YONGE CHARLOTTE MARY

COUNTESS KATE

Charlotte Yonge

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Yonge C.

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I

"There, I've done every bit I can do! I'm going to see what o'clock it is."

"I heard it strike eleven just now."

"Sylvia, you'll tip up! What a tremendous stretch!"

"Wha-ooh! Oh dear! We sha'n't get one moment before dinner! Oh, horrible! oh, horrible! most horrible!"

"Sylvia, you know I hate hearing *Hamlet* profaned."

"You can't hate it more than having no one to hear our lessons."

"That makes you do it. What on earth can Mary be about?"

"Some tiresome woman to speak to her, I suppose."

"I'm sure it can't be as much her business as it is to mind her poor little sisters. Oh dear! if Papa could only afford us a governess!"

"I am sure I should not like it at all; besides, it is wrong to wish to be richer than one is."

"I don't wish; I am only thinking how nice it would be, if some one would give us a famous quantity of money. Then Papa should have a pretty parsonage, like the one at Shagton; and we would make the church beautiful, and get another pony or two, to ride with Charlie."

"Yes, and have a garden with a hothouse like Mr. Brown's."

"Oh yes; and a governess to teach us to draw. But best of all—O Sylvia! wouldn't it be nice not to have to mind one's clothes always? Yes, you laugh; but it comes easier to you; and, oh dear! oh dear! it is so horrid to be always having to see one does not tear oneself."

"I don't think you do see," said Sylvia, laughing.

"My frocks always *will* get upon the thorns. It is very odd."

"Only do please, Katie dear, let me finish this sum; and then if Mary is not come, she can't scold if we are amusing ourselves."

"I know!" cried Kate. "I'll draw such a picture, and tell you all about it when your sum is over."

Thereon ensued silence in the little room, half parlour, half study, nearly filled with books and piano; and the furniture, though carefully protected with brown holland, looking the worse for wear, and as if danced over by a good many young folks.

The two little girls, who sat on the opposite sides of a little square table in the bay-window, were both between ten and eleven years old, but could not have been taken for twins, nor even for sisters, so unlike were their features and complexion; though their dress, very dark grey linsey, and brown holland aprons, was exactly the same, except that Sylvia's was enlivened by scarlet braid, Kate's darkened by black—and moreover, Kate's apron was soiled, and the frock bore traces of a great darn. In fact, new frocks for the pair were generally made necessary by Kate's tattered state, when Sylvia's garments were still available for little Lily, or for some school child.

Sylvia's brown hair was smooth as satin; Kate's net did not succeed in confining the loose rough waves of dark chestnut, on the road to blackness. Sylvia was the shorter, firmer, and stronger, with round white well-cushioned limbs; Kate was tall, skinny, and brown, though perfectly healthful. The face of the one was round and rosy, of the other thin and dark; and one pair of eyes were of honest grey, while the others were large and hazel, with blue whites. Kate's little hand was so slight, that Sylvia's strong fingers could almost crush it together, but it was far less effective in any sort of handiwork; and her slim neatly-made foot always was a reproach to her for making such boisterous steps, and wearing out her shoes so much faster than the quieter movements of her companion did

—her sister, as the children would have said, for nothing but the difference of surname reminded Katharine Umfraville that she was not the sister of Sylvia Wardour.

Her father, a young clergyman, had died before she could remember anything, and her mother had not survived him three months. Little Kate had then become the charge of her mother's sister, Mrs. Wardour, and had grown up in the little parsonage belonging to the district church of St. James's, Oldburgh, amongst her cousins, calling Mr. and Mrs. Wardour Papa and Mamma, and feeling no difference between their love to their own five children and to her.

Mrs. Wardour had been dead for about four years, and the little girls were taught by the eldest sister, Mary, who had been at a boarding-school to fit her for educating them. Mr. Wardour too taught them a good deal himself, and had the more time for them since Charlie, the youngest boy, had gone every day to the grammar-school in the town.

Armyn, the eldest of the family, was with Mr. Brown, a very good old solicitor, who, besides his office in Oldburgh, had a very pretty house and grounds two miles beyond St. James's, where the parsonage children were delighted to spend an afternoon now and then.

Little did they know that it was the taking the little niece as a daughter that had made it needful to make Armyn enter on a profession at once, instead of going to the university and becoming a clergyman like his father; nor how cheerfully Armyn had agreed to do whatever would best lighten his father's cares and troubles. They were a very happy family; above all, on the Saturday evenings and Sundays that the good-natured elder brother spent at home.

"There!" cried Sylvia, laying down her slate pencil, and indulging in another tremendous yawn; "we can't do a thing more till Mary comes! What can she be about?"

"Oh, but look, Sylvia!" cried Kate, quite forgetting everything in the interest of her drawing on a large sheet of straw-paper. "Do you see what it is?"

"I don't know," said Sylvia, "unless—let me see— That's a very rich little girl, isn't it?" pointing to an outline of a young lady whose wealth was denoted by the flounces (or rather scallops) on her frock, the bracelets on her sausage-shaped arms, and the necklace on her neck.

"Yes; she is a very rich and grand— Lady Ethelinda; isn't that a pretty name? I do wish I was Lady Katharine."

