation.

'But what on earth could you find to cry about?'

'It was very foolish! but I was in such a dreadful puzzle. I could not make the cook's accounts and mine agree, and I wanted to be sure whether she really—'

'Cheated!' exclaimed Arthur. 'Well, that's a blessing!'

'What is?' asked the astonished Violet.

'That I have cleared the house of that intolerable woman!'

'The cook gone!' cried Violet, starting, so that her papers slid away, and Arthur shuffled them up in his hand in renewed confusion. 'The cook really gone? Oh! I am so glad!'

'Capital!' cried Arthur. 'There was John declaring you would be in despair to find your precious treasure gone.'

'Oh! I never was more glad! Do tell me! Why did she go?'

'I had a skrimmage with her about some trout Fitzhugh sent, which I verily believe she ate herself.'

'Changed with the fishmonger!'

'I dare say. She sent us in some good-for-nothing wretches, all mud, and vowed these were stale—then grew impertinent.'

'And talked about the first families?'

'Exactly so, and when it came to telling me Mrs. Martindale was her mistress, I could stand no more. I paid her her wages, and recommended her to make herself scarce.'

'When did it happen?'

'Rather more than a fortnight ago.'

Violet laughed heartily. 'O-ho! there's the reason nurse scolds if I dare to ask to speak to the cook. And oh! how gravely Sarah said "yes, ma'am," to all my messages! How very funny! But how have we been living? When I am having nice things all day long, and giving so much trouble! Oh dear! How uncomfortable you must have been, and your brother too!'

'Am I not always telling you to the contrary? Sarah made everything look as usual, and I suspect Brown lent a helping hand. John said the coffee was made in some peculiar way Brown learnt in the East, and never practises unless John is very ill, or they are in some uncivilized place; but he told me to take no notice, lest Brown should think it infra dig.'

'I'm afraid he thought this an uncivilized place. But what a woman Sarah is! She has all the work of the house, and yet she seems to me to be here as much as nurse!'

'She has got the work of ten horses in her, with the face of a death's head, and the voice of a walking sepulchre!'

'But isn't she a thorough good creature! I can't think what will become of me without her! It will be like parting with a friend.'

'What would you part with her for? I thought she was the sheet-anchor.'

'That she is; but she won't stay where there are children. She told me so long ago, and only stayed because I begged her for the present. She will go when I am well.'

'Better give double wages to keep her,' said Arthur.

'I'd do anything I could, but I'm afraid. I was quite dreading the getting about again, because I should have to lose Sarah, and to do something or other with that woman.'

'What possessed you to keep her?'

'I wasn't sure about her. Your aunt recommended her, and I thought you might not like—and at first I did not know what things ought to cost, nor how long they ought to last, and that was what I did sums for. Then when I did prove it, I saw only dishonesty in the kitchen, and extravagance and mismanagement of my own.'

'So the little goose sat and cried!'

'I could not help it. I felt I was doing wrong; that was the terrible part; and I am glad you know the worst. I have been very weak and silly, and wasted your money sadly, and I did not know how to help it; and that was what made me so miserable. And now, dear Arthur, only say you overlook my blunders, and indeed I'll try to do better.'

'Overlook! The only thing I don't know how to forgive is your having made yourself so ill with this nonsense.'

'I can't be sorry for that,' said Violet, smiling, though the tears came. 'That has been almost all happiness. I shall have the heart to try more than ever—and I have some experience; and now that cook is gone, I really shall get on.'

'Promise me you'll never go bothering yourself for nothing another time. Take it easy! That's the only way to get through the world.'

'Ah! I will never be so foolish again. I shall never be afraid to make you attend to my difficulties.'

'Afraid! That was the silliest part of all! But here—will you have another hundred a year at once? and then there'll be no trouble.'

'Thank you, thank you! How kind of you! But do you know, I should like to try with what I have. I see it might be made to do, and I want to conquer the difficulty; if I can't, I will ask you for more.'

'Well, that may be best. I could hardly spare a hundred pounds without giving up one of the horses; and I want to see you riding again.'

'Besides, this illness must have cost you a terrible quantity of money. But I dare say I shall find the outgoings nothing to what the cook made them.' And she was taking up the accounts, when he seized them, crumpling them in his hand. 'Nonsense! Let them alone, or I shall put them in the fire at once.'

'Oh, don't do that, pray!' cried she, starting, 'or I shall be ruined. Oh, pray!'

'Very well;' and rising, and making a long arm, he deposited them on the top of a high wardrobe. 'There's the way to treat obstinate women. You may get them down when you can go after them—I shan't.'

'Ah! there's baby awake!'

'So, I shall go after that book at the library; and then I've plenty to tell you of inquiries for Mrs. Martindale. Good-bye, again.'

Violet received her babe into her arms with a languid long-drawn sigh, as of one wearied out with happiness. 'That he should have heard my confession, and only pet me the more! Foolish, wasteful thing that I am. Oh, babe! if I could only make you grow and thrive, no one would ever be so happy as your mamma.'

Perhaps she thought so still more some hours later, when she awoke from a long sleep, and saw Arthur reading “Emilia Wyndham”, and quite ready to defend his assertion that the wife broke open the desk with her head.

CHAPTER 3

But there was one fairy who was offended because she was not invited to the Christening.—MOTHER BUNCH

Theodora had spent the winter in trying not to think of her brother.

She read, she tried experiments, she taught at the school, she instructed the dumb boy, talked to the curate, and took her share of such county gaieties as were not beneath the house of Martindale; but at every tranquil moment came the thought, 'What are Arthur and his wife doing!'

There were rumours of the general admiration of Mrs. Martindale, whence she deduced vanity and extravagance; but she heard nothing more till Jane Gardner, a correspondent, who persevered in spite of scanty and infrequent answers, mentioned her call on poor Mrs. Martindale, who, she said, looked sadly altered, unwell, and out of spirits. Georgina had tried to persuade her to come out, but without success; she ought to have some one with her, for she seemed to be a good deal alone, and no doubt it was trying; but, of course, she would soon have her mother with her.

He leaves her alone—he finds home dull! Poor Arthur! A moment of triumph was followed by another of compunction, since this was not a doll that he was neglecting, but a living creature, who could feel pain. But the anticipation of meeting Mrs. Moss, after all those vows against her, and the idea of seeing his house filled with vulgar relations, hardened Theodora against the wife, who had thus gained her point.

Thus came the morning, when her father interrupted breakfast with an exclamation of dismay, and John's tidings were communicated.

I wish I had been kind to her! shot across Theodora's mind with acute pain, and the image of Arthur in grief swallowed up everything else. 'I will go with you, papa—you will go at once!'