"And what is she giving? I wish you would not do men and boys, Kate; their legs always look so funny as you do them."

"They never will come right; but never mind, I must have them. That is Lady Ethelinda's dear good cousin, Maximilian; he is a lawyer—don't you see the parchment sticking out of his pocket?"

"Just like Armyn."

"And she is giving him a box with a beautiful new microscope in it; don't you see the top of it? And there is a whole pile of books. And I would draw a pony, only I never can nicely; but look here,"—Kate went on drawing as she spoke—"here is Lady Ethelinda with her best hat on, and a little girl coming. There is the little girl's house, burnt down; don't you see?"

Sylvia saw with the eyes of her mind the ruins, though her real eyes saw nothing but two lines, meant to be upright, joined together by a wild zig-zag, and with some peaked scrabbles and round whirls intended for smoke. Then Kate's ready pencil portrayed the family, as jagged in their drapery as the flames and presently Lady Ethelinda appeared before a counter (such a counter! sloping like a desk in the attempt at perspective, but it conveniently concealed the shopman's legs,) buying very peculiar garments for the sufferers. Another scene in which she was presenting them followed, Sylvia looking on, and making suggestions; for in fact there was no quiet pastime more relished by the two cousins than drawing stories, as they called it, and most of their pence went in paper for that purpose.

"Lady Ethelinda had a whole ream of paper to draw on!" were the words pronounced in Kate's shrill key of eagerness, just as the long lost Mary and her father opened the door.

"Indeed!" said Mr. Wardour, a tall, grave-looking man; "and who is Lady Ethelinda!"

"O Papa, it's just a story I was drawing," said Kate, half eager, half ashamed.

"We have done all the lessons we could, indeed we have—" began Sylvia; "my music and our French grammar, and—"

"Yes, I know," said Mary; and she paused, looking embarrassed and uncomfortable, so that Sylvia stood in suspense and wonder.

"And so my little Kate likes thinking of Lady—Lady Etheldredas," said Mr. Wardour rather musingly; but Kate was too much pleased at his giving any sort of heed to her performances to note the manner, and needed no more encouragement to set her tongue off.

"Lady Ethelinda, Papa. She is a very grand rich lady, though she is a little girl: and see there, she is giving presents to all her cousins; and there she is buying new clothes for the orphans that were burnt out; and there she is building a school for them."

Kate suddenly stopped, for Mr. Wardour sat down, drew her between his knees, took both her hands into one of his, and looked earnestly into her face, so gravely that she grew frightened, and looking appealingly up, cried out, "O Mary, Mary! have I been naughty?"

"No, my dear," said Mr. Wardour; "but we have heard a very strange piece of news about you, and I am very anxious as to whether it may turn out for your happiness."

Kate stood still and looked at him, wishing he would speak faster. Could her great-uncle in India be come home, and want her to make him a visit in London? How delightful! If it had been anybody but Papa, she would have said, "Go on."

"My dear," said Mr. Wardour at last, "you know that your cousin, Lord Caergwent, was killed by an accident last week."

"Yes, I know," said Kate; "that was why Mary made me put this black braid on my frock; and a very horrid job it was to do—it made my fingers so sore."

"I did not know till this morning that his death would make any other difference to you," continued Mr. Wardour. "I thought the title went to heirs-male, and that Colonel Umfraville was the present earl; but, my little Katharine, I find that it is ordained that you should have this great responsibility."

"What, you thought it was the Salic law?" said Kate, going on with one part of his speech, and not quite attending to the other.

"Something like it; only that it is not the English term for it," said Mr. Wardour, half smiling. "As your grandfather was the elder son, the title and property come to you."

Kate did not look at him, but appeared intent on the marks of the needle on the end of her forefinger, holding down her head.

Sylvia, however, seemed to jump in her very skin, and opening her eyes, cried out, "The title! Then Kate is—is—oh, what is a she-earl called?"

"A countess," said Mr. Wardour, with a smile, but rather sadly. "Our little Kate is Countess of Caergwent."

"My dear Sylvia!" exclaimed Mary in amazement; for Sylvia, like an India-rubber ball, had bounded sheer over the little arm-chair by which she was standing.

But there her father's look and uplifted finger kept her still and silent. He wanted to give Kate time to understand what he had said.

"Countess of Caergwent," she repeated; "that's not so pretty as if I were Lady Katharine."

"The sound does not matter much," said Mary. "You will always be Katharine to those that love you best. And oh!—" Mary stopped short, her eyes full of tears.

Kate looked up at her, astonished. "Are you sorry, Mary?" she asked, a little hurt.

"We are all sorry to lose our little Kate," said Mr. Wardour.

"Lose me, Papa!" cried Kate, clinging to him, as the children scarcely ever did, for he seldom made many caresses; "Oh no, never! Doesn't Caergwent Castle belong to me? Then you must all come and live with me there; and you shall have lots of big books, Papa; and we will have a pony-carriage for Mary, and ponies for Sylvia and Charlie and me, and—"

Kate either ran herself down, or saw that the melancholy look on Mr. Wardour's face rather deepened than lessened, for she stopped short.

"My dear," he said, "you and I have both other duties."

"Oh, but if I built a church! I dare say there are people at Caergwent as poor as they are here. Couldn't we build a church, and you mind them, Papa?"

"My little Katharine, you have yet to understand that 'the heir, so long as he is a child, differeth in nothing from a servant, but is under tutors and governors.' You will not have any power over yourself or your property till you are twenty-one."

"But you are my tutor and my governor, and my spiritual pastor and master," said Kate. "I always say so whenever Mary asks us questions about our duty to our neighbour."

"I have been so hitherto," said Mr. Wardour, setting her on his knee; "but I see I must explain a good deal to you. It is the business of a court in London, that is called the Court of Chancery, to provide that proper care is taken of young heirs and heiresses and their estates, if no one have been appointed by their parents to do so; and it is this court that must settle what is to become of you."

"And why won't it settle that I may live with my own papa and brothers and sisters?"

"Because, Kate, you must be brought up in a way to fit your station; and my children must be brought up in a way to fit theirs. And besides," he added more sadly, "nobody that could help it would leave a girl to be brought up in a household without a mother."

Kate's heart said directly, that as she could never again have a mother, her dear Mary must be better than a stranger; but somehow any reference to the sorrow of the household always made her anxious to get away from the subject, so she looked at her finger again, and asked, "Then am I to live up in this Court of Chances?"

"Not exactly," said Mr. Wardour. "Your two aunts in London, Lady Barbara and Lady Jane Umfraville, are kind enough to offer to take charge of you. Here is a letter that they sent inclosed for you."

"The Countess of Caergwent," was written on the envelope; and Kate's and Sylvia's heads were together in a moment to see how it looked, before opening the letter, and reading:—"'My dear Niece,'—dear me, how funny to say niece!—'I deferred writing to you upon the melancholy—' oh, what is it, Sylvia?"

"The melancholy comet!"

"No, no; nonsense."

"Melancholy event," suggested Mary.

"Yes, to be sure. I can't think why grown-up people always write on purpose for one not to read them.—'Melancholy event that has placed you in possession of the horrors of the family.'"

"Horrors!—Kate, Kate!"

"Well, I am sure it *is* horrors," said the little girl rather perversely.

"This is not a time for nonsense, Kate," said Mr. Wardour; and she was subdued directly.

"Shall I read it to you?" said Mary.

"Oh, no, no!" Kate was too proud of her letter to give it up, and applied herself to it again. —"'Family honours, until I could ascertain your present address. And likewise, the shock of your poor cousin's death so seriously affected my sister's health in her delicate state, that for some days I could give my attention to nothing else.' Dear me! This is my Aunt Barbara, I see! Is Aunt Jane so ill?"

"She has had very bad health for many years," said Mr. Wardour; "and your other aunt has taken the greatest care of her."

"'We have now, however, been able to consider what will be best for all parties; and we think nothing will be so proper as that you should reside with us for the present. We will endeavour to make a happy home for you; and will engage a lady to superintend your education, and give you all the advantages to which you are entitled. We have already had an interview with a very admirable

person, who will come down to Oldburgh with our butler next Friday, and escort you to us, if Mrs. Wardour will kindly prepare you for the journey. I have written to thank her for her kindness to you.'"

"Mrs. Wardour!" exclaimed Sylvia.

"The ladies have known and cared little about Kate or us for a good many years," said Mary, almost to herself, but in such a hurt tone, that her father looked up with grave reproof in his eyes, as if to remind her of all he had been saying to her during the long hours that the little girls had waited.

"'With your Aunt Jane's love, and hoping shortly to be better acquainted, I remain, my dear little niece, your affectionate aunt, Barbara Umfraville.' Then I am to go and live with them!" said Kate, drawing a long sigh. "O Papa, do let Sylvia come too, and learn of my governess with me!"

"Your aunts do not exactly contemplate that," said Mr. Wardour; "but perhaps there may be visits between you."

Sylvia began to look very grave. She had not understood that this great news was to lead to nothing but separation. Everything had hitherto been in common between her and Kate, and that what was good for the one should not be good for the other was so new and strange, that she did not understand it at once.

"Oh yes! we will visit. You shall all come and see me in London, and see the Zoological Gardens and the British Museum; and I will send you such presents!"

"We will see," said Mr. Wardour kindly; "but just now, I think the best thing you can do is to write to your aunt, and thank her for her kind letter; and say that I will bring you up to London on the day she names, without troubling the governess and the butler."

"Oh, thank you!" said Kate; "I sha'n't be near so much afraid if you come with me."

Mr. Wardour left the room; and the first thing Mary did was to throw her arms round the little girl in a long vehement embrace. "My little Kate! my little Kate! I little thought this was to be the end of it!" she cried, kissing her, while the tears dropped fast.

Kate did not like it at all. The sight of strong feeling distressed her, and made her awkward and ungracious. "Don't, Mary," she said, disengaging herself; "never mind; I shall always come and see you; and when I grow up, you shall come to live with me at Caergwent. And you know, when they write a big red book about me, they will put in that you brought me up."

"Write a big red book about you, Kate!"

"Why," said Kate, suddenly become very learned, "there is an immense fat red and gold book at Mr. Brown's, all full of Lords and Ladies."