'Poor young thing!' said Lord Martindale; 'she was as pretty a creature as I ever beheld, and I do believe, as good. Poor Arthur, I am glad he has John with him.'

Lady Martindale wondered how John came there,—and remarks ensued on his imprudence in risking a spring in England. To Theodora this seemed indifference to Arthur's distress, and she impatiently urged her father to take her to him at once.

He would not have delayed had Arthur been alone; but since John was there, he thought their sudden arrival might be more encumbering than consoling, and decided to wait for a further account, and finish affairs that he could not easily leave.

Theodora believed no one but herself could comfort Arthur, and was exceedingly vexed. She chafed against her father for attending to his business—against her mother for thinking of John; and was in charity with no one except Miss Piper, who came out of Mrs. Nesbit's room red with swallowing down tears, and with the under lady's-maid, who could not help begging to hear if Mrs. Martindale was so ill, for Miss Standaloft said, 'My lady had been so nervous and hysterical in her own room, that she had been forced to give her camphor and sal volatile.'

Never had Theodora been more surprised than to hear this of the mother whom she only knew as calm, majestic, and impassible. With a sudden impulse, she hastened to her room. She was with Mrs. Nesbit, and Theodora following, found her reading aloud, without a trace of emotion. No doubt it was a figment of Miss Standaloft, and there was a sidelong glance of satisfaction in her aunt's eyes, which made Theodora so indignant, that she was obliged to retreat without a word.

Her own regret and compassion for so young a creature thus cut off were warm and keen, especially when the next post brought a new and delightful hope, the infant, of whose life John had yesterday despaired, was said to be improving. Arthur's child! Here was a possession for Theodora, an object for the affections so long yearning for something to love. She would bring it home, watch

over it, educate it, be all the world to Arthur, doubly so for his son's sake. She dreamt of putting his child into his arms, and bidding him live for it, and awoke clasping the pillow!

What were her feelings when she heard Violet was out of danger? For humanity's sake and for Arthur's, she rejoiced; but it was the downfall of a noble edifice. 'How that silly young mother would spoil the poor child!'

'My brothers' had always been mentioned in Theodora's prayer, from infancy. It was the plural number, but the strength and fervency of petition were reserved for one; and with him she now joined the name of his child. But how pray for the son without the mother? It was positively a struggle; for Theodora had a horror of mockery and formality; but the duty was too clear, the evil which made it distasteful, too evident, not to be battled with; she remembered that she ought to pray for all mankind, even those who had injured her, and, on these terms, she added her brother's wife. It was not much from her heart; a small beginning, but still it was a beginning, that might be blessed in time.

Lord Martindale wished the family to have gone to London immediately, but Mrs. Nesbit set herself against any alteration in their plans being made for the sake of Arthur's wife. They were to have gone only in time for the first drawing-room, and she treated as a personal injury the proposal to leave her sooner than had been originally intended; making her niece so unhappy that Lord Martindale had to yield. John's stay in London was a subject of much anxiety; and while Mrs. Nesbit treated it as an absurd trifling with his own health, and his father reproached himself for being obliged to leave Arthur to him, Theodora suffered from complicated jealousy. Arthur seemed to want John more than her, John risked himself in London, in order to be with Arthur and his wife.

She was very eager for his coming; and when she expected the return of the carriage which was sent to meet him at the Whitford station, she betook herself to the lodge, intending him to pick her up there, that she might skim the cream of his information.

The carriage appeared, but it seemed empty. That dignified, gentlemanly personage, Mr. Brown, alighted from the box, and advanced with affability, replying to her astonished query, 'Mr. Martindale desired me to say he should be at home by dinner-time, ma'am. He left the train at the Enderby station, and is gone round by Rickworth Priory, with a message from Mrs. Martindale to Lady Elizabeth Brandon.'

Theodora stood transfixed; and Brown, a confidential and cultivated person, thought she waited for more information.

'Mr. Martindale has not much cough, ma'am, and I hope coming out of London will remove it entirely. I think it was chiefly excitement and anxiety that brought on a recurrence of it, for his health is decidedly improved. He desired me to mention that Mrs. Martindale is much better. She is on the sofa to-day for the first time; and he saw her before leaving.'

'Do you know how the little boy is?' Theodora could not help asking.

'He is a little stronger, thank you, ma'am,' said Brown, with much interest; 'he has cried less these last few days. He is said to be extremely like Mrs. Martindale.'

Brown remounted to his place, the carriage drove on, and Theodora impetuously walked along the avenue.

'That man is insufferable! Extremely like Mrs. Martindale! Servants' gossip! How could I go and ask him? John has perfectly spoilt a good servant in him! But John spoils everybody. The notion of that girl sending him on her messages! John, who is treated like something sacred by my father and mother themselves! Those damp Rickworth meadows! How could Arthur allow it? It would serve him right if he was to marry Emma Brandon after all!'

She would not go near her mother, lest she should give her aunt the pleasure of hearing where he was gone; but as she was coming down, dressed for dinner, she met her father in the hall, uneasily asking a servant whether Mr. Martindale was come.

'Arthur's wife has sent him with a message to Rickworth,' she said.

'John? You don't mean it. You have not seen him?'

'No; he went round that way, and sent Brown home. He said he should be here by dinner-time, but it is very late. Is it not a strange proceeding of hers, to be sending him about the country!'

'I don't understand it. Where's Brown?'

'Here's a fly coming up the avenue. He is come at last.'

Lord Martindale hastened down the steps; Theodora came no further than the door, in so irritated a state that she did not like John's cheerful alacrity of step and greeting. 'She is up to-day, she is getting better,' were the first words she heard. 'Well, Theodora, how are you?' and he kissed her with more warmth than she returned.

'Did I hear you had been to Rickworth?' said his father.

'Yes; I sent word by Brown. Poor Violet is still so weak that she cannot write, and the Brandons have been anxious about her; so she asked me to let them know how she was, if I had the opportunity, and I came round that way. I wanted to know when they go to London; for though Arthur is as attentive as possible, I don't think Violet is in a condition to be left entirely to him. When do you go?'

'Not till the end of May—just before the drawing-room,' said Lord Martindale.

'I go back when they can take the boy to church. Is my mother in the drawing-room? I'll just speak to her, and dress—it is late I see.'

'How well he seems,' said Lord Martindale, as John walked quickly on before.

'There was a cough,' said Theodora.

'Yes; but so cheerful. I have not seen him so animated for years. He must be better!'

His mother was full of delight. 'My dear John, you look so much better! Where have you been?'