"Oh, a Peerage!" said Mary; "but even you, my Lady Countess, can't have a whole peerage to yourself."

And that little laugh seemed to do Mary good, for she rose and began to rule the single lines for Kate's letter. Kate could write a very tidy little note; but just now she was too much elated and excited to sit down quietly, or quite to know what she was about. She went skipping restlessly about from one chair to another, chattering fast about what she would do, and wondering what the aunts would be like, and what Armyn would say, and what Charlie would say, and the watch she would buy for Charlie, and the great things she was to do for everybody—till Mary muttered something in haste, and ran out of the room.

"I wonder why Mary is so cross," said Kate.

Poor Mary! No one could be farther from being cross; but she was thoroughly upset. She was as fond of Kate as of her own sisters, and was not only sorry to part with her, but was afraid that she would not be happy or good in the new life before her.

CHAPTER II

The days passed very slowly with Kate, until the moment when she was to go to London and take her state upon her, as she thought. Till that should come to pass, she could not feel herself really a countess. She did not find herself any taller or grander; Charlie teased her rather more instead of less and she did not think either Mr. Wardour or Mary or Armyn thought half enough of her dignity: they did not scruple to set her down when she talked too loud, and looked sad instead of pleased when she chattered about the fine things she should do. Mr. and Mrs. Brown, to be sure, came to wish her good-bye; but they were so respectful, and took such pains that she should walk first, that she grew shy and sheepish, and did not like it at all.

She thought ease and dignity would come by nature when she was once in London; and she made so certain of soon seeing Sylvia again, that she did not much concern herself about the parting with her; while she was rather displeased with Mary for looking grave, and not making more of her, and trying to tell her that all might not be as delightful as she expected. She little knew that Mary was grieved at her eagerness to leave her happy home, and never guessed at the kind sister's fears for her happiness. She set it all down to what she was wont to call crossness. If Mary had really been a cross or selfish person, all she would have thought of would have been that now there would not be so many rents to mend after Kate's cobbling attempts, nor so many shrill shrieking laughs to disturb Papa writing his sermon, nor so much difficulty in keeping any room in the house tidy, nor so much pinching in the housekeeping. Instead of that, Mary only thought whether Barbara and Lady Jane would make her little Kate happy and good. She was sure they were proud, hard, cold people; and her father had many talks with her, to try to comfort her about them.

Mr. Wardour told her that Kate's grandfather had been such a grief and shame to the family, that it was no wonder they had not liked to be friendly with those he had left behind him. There had been help given to educate the son, and some notice had been taken of him, but always very distant; and he had been thought very foolish for marrying when he was very young, and very ill off. At the time of his death, his uncle, Colonel Umfraville, had been very kind, and had consulted earnestly with Mr. Wardour what was best for the little orphan; but had then explained that he and his wife could not take charge of her, because his regiment was going to India, and she could not go there with them; and that his sisters were prevented from undertaking the care of so young a child by the bad health of the elder, who almost owed her life to the tender nursing of the younger. And as Mrs. Wardour was only eager to keep to herself all that was left of her only sister, and had a nursery of her own, it had been most natural that Kate should remain at St. James's Parsonage; and Mr. Wardour had full reason to believe that, had there been any need, or if he had asked for help, the aunts would have gladly given it. He knew them to be worthy and religious women; and he told Mary that he thought it very likely that they might deal better with Kate's character than he had been able to do. Mary knew she herself had made mistakes, but she could not be humble for her father, or think any place more improving than under his roof.

And Kate meanwhile had her own views. And when all the good-byes were over, and she sat by the window of the railway carriage, watching the fields rush by, reduced to silence, because "Papa" had told her he could not hear her voice, and had made a peremptory sign to her when she screamed her loudest, and caused their fellow-travellers to look up amazed, she wove a web in her brain something like this:—"I know what my aunts will be like: they will be just like ladies in a book. They will be dreadfully fashionable! Let me see—Aunt Barbara will have a turban on her head, and a bird of paradise, like the bad old lady in Armyn's book that Mary took away from me; and they will do nothing all day long but try on flounced gowns, and count their jewels, and go out to balls and operas—and they will want me to do the same—and play at cards all Sunday! 'Lady Caergwent,' they will say, 'it is becoming to your position!' And then the young countess presented a remarkable

contrast in her ingenuous simplicity," continued Kate, not quite knowing whether she was making a story or thinking of herself—for indeed she did not feel as if she were herself, but somebody in a story. "Her waving hair was only confined by an azure ribbon, (Kate loved a fine word when Charlie did not hear it to laugh at her;) and her dress was of the simplest muslin, with one diamond aigrette of priceless value!"

Kate had not the most remote notion what an aigrette might be, but she thought it would sound well for a countess; and she went on musing very pleasantly on the amiable simplicity of the countess, and the speech that was to cure the aunts of playing at cards on a Sunday, wearing turbans, and all other enormities, and lead them to live in the country, giving a continual course of school feasts, and surprising meritorious families with gifts of cows. She only wished she had a pencil to draw it all to show Sylvia, provided Sylvia would know her cows from her tables.