'At Rickworth. I went to give Lady Elizabeth an account of Violet. She is much better.'

'And you have been after sunset in that river fog! My dear John!'

'There was no fog; and it was a most pleasant drive. I had no idea Rickworth was so pretty. Violet desired me to thank you for your kind messages. You should see her to-day, mother; she would be quite a study for you; she looks so pretty on her pillows, poor thing! and Arthur is come out quite a new character—as an excellent nurse.'

'Poor thing! I am glad she is recovering,' said Lady Martindale. 'It was very kind in you to stay with Arthur. I only hope you have not been hurting yourself.'

'No, thank you; I came away in time, I believe: but I should have been glad to have stayed on, unless I made room for some one of more use to Violet.'

'I wish you had come home sooner. We have had such a pleasant dinner-party. You would have liked to meet the professor.'

It was not the first time John had been sensible that that drawing-room was no place for sympathy; and he felt it the more now, because he had been living in such entire participation of his brother's hopes and fears, that he could hardly suppose any one could be less interested in the mother and child in Cadogan-place. He came home, wishing Theodora would go and relieve Arthur of some of the care Violet needed in her convalescence; and he was much disappointed by her apparent indifference—in reality, a severe fit of perverse jealousy.

All dinner-time she endured a conversation on the subjects for which she least cared; nay, she talked ardently about the past dinner-party, for the very purpose of preventing John from suspecting that her anxiety had prevented her from enjoying it. And when she left the dining-room, she felt furious at knowing that now her father would have all the particulars to himself, so that none would transpire to her.

She longed so much to hear of Arthur and his child, that when John came into the drawing-room she could have asked! But he went to greet his aunt, who received him thus:

'Well, I am glad to see you at last. You ought to have good reasons for coming to England for the May east winds, and then exposing yourself to them in London!'

'I hope I did not expose myself: I only went out three or four times.'

'I know you are always rejoiced to be as little at home as possible.'

'I could not be spared sooner, ma'am.'

'Spared? I think you have come out in a new capacity.'

John never went up his aunt without expecting to undergo a penance.

'I was sorry no one else could be with Arthur, but being there, I could not leave him.'

'And your mother tells me you are going back again.'

'Yes, to stand godfather.'

'To the son and heir, as they called him in the paper. I gave Arthur credit for better taste; I suppose it was done by some of her connections?'

'I was that connection,' said John.

'Oh! I suppose you know what expectations you will raise?'

John making no answer, she grew more angry. 'This one, at least, is never likely to be heir, from what I hear; it is only surprising that it is still alive.'

How Theodora hung upon the answer, her very throat aching with anxiety, but hardening her face because John looked towards her.

'We were very much afraid for him at first,' he said, 'but they now think there is no reason he should not do well. He began to improve from the time she could attend to him.'

A deep sigh from his mother startled John, and recalled the grief of his childhood—the loss of two young sisters who had died during her absence on the continent. He crossed over and stood near her, between her and his aunt, who, in agitated haste to change the conversation, called out to ask her about some club-book. For once she did not attend; and while Theodora came forward and answered Mrs. Nesbit, she tremulously asked John if he had seen the child.

'Only once, before he was an hour old. He was asleep when I came away; and, as Arthur says, it is a serious thing to disturb him, he cries so much.'

'A little low melancholy wailing,' she said, with a half sob. But Mrs. Nesbit would not leave her at peace any longer, and her voice came beyond the screen of John's figure:—

'Lady Martindale, my dear, have you done with those books! They ought to be returned.'

'Which, dear aunt?' And Lady Martindale started up as if she had been caught off duty, and, with a manifest effort, brought her wandering thoughts back again, to say which were read and which were unread.

John did not venture to revert to a subject that affected his mother so strongly; but he made another attempt upon his sister, when he could speak to her apart. 'Arthur has been wondering not to hear from you.'

'Every one has been writing,' she answered, coldly.

'He wants some relief from his constant attendance,' continued John; 'I was afraid at first it would be too much for him, sitting up three nights consecutively, and even now he has not at all recovered his looks.'

'Is he looking ill?' said Theodora.

'He has gone through a great deal, and when she tries to make him go out, he only goes down to smoke. You would do a great deal of good if you were there.'

Theodora would not reply. For Arthur to ask her to come and be godmother was the very thing she wished; but she would not offer at John's bidding, especially when Arthur was more than ever devoted to his wife; so she made no sign; and John repented of having said so much, thinking that, in such a humour, the farther she was from them the better.

Yet what he had said might have worked, had not a history of the circumstances of Violet's illness come round to her by way of Mrs. Nesbit. John had told his father; Lord Martindale told his wife; Lady Martindale told her aunt, under whose colouring the story reached Theodora, that Arthur's wife had been helpless and inefficient, had done nothing but cry over her household affairs, could not bear to be left alone, and that the child's premature birth had been occasioned by a fit of hysterics because Arthur had gone out fishing. No wonder Theodora pitied the one brother, and

thought the other infatuated. To write to Arthur was out of the question; and she could only look forward to consoling him when the time for London should come. Nor was she much inclined to compassionate John, when, as he said, the east wind—as his aunt said, the London fog—as she thought, the Rickworth meadows—brought on such an accession of cough that he was obliged to confine himself to his two rooms, where he felt unusually solitary.

She went in one day to carry him the newspaper. 'I am writing to Arthur,' he said, 'to tell him that I shall not be able to be in London next Sunday; do you like to put in a note?'

'No, I thank you.'

'You have no message?'

'None.'

He paused and looked at her. 'I wish you would write,' he said. 'Arthur has been watching eagerly for your congratulation.'

'He does not give much encouragement,' said Theodora, moving to the door.

'I wish he was a letter writer! After being so long with them, I don't like hearing nothing more; but his time has been so much engrossed that he could hardly have written at first. I believe the first letter he looked for was from you.'

'I don't know what to say. Other people have said all the commonplace things.'

'You would not speak in that manner—you who used to be so fond of Arthur—if you by any means realized what he has gone through.'

Theodora was touched, but would not show it. 'He does not want me now,' she said, and was gone, and then her lips relaxed, and she breathed a heavy sigh.

John sighed too. He could not understand her, and was sensible that his own isolation was as a consequence of having lived absorbed in his affection and his grief, without having sought the intimacy of his sister. His brother's family cares had, for the first time, led him to throw himself into the interests of those around him, and thus aroused from the contemplation of his loss, he began to look with regret on opportunities neglected and influence wasted. The stillness of his own room did not as formerly suffice to him; the fears and hopes he had lately been sharing rose more vividly before him, and he watched eagerly for the reply to his letter.