After more vain attempts at chatter, and various stops at stations, Mr. Wardour bought a story-book for her; and thus brought her to a most happy state of silent content, which lasted till the house roofs of London began to rise on either side of the railway.

Among the carriages that were waiting at the terminus was a small brougham, very neat and shiny; and a servant came up and touched his hat, opening the door for Kate, who was told to sit there while the servant and Mr. Wardour looked for the luggage. She was a little disappointed. She had once seen a carriage go by with four horses, and a single one did not seem at all worthy of her; but she had two chapters more of her story to read, and was so eager to see the end of it, that Mr. Wardour could hardly persuade her to look out and see the Thames when she passed over it, nor the Houses of Parliament and the towers of Westminster Abbey.

At last, while passing through the brighter and more crowded streets, Kate having satisfied herself what had become of the personages of her story, looked up, and saw nothing but dull houses of blackened cream colour; and presently found the carriage stopping at the door of one.

"Is it here, Papa?" she said, suddenly seized with fright.

"Yes," he said, "this is Bruton Street;" and he looked at her anxiously as the door was opened and the steps were let down. She took tight hold of his hand. Whatever she had been in her day-dreams, she was only his own little frightened Kate now; and she tried to shrink behind him as the footman preceded them up the stairs, and opening the door, announced—"Lady Caergwent and Mr. Wardour!"

Two ladies rose up, and came forward to meet her. She felt herself kissed by both, and heard greetings, but did not know what to say, and stood up by Mr. Wardour, hanging down her head, and trying to stand upon one foot with the other, as she always did when she was shy and awkward.

"Sit down, my dear," said one of the ladies, making a place for her on the sofa. But Kate only laid hold of a chair, pulled it as close to Mr. Wardour as possible, and sat down on the extreme corner of it, feeling for a rail on which to set her feet, and failing to find one, twining her ankles round the leg of the chair. She knew very well that this was not pretty; but she never could recollect what was pretty behaviour when she was shy. She was a very different little girl in a day-dream and out of one. And when one of the aunts asked her if she were tired, all she could do was to give a foolish sort of smile, and say, "N—no."

Then she had a perception that Papa was looking reprovingly at her; so she wriggled her legs away from that of the chair, twisted them together in the middle, and said something meant for "No, thank you;" but of which nothing was to be heard but "q," apparently proceeding out of the brim of her broad hat, so low did the young countess, in her amiable simplicity, hold her head.

"She is shy!" said one of the ladies to the other; and they let her alone a little, and began to talk to Mr. Wardour about the journey, and various other things, to which Kate did not greatly listen. She began to let her eyes come out from under her hat brim, and satisfied herself that the aunts certainly did not wear either turbans or birds of paradise, but looked quite as like other people as she felt herself, in spite of her title.

Indeed, one aunt had nothing on her head at all but a little black velvet and lace, not much more than Mary sometimes wore, and the other only a very light cap. Kate thought great-aunts must be as old at least as Mrs. Brown, and was much astonished to see that these ladies had no air of age about them. The one who sat on the sofa had a plump, smooth, pretty, pink and white face, very soft and pleasant to look at, though an older person than Kate would have perceived that the youthful delicacy of the complexion showed that she had been carefully shut up and sheltered from all exposure and exertion, and that the quiet innocent look of the small features was that of a person who had never had to use her goodness more actively than a little baby. Kate was sure that this was aunt Jane, and that she should get on well with her, though that slow way of speaking was rather wearisome.

The other aunt, who was talking the most, was quite as slim as Mary, and had a bright dark complexion, so that if Kate had not seen some shades of grey in her black hair, it would have been hard to believe her old at all. She had a face that put Kate in mind of a picture of a beautiful lady in a book at home—the eyes, forehead, nose, and shape of the chin, were so finely made; and yet there was something in them that made the little girl afraid, and feel as if the plaster cast of Diana's head on the study mantelpiece had got a pair of dark eyes, and was looking very hard at her; and there was a sort of dry sound in her voice that was uncomfortable to hear.

Then Kate took a survey of the room, which was very prettily furnished, with quantities of beautiful work of all kinds, and little tables and brackets covered with little devices in china and curiosities under glass, and had flowers standing in the windows; and by the time she had finished trying to make out the subject of a print on the walls, she heard some words that made her think that her aunts were talking of her new governess, and she opened her ears to hear, "So we thought it would be an excellent arrangement for her, poor thing!" and "Papa" answering, "I hope Kate may try to be a kind considerate pupil." Then seeing by Kate's eyes that her attention had been astray, or that she had not understood Lady Barbara's words, he turned to her, saying, "Did you not hear what your aunt was telling me?"

"No, Papa."

"She was telling me about the lady who will teach you. She has had great afflictions. She has lost her husband, and is obliged to go out as governess, that she may be able to send her sons to school. So, Kate, you must think of this, and try to give her as little trouble as possible."

It would have been much nicer if Kate would have looked up readily, and said something kind and friendly; but the fit of awkwardness had come over her again, and with it a thought so selfish, that it can hardly be called otherwise than naughty—namely, that grown-up people in trouble were very tiresome, and never let young ones have any fun.

"Shall I take you to see Mrs. Lacy, my dear?" said Lady Barbara, rising. And as Kate took hold of Mr. Wardour's hand, she added, "You will see Mr. Wardour again after dinner. You had better dress, and have some meat for your tea, with Mrs. Lacy, and then come into the drawing-room."

This was a stroke upon Kate. She who had dined with the rest of the world ever since she could remember—she, now that she was a countess, to be made to drink tea up-stairs like a baby, and lose all that time of Papa's company! She swelled with displeasure: but Aunt Barbara did not look like a person whose orders could be questioned, and "Papa" said not a word in her favour. Possibly the specimen of manners she had just given had not led either him or Lady Barbara to think her fit for a late dinner.

Lady Barbara first took her up-stairs, and showed her a little long narrow bed-room, with a pretty pink-curtained bed in it.

"This will be your room, my dear," she said. "I am sorry we have not a larger one to offer you; but it opens into mine, as you see, and my sister's is just beyond. Our maid will dress you for a few days, when I hope to engage one for you."

Here was something like promotion! Kate dearly loved to have herself taken off her own hands, and not to be reproved by Mary for untidiness, or roughly set to rights by Lily's nurse. She actually

exclaimed, “Oh, thank you!” And her aunt waited till the hat and cloak had been taken off and the chestnut hair smoothed, looked at her attentively, and said, “Yes, you are like the family.”

“I’m very like my own papa,” said Kate, growing a little bolder, but still speaking with her head on one side, which was her way when she said anything sentimental.

“I dare say you are,” answered her aunt, with the dry sound. “Are you ready now? I will show you the way. The house is very small,” continued Lady Barbara, as they went down the stairs to the ground floor; “and this must be your school-room for the present.”

It was the room under the back drawing-room; and in it was a lady in a widow’s cap, sitting at work. “Here is your little Pupil—Lady Caergwent—Mrs. Lacy,” said Lady Barbara. “I hope you will find her a good child. She will drink tea with you, and then dress, and afterwards I hope, we shall see you with her in the drawing-room.”

Mrs. Lacy bowed, without any answer in words, only she took Kate’s hand and kissed her. Lady Barbara left them, and there was a little pause. Kate looked at her governess, and her heart sank, for it was the very saddest face she had ever seen—the eyes looked soft and gentle, but as if they had wept till they could weep no longer; and when the question was asked, “Are you tired, my dear?” it was in a sunk tone, trying to be cheerful but the sadder for that very reason. Poor lady! it was only that morning that she had parted with her son, and had gone away from the home where she had lived with her husband and children.

Kate was almost distressed; yet she felt more at her ease than with her aunts, and answered, “Not at all, thank you,” in her natural tone.

“Was it a long journey?”

Kate had been silent so long, that her tongue was ready for exertion; and she began to chatter forth all the events of the journey, without heeding much whether she were listened to or not, till having come to the end of her breath, she saw that Mrs. Lacy was leaning back in her chair, her eyes fixed as if her attention had gone away. Kate thereupon roamed round the room, peeped from the window and saw that it looked into a dull black-looking narrow garden, and then studied the things in the room. There was a piano, at which she shook her head. Mary had tried to teach her music; but after a daily fret for six weeks, Mr. Wardour had said it was waste of time and temper for both; and Kate was delighted. Then she came to a book-case; and there the aunts had kindly placed the books of their own younger days, some of which she had never seen before. When she had once begun on the “Rival Crusoes,” she gave Mrs. Lacy no more trouble, except to rouse her from it to drink her tea, and then go and be dressed.

The maid managed the white muslin so as to make her look very nice; but before she had gone half way down-stairs, there was a voice behind—“My Lady! my Lady!”

She did not turn, not remembering that she herself must be meant; and the maid, running after her, caught her rather sharply, and showed her her own hand, all black and grimed.

“How tiresome!” cried she. “Why, I only just washed it!”

“Yes, my Lady; but you took hold of the balusters all the way down. And your forehead! Bless me! what would Lady Barbara say?”

For Kate had been trying to peep through the balusters into the hall below, and had of course painted her brow with London blacks. She made one of her little impatient gestures, and thought she was very hardly used—dirt stuck upon her, and brambles tore her like no one else.

She got safely down this time, and went into the drawing-room with Mrs. Lacy, there taking a voyage of discovery among the pretty things, knowing she must not touch, but asking endless questions, some of which Mrs. Lacy answered in her sad indifferent way, others she could not answer, and Kate was rather vexed at her not seeming to care to know. Kate had not yet any notion of caring for other people’s spirits and feelings; she never knew what to do for them, and so tried to forget all about them.

The aunts came in, and with them Mr. Wardour. She was glad to run up to him, and drag him to look at a group in white Parian under a glass, that had delighted her very much. She knew it was Jupiter's Eagle; but who was feeding it? "Ganymede," said Mr. Wardour; and Kate, who always liked mythological stories, went on most eagerly talking about the legend of the youth who was borne away to be the cup-bearer of the gods. It was a thing to make her forget about the aunts and everybody else; and Mr. Wardour helped her out, as he generally did when her talk was neither foolish nor ill-timed but he checked her when he thought she was running on too long, and went himself to talk to Mrs. Lacy, while Kate was obliged to come to her aunts, and stood nearest to Lady Jane, of whom she was least afraid.