It came, not from Arthur, but in the pointed style of Violet's hardest steel pen, when Matilda's instructions were most full in her mind; stiff, cramped, and formal, as if it had been a great effort to write it, and John was grieved to find that she was still in no state for exertion. She had scarcely been down-stairs, and neither she nor the baby were as yet likely to be soon able to leave the house, in spite of all the kind care of Lady Elizabeth and Miss Brandon. Violet made numerous apologies for the message, which she had little thought would cause Mr. Martindale to alter his route.

In fact, those kind friends had been so much affected by John's account of Violet's weak state, under no better nursing than Arthur's, that, as he had hoped, they had hastened their visit to London, and were now settled as near to her as possible, spending nearly the whole of their time with her. Emma almost idolized the baby, and was delighted at Arthur's grateful request that she would be its sponsor, and Violet was as happy in their company as the restlessness of a mind which had not yet recovered its tone, would allow her to be.

In another fortnight John wrote to say that he found he had come home too early, and must go to the Isle of Wight till the weather was warmer. In passing through London, he would come to Cadogan-place, and it was decided that he should arrive in time to go with the baby to church on the Tuesday, and proceed the next morning.

He arrived as Violet came down to greet her party of sponsors. Never had she looked prettier than when her husband led her into the room, her taper figure so graceful in her somewhat languid movements, and her countenance so sweetly blending the expression of child and mother. Each white cheek was tinged with exquisite rose colour, and the dark liquid eyes and softly smiling mouth had an affectionate pensiveness far lovelier than her last year's bloom, and yet there was something painful

in that beauty—it was too like the fragility of the flower fading under one hour's sunshine; and there was a sadness in seeing the matronly stamp on a face so young that it should have shown only girlhood's freedom from care. Arthur indeed was boasting of the return of the colour, which spread and deepened as he drew attention to it; but John and Lady Elizabeth agreed, as they walked to church, that it was the very token of weakness, and that with every kind intention Arthur did not know how to take care of her—how should he?

The cheeks grew more brilliant and burning at church, for on being carried to the font, the baby made his doleful notes heard, and when taken from his nurse, they rose into a positive roar. Violet looked from him to his father's face, and there saw so much discomposure that her wretchedness was complete, enhanced as it was by a sense of wickedness in not being able to be happy and grateful. Just as when a few days previously she had gone to return thanks, she had been in a nervous state of fluttering and trembling that allowed her to dwell on nothing but the dread of fainting away. The poor girl's nerves had been so completely overthrown, that even her powers of mind seemed to be suffering, and her agitated manner quite alarmed Lady Elizabeth. She was in good hands, however; Lady Elizabeth went home with her, kept every one else away, and nursing her in her own kind way, brought her back to common sense, for in the exaggeration of her weak spirits, she had been feeling as if it was she who had been screaming through the service, and seriously vexing Arthur.

He presently looked in himself to say the few fond merry words that were only needed to console her, and she was then left alone to rest, not tranquil enough for sleep, but reading hymns, and trying to draw her thoughts up to what she thought they ought to be on the day of her child's baptismal vows.

It was well for her that the christening dinner (a terror to her imagination) had been deferred till the family should be in town, and that she had no guest but John, who was very sorry to see how weary and exhausted she looked, as if it was a positive effort to sit at the head of the table.

When the two brothers came up to the drawing-room, they found her on the sofa.

'Regularly done for!' said Arthur, sitting down by her. 'You ought to have gone to bed, you perverse woman.'

'I shall come to life after tea,' said she, beginning to rise as signs of its approach were heard.

'Lie still, I say,' returned Arthur, settling the cushion. 'Do you think no one can make tea but yourself! Out with the key, and lie still.'

'I hope, Violet,' said John, 'you did not think the Red Republicans had been in your drawers and boxes. I am afraid Arthur may have cast the blame of his own doings on the absent, though I assure you I did my best to protect them.'

'Indeed he did you more justice,' said Violet, 'he told me the box was your setting to rights, and the drawer his. It was very honest of him, for I must say the box did you most credit.'

'As to the drawer,' said Arthur, 'I wish I had put it into the fire at once! Those accounts are a monomania! She has been worse from the day she got hold of that book of hers again, and the absurd part of it is that these are all bills that she pays!'

'Oh! they are all comfortable now,' said Violet.

'And what did you say to Arthur's bold stroke!' said John.

'Oh! I never laughed more in my life.'

'Ah ha" said Arthur, 'it was all my admirable sagacity! Why, John, the woman was an incubus saddled upon us by Miss Standaloft, that this poor silly child did not know how to get rid of, though she was cheating us out of house and home. Never were such rejoicings as when she found the Old Man of the Sea was gone!'

'It is quite a different thing now,' said Violet. 'Nurse found me such a nice niece of her own, who does not consume as much in a fortnight as that dreadful woman did in a week. Indeed, my great book has some satisfaction in it now.'

'And yet he accuses it of having thrown you back.'

'Everything does that!' said Arthur. 'She will extract means of tiring herself out of anything—pretends to be well, and then is good for nothing!'

'Arthur! Arthur! do you know what you are doing with the tea?' cried Violet, starting up. He has put in six shellfuls for three people, and a lump of sugar, and now was shutting up the unfortunate teapot without one drop of water!' And gaily driving him away, she held up the sugar-tongs with the lump of sugar in his face, while he laughed and yielded the field, saying, disdainfully, 'Woman's work.'

'Under the circumstances,' said John, 'putting in no water was the best thing he could do.'

'Ay,' said Arthur, 'a pretty fellow you for a West Indian proprietor, to consume neither sugar nor cigars.'

'At this rate,' said John, 'they are the people to consume nothing. There was such an account of the Barbuda property the other day, that my father is thinking of going to see what is to be done with it.'

'No bad plan for your next winter,' said Arthur. 'Now, Violet, to your sofa! You have brewed your female potion in your female fashion, and may surely leave your betters to pour it out.'

'No, indeed! How do I know what you may serve us up?' said she, quite revived with laughing. 'I won't give up my place.'

'Quite right, Violet,' said John, 'don't leave me to his mercy. Last time he made tea for me, it consisted only of the other ingredient, hot water, after which I took the law into my own hands for our mutual benefit. Pray what became of him after I was gone?'

'I was obliged to have him up into my room, and give him his tea properly there, or I believe he would have existed on nothing but cigars.'

'Well, I shall have some opinion of you when you make him leave off cigars.'

'Catch her!' quietly responded Arthur.

'There can't be a worse thing for a man that gets bad coughs.'