"You seem quite at home with all the heathen gods, my dear," said Lady Jane; "how come you to know them so well?"

"In Charlie's lesson-books, you know," said Kate; and seeing that her aunt did not know, she went on to say, "there are notes and explanations. And there is a Homer—an English one, you know; and we play at it."

"We seem to have quite a learned lady here!" said aunt Barbara, in the voice Kate did not like. "Do you learn music?"

"No; I haven't got any ear; and I hate it!"

"Oh!" said Lady Barbara drily; and Kate seeing Mr. Wardour's eyes fixed on her rather anxiously, recollected that hate was not a proper word, and fell into confusion.

"And drawing?" said her aunt.

"No; but I want to—"

"Oh!" again said Lady Barbara, looking at Kate's fingers, which in her awkwardness she was apparently dislocating in a method peculiar to herself.

However, it was soon over, for it was already later than Kate's home bed-time; she bade everyone good-night, and was soon waited on by Mrs. Bartley, the maid, in her own luxurious little room.

But luxurious as it was, Kate for the first time thoroughly missed home. The boarded floor, the old crib, the deal table, would have been welcome, if only Sylvia had been there. She had never gone to bed without Sylvia in her life. And now she thought with a pang that Sylvia was longing for her, and looking at her empty crib, thinking too, it might be, that Kate had cared more for her grandeur than for the parting.

Not only was it sorrowful to be lonely, but also Kate was one of the silly little girls, to whom the first quarter of an hour in bed was a time of fright. Sylvia had no fears, and always accounted for the odd noises and strange sights that terrified her companion. She never believed that the house was on fire, even though the moon made very bright sparkles; she always said the sounds were the servants, the wind, or the mice; and never would allow that thieves would steal little girls, or anything belonging to themselves. Or if she were fast asleep, her very presence gave a feeling of protection.

But when the preparations were very nearly over, and Kate began to think of the strange room, and the roar of carriages in the streets sounded so unnatural, her heart failed her, and the fear of being alone quite overpowered her dread of the grave staid Mrs. Bartley, far more of being thought a silly little girl.

"Please please, Mrs. Bartley," she said in a trembling voice, "are you going away?"

"Yes, my Lady; I am going down to supper, when I have placed my Lady Jane's and my Lady Barbara's things."

"Then please—please," said Kate, in her most humble and insinuating voice, "do leave the door open while you are doing it."

"Very well, my Lady," was the answer, in a tone just like that in which Lady Barbara said "Oh!"

And the door stayed open; but Kate could not sleep. There seemed to be the rattle and bump of the train going on in her bed; the gas-lights in the streets below came in unnaturally, and the noises

were much more frightful and unaccountable than any she had ever heard at home. Her eyes spread with fright, instead of closing in sleep; then came the longing yearning for Sylvia, and tears grew hot in them; and by the time Mrs. Bartley had finished her preparations, and gone down, her distress had grown so unbearable, that she absolutely began sobbing aloud, and screaming, “Papa!” She knew he would be very angry, and that she should hear that such folly was shameful in a girl of her age; but any anger would be better than this dreadful loneliness. She screamed louder and louder; and she grew half frightened, half relieved, when she heard his step, and a buzz of voices on the stairs; and then there he was, standing by her, and saying gravely, “What is the matter, Kate?”

“O Papa, Papa, I want—I want Sylvia!—I am afraid!” Then she held her breath, and cowered under the clothes, ready for a scolding; but it was not his angry voice. “Poor child!” he said quietly and sadly. “You must put away this childishness, my dear. You know that you are not really alone, even in a strange place.”

“No, no, Papa; but I am afraid—I cannot bear it!”

“Have you said the verse that helps you to bear it, Katie?”

“I could not say it without Sylvia.”

She heard him sigh; and then he said, “You must try another night, my Katie, and think of Sylvia saying it at home in her own room. You will meet her prayers in that way. Now let me hear you say it.”

Kate repeated, but half choked with sobs, “I lay me down in peace,” and the rest of the calm words, with which she had been taught to lay herself in bed; but at the end she cried, “O Papa, don’t go!”

“I must go, my dear: I cannot stay away from your aunts. But I will tell you what to do to-night, and other nights when I shall be away: say to yourself the ninety-first Psalm. I think you know it —‘Whoso abideth under the defence of the Most High—’”

“I think I do know it.”

“Try to say it to yourself, and then the place will seem less dreary, because you will feel Who is with you. I will look in once more before I go away, and I think you will be asleep.”

And though Kate tried to stay awake for him, asleep she was.

CHAPTER III

In a very few days, Kate had been settled into the ways of the household in Bruton Street; and found one day so like another, that she sometimes asked herself whether she had not been living there years instead of days.

She was always to be ready by half-past seven. Her French maid, Josephine, used to come in at seven, and wash and dress her quietly, for if there were any noise Aunt Barbara would knock and be displeased. Aunt Barbara rose long before that time, but she feared lest Aunt Jane should be disturbed in her morning's sleep; and Kate thought she had the ears of a dragon for the least sound of voice or laugh.