'That's all smoke, Violet,' said Arthur. 'Don't tell her so, or I shall never have any peace.'

'At least, I advise you to open the windows of his den before you show my mother and Theodora the house.'

'As to Theodora! what is the matter with her!' said Arthur.

'I don't know,' said John.

'In one of her moods? Well, we shall have her here in ten days' time, and I shall know what to be at with her.'

'I know she likes babies,' said Violet, with confidence. She had quite revived, and was lively and amused; but as soon as tea was over, Arthur insisted on her going to bed.

The loss of her gentle mirth seemed to be felt, for a long silence ensued; Arthur leaning against the mantel-shelf, solacing himself with a low whistle, John sitting in meditation. At last he looked up, saying, 'I wish you would all come and stay with me at Ventnor.'

'Thank you; but you see there's no such thing as my going. Fitzhugh is in Norway, and till he comes back, I can't get away for more than a day or two.'

'Suppose,' said John, rather doubtingly; 'what should you think of putting Violet under my charge, and coming backwards and forwards yourself?'

'Why, Harding did talk of sea air, but she did not take to the notion; and I was not sorry; for, of all things I detest, the chief is sticking up in a sea place, with nothing to do. But it is wretched work going on as we do, though they say there is nothing the matter but weakness. I verily believe it is all that child's eternal noise that regularly wears her out. She is upset in a moment; and whenever she is left alone, she sets to work on some fidget or other about the house, that makes her worse than before.'

'Going from home would be the best cure for that.'

'I suppose it would. I meant her to have gone out with my mother, but that can't be anyway now! The sea would give her a chance; I could run down pretty often; and you would see that she did not tire herself.'

'I would do my best to take care of her, if you would trust her to me.'

'I know you would; and it is very kind in you to think of it.'

'I will find a house, and write as soon as it is ready. Do you think the end of the week would be too soon for her? I am sure London is doing her harm.'

'Whenever you please; and yet I am sorry. I wanted my father to have seen the boy; but perhaps he had better look a little more respectable, and learn to hold his tongue first. Besides, how will it be taken, her going out of town just as they come up?'

'I rather think it would be better for her not to meet them till she is stronger. Her continual anxiety and effort to please would be too much strain.'

'Very likely; and I am sure I won't keep her here to expose her to Miss Martindale's airs. She shall come as soon as you like.'

Arthur was strengthened in his determination by the first sound that met him on going up-stairs —the poor babe's lamentable voice; and by finding Violet, instead of taking the rest she so much needed, vainly trying to still the feeble moaning. He was positively angry; and almost as if the poor little thing had been wilfully persecuting her, declared it would be the death of her, and peremptorily ordered it up-stairs; the nurse only too glad to carry it off, and agreeing with him that it was doing more harm to its mother than she did good to it. Violet, in submissive misery, gave it up, and hid her face. One of her chief subjects for self-torment was an imagination that Arthur did not like the baby, and was displeased with its crying; and she felt utterly wretched, hardly able to bear the cheerful tone in which he spoke! 'Well, Violet, we shall soon set you up. It is all settled. You are to go, at the end of the week, to stay with John in the Isle of Wight.'

'Go away?' said Violet, in an extinguished voice.

'Yes; it is the very thing for you. I shall stay here, and go backwards and forwards. Well, what is it now?'

She was starting up, as the opening of the door let out another scream. 'There he is still! Let me go to him for one minute.'

'Folly!' said Arthur, impatiently. 'There's no peace day or night. I won't stand it any longer. You are half dead already. I will not have it go on. Lie down; go to sleep directly, and don't trouble your head about anything more till morning.'

Like a good child, though choking with tears, she obeyed the first mandate; and presently was rather comforted by his listening at the foot of the stairs, and reporting that the boy seemed to be quiet at last. The rest of the order it was not in her power to obey; she was too much fatigued to sleep soundly, or to understand clearly. Most of the night was spent in broken dreams of being separated from her child and her husband, and wakening to the knowledge that something was going to happen.

At last came sounder slumbers; and she awoke with an aching head, but to clearer perceptions. And when Arthur, before going down to breakfast, asked what she wished him to say to John, she answered: 'It is very kind of him—but you never meant me to go without you?'

'I shall take you there, and run down pretty often; and John has been used to coddling himself all his life, so of course he will know how to take care of you.'

'How kind he is, but I don't'—she broke off, and looked at the little pinched face and shrivelled arms of the tiny creature, which she pressed more closely to her; then, with a hesitating voice, 'Only, if it would do baby good!'

'Of course it would. He can't be well while things go on at this rate. Only ask Harding.'

'I wonder whether Mr. Martindale knew it was what Mr. Harding recommended! But you would be by yourself.'

'As if I had not taken care of myself for three-and-twenty years without your help!'

'And all your party will be in town, so that you will not miss me.'

'I shall be with you very often. Shall I tell John you accept?'

'Tell him it is very kind, and I am so much obliged to him,' said Violet, unable to speak otherwise than disconsolately.

Accordingly the brothers agreed that Arthur should bring her to Ventnor on Saturday, if, as John expected, he could be prepared to receive her; placing much confidence in Brown's savoir faire, though Brown was beyond measure amazed at such a disarrangement of his master's methodical habits; and Arthur himself gave a commiserating shake of the head as he observed that there was no accounting for tastes, but if John chose to shut himself up in a lodging with the most squallingest babby in creation, he was not the man to gainsay him; and further reflected, that if a man must be a younger son, John was a model elder brother.

Poor Violet! Her half-recovered state must be an excuse for her dire consternation on hearing it was definitively settled that she was to be carried off to Ventnor in four days' time! How arrange for Arthur? Where find a nursemaid? What would become of the baby so far from Mr. Harding? The Isle of Wight seemed the ends of the earth—out of England! Helpless and overpowered, she was in despair; it came to Arthur's asking, in displeasure, what she wanted—whether she meant to go or not. She thought of her drooping infant, and said at once she would go.

'Well, then, what's all this about?'

Then came tears, and Arthur went away, declaring she did not know herself what she would be at. He had really borne patiently with much plaintiveness, and she knew it. She accused herself of ingratitude and unreasonableness, and went into a fresh agony on that score; but soon a tap at the door warned her to strive for composure. It was Sarah, and Violet felt sure that the dreaded moment was come of her giving warning; but it was only a message. 'If you please, ma'am, there's a young person wants to see you.'

'Come as a nursery maid?' said Violet, springing up in her nervous agitated way. 'Do you think she will do?'

'I don't think nothing of her,' said Sarah, emphatically. 'Don't you go and be in a way, ma'am; there's no hurry.'

'Yes, but there is, Sarah. Baby and I are to go next Saturday to the Isle of Wight, and I can't take old nurse. I must have some one.'

'You won't get nobody by hurrying,' said Sarah.

'But what's to be done, Sarah? I can't bear giving the dear baby to a stranger, but I can't help it.'

'As for that, said Sarah, gloomily, 'I don't see but I could look after Master John as well as any that is like to offer for the present.'

'You! Oh, that would be nice! But I thought you did not like children?'

'I don't, but I don't mind while he is too little to make a racket, and worrit one out of one's life. It is only for the present, till you can suit yourself, ma'am—just that you may not be lost going into foreign parts with a stranger.'

Sarah had been nursing the baby every leisure moment, and had, during the worst part of Violet's illness, had more to do with him than the regular nurse. This was happily settled, and all at which Violet still demurred was how the house and its master should be provided for in their absence; to which Sarah replied, 'Mary would do well enough for he;' and before Violet knew to which she must suppose the pronoun referred, there was a new-comer, Lady Elizabeth, telling her that Arthur had just been to beg her to come to her, saying he feared he had hurried her and taken her by surprise.

Under such kind soothing Violet's rational mind returned. She ceased to attempt to put herself into a vehement state of preparation, and began to take so cheerful a view of affairs that she met Arthur again in excellent spirits.

Emma Brandon pitied her for being left alone with Mr. Martindale, but this was no subject of dread to her, and she confessed that she was relieved to escape the meeting with the rest of the family. The chief regret was, that the two friends would miss the constant intercourse with which they had flattered themselves—the only thing that made London endurable to poor Emma. She amused Violet

with her lamentations over her gaieties, and her piteous accounts of the tedium of parties and balls; whereas Violet declared that she liked them very much.

'It was pleasant to walk about with Arthur and hear his droll remarks, and she liked seeing people look nice and well dressed.'

'Ah! you are better off. You are not obliged to dance, and you are safe, too. Now, whenever any one asks to be introduced to me I am sure he wants the Priory, and feel bound to guard it.'

'And so you don't like any one, and find it stupid?'

'So I do, of course, and I hope I always shall. But oh! Violet, I have not told you that I saw that lady again this morning at the early service. She had still her white dress on, I am sure it is for Whitsuntide; and her face is so striking—so full of thought and earnestness, just like what one would suppose a novice. I shall take her for my romance, and try to guess at her history.'

'To console you for your godson going away?'

'Ah! it won't do that! But it will be something to think of, and I will report to you if I make out any more about her. And mind you give me a full account of the godson.'

Arthur wished the journey well over; he had often felt a sort of superior pity for travellers with a baby in company, and did not relish the prospect; but things turned out well; he found an acquaintance, and travelled with him in a different carriage, and little Johnnie, lulled by the country air, slept so much that Violet had leisure to enjoy the burst into country scenery, and be refreshed by the glowing beauty of the green meadows, the budding woods, and the brilliant feathery broom blossoms that gilded the embankments. At Winchester Arthur came to her window, and asked if she remembered last year.

'It is the longest year of my life,' said she. 'Oh, don't laugh as if I had made a bad compliment, but so much has happened!' There was no time for more; and as she looked out at the cathedral as they moved on, she recollected her resolutions, and blamed herself for her failures, but still in a soothed and happier frame of hope.

The crossing was her delight, her first taste of sea. There was a fresh wind, cold enough to make Arthur put on his great-coat, but to her it brought a delicious sense of renewed health and vigour, as she sat inhaling it, charmed to catch a drop of spray on her face, her eyes and cheeks brightening and her spirits rising.

The sparkling Solent, the ships at Spithead, the hills and wooded banks, growing more defined before her; the town of Ryde and its long pier, were each a new wonder and delight, and she exclaimed with such ecstasy, and laughed so like the joyous girl she used to be, that Arthur felt old times come back; and when he handed her out of the steamer he entirely forgot the baby.

At last she was tired with pleasure, and lay back in the carriage in languid enjoyment; fields, cottages, hawthorns, lilacs, and glimpses of sea flitting past her like pictures in a dream, a sort of waking trance that would have been broken by speaking or positive thinking.

They stopped at a gate: she looked up and gave a cry of delight. Such a cottage as she and Annette had figured in dreams of rural bliss, gable-ends, thatch, verandah overrun with myrtle, rose, and honeysuckle, a little terrace, a steep green slope of lawn shut in with laburnum and lilac, in the flush of the lovely close of May, a view of the sea, a green wicket, bowered over with clematis, and within it John Martindale, his look of welcome overpowering his usual gravity, so as to give him an air of gladness such as she had never seen in him before.

CHAPTER 4

The inmost heart of man if glad
Partakes a livelier cheer,
And eyes that cannot but be sad
Let fall a brightened tear.
Since thy return, through days and weeks
Of hope that grew by stealth,
How many wan and faded cheeks
Have kindled into health.

—WORDSWORTH'S Ode to May

'I say,' called Arthur, standing half in and half out of the French window, as Sarah paced round the little garden, holding a parasol over her charge, 'if that boy kicks up a row at night, don't mind Mrs. Martindale. Carry him off, and lock the door. D'ye hear?'

'Yes, sir,' said the unmoved Sarah.

'Stern, rugged nurse!' said Arthur, drawing in his head. 'Your boy ought to be virtue itself, Violet. Now for you, John, if you see her at those figures, take them away. Don't let her think what two and two make.'

'You are like one of my little sisters giving her doll to the other to keep,' said Violet.

'Some folks say it is a doll, don't they, John?'

'Well, I will try to take as much care of your doll as she does of hers,' said John, smiling.

'Good-bye, then! I wish I could stay!'

Violet went to the gate with him, while John stood at the window watching the slender girlish figure under the canopy of clematis, as she stood gazing after her husband, then turned and slowly paced back again, her eyes on the ground, and her face rather sad and downcast.

That pretty creature was a strange new charge for him, and he dreaded her pining almost as he would have feared the crying of a child left alone with him.

'Well, Violet,' said he, cheerfully, 'we must do our best. What time would you like to take a drive?'

'Any time, thank you,' said she, gratefully, but somewhat plaintively; 'but do not let me be a trouble to you. Sarah is going to hire a chair for me to go down to the beach. I only want not to be in your way.'

'I have nothing to do. You know I am no great walker, and I am glad of an excuse for setting up my carriage. Shall we dine early, and go out when the sun is not so high?'

'Thank you! that will be delightful. I want to see those beautiful places that I was too tired to look at on Saturday.'

Sarah's rounds again brought her in sight; Violet crossed the grass, and the next moment was under the verandah with the little long-robed chrysalis shape in her arms, declaring he was growing quite good, and getting fat already; and though to John's eyes the face was as much as ever like a very wizened old man, he could not but feel heartfelt pleasure in seeing her for once enjoying a young mother's exultation.

'Poor thing!' said he to himself, as she carried the babe upstairs, 'she has done too much, thought too much, felt too much for her years. Life has begun before she has strength for the heat and burthen of the day. The only hope is in keeping those overtasked spirits at rest, guarding her from care, and letting her return to childhood. And should this work fall on me, broken down in spirits and energy, with these long-standing habits of solitude and silence? If Helen was but here!'

He was relieved by Violet's reappearance at dinner-time, full of smiles, proud of Johnnie's having slept half the morning, and delighted with "Mary Barton", which, on his system of diversion for her mind, he had placed in her way. She was amazed and charmed at finding that he could discuss the tale with interest and admiration.

'Arthur calls such books trash,' said she.

'He reads them, though.'

'Yes, he always reads the third volume while I read the first.'

'The best way. I always begin at the end to judge whether a book is worth reading.'

'I saw a French book on the table; are you reading it?'

'Consulting it. You are welcome to it.'

'I think,' she said, timidly, 'I ought to read some history and French, or I shall never be fit to teach my little boy.'

'I have a good many books at home, entirely at your service.'

'Thank you, thank you! I thought last winter if I could but have read, I should not have minded half so much.'

'And why could you not?'

'I had finished all my own books, and they cost too much to hire, so there was only a great Roman History that Arthur had had at school. I could not read more than thirty pages of that a day, it was so stupid.'

'And you read those as a task! Very wise!'

'Matilda said my education was incomplete, and she feared I should be found deficient; and mamma told me to make a point of reading something improving every day, but I have not begun again.'

'I have some work on my hands,' said John. 'I was with Percy Fotheringham eight years ago in Syria and Asia Minor. He has gone over the same places a second time, and has made the journals up into a book on the Crusaders, which he has sent from Constantinople for me to get ready for publication. I shall come to you for help.'

'Me! How can I?' exclaimed Violet, colouring with astonishment.

'Let us enjoy our holiday first,' he replied, smiling. 'See there.'

A low open carriage and a pair of ponies came to the gate; Violet was enchanted, and stood admiring and patting them, while John looked on amused, telling her he was glad she approved, for he had desired Brown to find something in which Captain Martindale would not be ashamed to see her.

They drove along the Undercliff, and her enjoyment was excessive. To one so long shut up in town, the fresh air, blue sky, and green trees were charms sufficient in themselves, and when to these were added the bright extent of summer sea, the beautiful curving outline of the bay ending in the bold Culver Cliffs, and the wall of rocks above, clothed in part with garland-like shrubs and festoons of creepers, it was to her a perfect vision of delight. There was an alternation of long pauses of happy contemplation, and of smothered exclamations of ecstasy, as if eye and heart were longing to take a still fuller grasp of the beauty of the scene. The expression her face had worn at the cathedral entrance was on it now, and seemed to put a new soul into her features, varied by the beaming smiles as she cried out joyously at each new object-the gliding sails on the water, the curious forms of the crags, or the hawks that poised themselves in the air.

The flowers, too! They came to a lane bordered with copse, blue with wild hyacinth. 'Oh! it was so long since she had seen a wild flower! Would he be so kind as to stop for one moment to let her gather one. She did so much wish to pick a flower for herself once more!'

He drew up, and sat, leaning back, watching her with one of his smiles of melancholy meaning, as she lightly sprang up the bank, and dived between the hazel stems; and there he remained musing till, like a vision of May herself, she reappeared on the bank, the nut-bushes making a bower around her, her hands filled with flowers, her cheek glowing like her wild roses, and the youthful delicacy

of her form, and the transient brightness of her sweet face, suiting with the fresh tender colouring of the foliage, chequered with flickering sunshine.

'Oh! I hope I have not kept you waiting too long! but, indeed, I did not know how to turn back. I went after an orchis, and then I saw some Solomon's seal; and oh! such bluebells, and I could not help standing quite still to feel how delicious it was! I hope that it was not long.'

'No, not at all, I am glad.'

There was a moisture around the bright eyes, and perhaps she felt a little childish shame, for she put up her hand to brush it off. 'It is very silly,' she said. 'Beautiful places ought not to make one ready to cry—and yet somehow, when I stood quite still, and it was all so green, and I heard the cuckoo and all the little birds singing, it would come over me! I could not help thinking who made it all so beautiful, and that He gave me my baby too.'—And there, as having said too much, she blushed in confusion, and began to busy herself with her flowers, delighting herself in silence over each many-belled hyacinth, each purple orchis, streaked wood sorrel, or delicate wreath of eglantine, deeming each in turn the most perfect she had ever seen.

John let her alone; he thought the May blossoms more suitable companions for her than himself, and believed that it would only interfere with that full contentment to be recalled to converse with him. It was pleasure enough to watch that childlike gladsomeness, like studying a new life, and the relief it gave him to see her so happy perhaps opened his mind to somewhat of the same serene enjoyment.

That evening, when Brown, on bringing in the tea, gave an anxious glance to judge how his master fared, he augured from his countenance that the change of habits was doing him no harm.

In the evening, Mr. Fotheringham's manuscript was brought out: John could never read aloud, but he handed over the sheets to her, and she enjoyed the vivid descriptions and anecdotes of adventures, further illustrated by comments and details from John, far more entertaining than those designed for the public. This revision was their usual evening occupation, and she soon became so well instructed in those scenes, that she felt as if she had been one of the travellers, and had known the handsome Arab sheik, whose chivalrous honour was only alloyed by desire of backsheesh, the Turkish guard who regularly deserted on the first alarm, and the sharp knavish Greek servant with his contempt for them all, more especially for the grave and correct Mr. Brown, pining to keep up Martindale etiquette in desert, caravanserai, and lazzeretto. She went along with them in the researches for Greek inscription, Byzantine carving, or Frank fortress; she shared the exultation of deciphering the ancient record in the venerable mountain convent, the disappointment when Percy's admirable entrenched camp of Bohemond proved to be a case of 'praetorian here, praetorian there;' she listened earnestly to the history, too deeply felt to have been recorded for the general reader, of the feelings which had gone with the friends to the cedars of Lebanon, the streams of Jordan, the peak of Tabor, the cave of Bethlehem, the hills of Jerusalem. Perhaps she looked up the more to John, when she knew that he had trod that soil, and with so true a pilgrim's heart. Then the narration led her through the purple mountain islets of the Archipelago, and the wondrous scenery of classic Greece, with daring adventures among robber Albanians, such as seemed too strange for the quiet inert John Martindale, although the bold and gay temper of his companion appeared to be in its own element; and in truth it was as if there was nothing that came amiss to Percival Fotheringham, who was equally ready for deep and scholarly dissertation, or for boyish drollery and good-natured tricks. He had a peculiar talent for languages, and had caught almost every dialect of the natives, as well as being an excellent Eastern scholar, and this had led to his becoming attached to the embassy at Constantinople, where John had left him on returning to England. He was there highly esteemed, and in the way of promotion, to the great satisfaction of John, who took a sort of affectionate fatherly pride in his well-doing.

The manuscript evinced so much ability and research, and was so full of beautiful and poetical description, as not only charmed Violet, but surpassed even John's expectations; and great was his delight in dwelling on its perfections, while he touched it up and corrected it with a doubtful, respectful

hand, scarcely perceiving how effective were his embellishments and refinements. Violet's remarks and misunderstanding were useful, and as she grew bolder, her criticisms were often much to the point. She was set to search in historical authorities, and to translate from the French for the notes, work which she thought the greatest honour, and which kept her mind happily occupied to the exclusion of her cares.

Fresh air, busy idleness, the daily renewed pleasure of beautiful scenery, the watchful care of her kind brother, and the progressive improvement of her babe, produced the desired effect; and when the promised day arrived, and they walked to the coach-office to meet Arthur, it was a triumph to hear him declare that he had been thinking that for once he saw a pretty girl before he found out it was Violet, grown rosy in her sea-side bonnet.

If the tenor of John's life had been far less agreeable, it would have been sufficiently compensated by the pleasure of seeing how happy he had made the young couple, so joyously engrossed with each other, and full of spirits and merriment.

Violet was gladsome and blithe at meeting her husband again, and Arthur, wholesomely and affectionately gay, appearing to uncommon advantage. He spoke warmly of his father. It seemed that they had been much together, and had understood each other better than ever before. Arthur repeated gratifying things which Lord Martindale had said of Violet, and, indeed, it was evident that interest in her was the way to find out his heart. Of his mother and sister there was less mention, and John began to gather the state of the case as he listened in the twilight of the summer evening, while Arthur and Violet sat together on the sofa, and he leant back in his chair opposite to them, his book held up to catch the fading light; but his attention fixed on their talk over Arthur's news.

'You have not told me about the drawing-room.'

'Do you think I am going there till I am obliged!'

'What! You did not go with Lady Martindale and Theodora? I should like to have seen them dressed. Do tell me how they looked.'

'Splendid, no doubt; but you must take it on trust.'

'You did not see them! What a pity! How disappointed Theodora must have been!'

'Were there not folks enough to look at her?'

'As if they were of any use without you.'

'Little goose! I am not her husband, thank goodness, and wishing him joy that gets her.'

'O, Arthur, don't! I want to hear of Lady Albury's party. You did go to that!'

'Yes, my mother lugged me into it, and a monstrous bore it was. I wish you had been there.'

'Thank you, but if it was so dull—'

'Emma Brandon and I agreed that there was not a woman who would have been looked at twice if you had been there. We wanted you for a specimen of what is worth seeing. Fancy! it was such a dearth of good looks that they were making a star of Mrs. Finch! It was enough to put one in a rage. I told Theodora at last, since she would have it, there was nothing in the woman but impudence.'

John glanced over his book, and perceived that to Arthur there appeared profanation in the implied comparison of that flashy display of beauty with the pure, modest, tender loveliness, whose every blush and smile, as well as the little unwonted decorations assumed to honour his presence, showed, that its only value was the pleasure it gave to him. His last speech made her tone somewhat of reproof. 'Oh! that must have vexed her, I am afraid. She is very fond of Mrs. Finch.'

'Out of opposition,' said Arthur. 'It is too bad, I declare! That Georgina was well enough as a girl, spirited and like Theodora, only Theodora always had sense. She was amusing then, but there is nothing so detestable as a woman who continues "fast" after marriage.'

'Except a man,' observed John, in a tone of soliloquy. 'She has grown so thin, too!' continued Arthur. 'She used to be tolerably handsome when she was a fine plump rosy girl. Now she is all red cheek-bone and long neck! We are come to a pretty pass when we take her for a beauty!'

Oh! but there is your sister,' said Violet. 'Do tell me how she likes going out. She thought it would be such a penance.'

'All I know is, that at home she is as sulky as a Greenland bear, and then goes out and flirts nineteen to the dozen.'

Arthur!' came the remonstrating voice again, 'how you talk—do you mean that she is silent at home? Is she unhappy? What can be the matter with her?'

'How should I know?'

'Has not she said anything about baby?'

'Not she. Not one of them has, except my father.'

'I thought she would have liked to have heard of baby,' said Violet, in a tone of disappointment; 'but if there is anything on her spirits, perhaps she cannot think about him. I wonder what it can be. It cannot be any—any—'

'Any love affair! No! no! Miss Martindale may break hearts enough, but she will take care of her own, if she has one.'

'Is she so much admired?'

'Of course she is. You do not often see her style, and she talks and goes on at no end of a rate.'

'I remember how she grew excited at the ball, after disliking the prospect.'

'Is this mere general admiration,' asked John, 'or anything more serious?'

'Upon my word, I cannot say. There is no earnest on her part. She will rattle on with a poor fellow one night as if she had eyes for no one else, then leave him in the lurch the next. She cares not a rush for any of them, only wants to be run after. As to her followers, some of them are really smitten, I fancy. There was Fitzhugh, but he is an old hand, and can pay her in her own coin, and that sober-faced young Mervyn—it is a bad case with him. In fact, there is a fresh one whenever she goes out—a Jenny Dennison in high life—but the most bitten of all, I take it, is Lord St. Erme.'

'Lord St. Erme!' exclaimed both auditors in a breath.

'Ay. She met him at that breakfast, walked about the gardens with him all the morning, and my mother wrote to my aunt, I believe, that she was booked. Then at this Bryanstone soiree, the next night, Fitzhugh was in the ascendant—poor St. Erme could not so much as gain a look.'

'So he is in London!' said Violet. 'Do tell me what he is like.'

'Like a German music-master,' said Arthur. 'As queer a figure as ever I saw. Keeps his hair parted in the middle, hanging down in long lank rats' tails, meant to curl, moustache ditto, open collar turned down, black ribbon tie.'

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.