At half-past seven, Kate met Mrs. Lacy in the school-room, read the Psalms and Second Lesson, and learnt some answers to questions on the Catechism, to be repeated to Lady Barbara on a Sunday. For so far from playing at cards in a bird-of-paradise turban all Sunday, the aunts were quite as particular about these things as Mr. Wardour—more inconveniently so, the countess thought; for he always let her answer his examinations out of her own head, and never gave her answers to learn by heart; "Answers that I know before quite well," said Kate, "only not made tiresome with fine words."

"That is not a right way of talking, Lady Caergwent," gravely said Mrs. Lacy; and Kate gave herself an ill-tempered wriggle, and felt cross and rebellious.

It was a trial; but if Kate had taken it humbly, she would have found that even the stiff hard words and set phrases gave accuracy to her ideas; and the learning of the texts quoted would have been clear gain, if she had been in a meeker spirit.

This done, Mrs. Lacy gave her a music-lesson. This was grievous work, for the question was not how the learning should be managed, but whether the thing should be learnt at all.

Kate had struggled hard against it. She informed her aunts that Mary had tried to teach her for six weeks in vain, and that she had had a bad mark every day; that Papa had said it was all nonsense, and that talents could not be forced; and that Armyn said she had no more ear than an old pea-hen.

To which Lady Barbara had gravely answered, that Mr. Wardour could decide as he pleased while Katharine was under his charge, but that it would be highly improper that she should not learn the accomplishments of her station.

"Only I can't learn," said Kate, half desperate; "you will see that it is no use, Aunt Barbara."

"I shall do my duty, Katharine," was all the answer she obtained; and she pinched her chair with suppressed passion.

Lady Barbara was right in saying that it was her duty to see that the child under her charge learnt what is usually expected of ladies; and though Kate could never acquire music enough to give pleasure to others, yet the training and discipline were likely not only to improve her ear and untamed voice, but to be good for her whole character—that is, if she had made a good use of them. But in these times, being usually already out of temper with the difficult answers of the Catechism questions, and obliged to keep in her pettish feelings towards what concerned sacred things, she let all out in the music lesson, and with her murmurs and her inattention, her yawns and her blunders, rendered herself infinitely more dull and unmusical than nature had made her, and was a grievous torment to poor Mrs. Lacy, and her patient, "One, two, three—now, my dear."

Kate thought it was Mrs. Lacy who tormented her! I wonder which was the worse to the other! At any rate, Mrs. Lacy's heavy eyes looked heavier, and she moved as though wearied out for the whole day by the time the clock struck nine, and released them; whilst her pupil, who never was cross long together, took a hop, skip, and jump, to the dining-room, and was as fresh as ever in the eager hope that the post would bring a letter from home.

Lady Barbara read prayers in the dining-room at nine, and there breakfasted with Kate and Mrs. Lacy, sending up a tray to Lady Jane in her bed-room. Those were apt to be grave breakfasts;

not like the merry mornings at home, when chatter used to go on in half whispers between the younger ones, with laughs, breaking out in sudden gusts, till a little over-loudness brought one of Mary's good-natured "Hushes," usually answered with, "O Mary, such fun!"

It was Lady Barbara's time for asking about all the lessons of the day before; and though these were usually fairly done, and Mrs. Lacy was always a kind reporter, it was rather awful; and what was worse, were the strictures on deportment. For it must be confessed, that Lady Caergwent, though neatly and prettily made, with delicate little feet and hands, and a strong upright back, was a remarkably awkward child; and the more she was lectured, the more ungraceful she made herself—partly from thinking about it, and from fright making her abrupt, partly from being provoked. She had never been so ungainly at Oldburgh; she never was half so awkward in the school-room, as she would be while taking her cup of tea from Lady Barbara, or handing the butter to her governess. And was it not wretched to be ordered to do it again, and again, and again, (each time worse than the last—the fingers more crooked, the elbow more stuck out, the shoulder more forward than before), when there was a letter in Sylvia's writing lying on the table unopened?

And whereas it had been the fashion at St. James's Parsonage to compare Kate's handing her plate to a chimpanzee asking for nuts, it was hard that in Bruton Street these manners should be attributed to the barbarous country in which she had grown up! But that, though Kate did not know it, was very much her own fault. She could never be found fault with but she answered again. She had been scarcely broken of replying and justifying herself, even to Mr. Wardour, and had often argued with Mary till he came in and put a sudden sharp stop to it; and now she usually defended herself with "Papa says—" or "Mary says—" and though she really thought she spoke the truth, she made them say such odd things, that it was no wonder Lady Barbara thought they had very queer notions of education, and that her niece had nothing to do but to unlearn their lessons. Thus:

"Katharine, easy-chairs were not meant for little girls to lounge in."

"Oh, Papa says he doesn't want one always to sit upright and stupid."

So Lady Barbara was left to suppose that Mr. Wardour's model attitude for young ladies was sitting upon one leg in an easy-chair, with the other foot dangling, the forehead against the back, and the arm of the chair used as a desk! How was she to know that this only meant that he had once had the misfortune to express his disapproval of the high-backed long-legged school-room chairs formerly in fashion? In fact, Kate could hardly be forbidden anything without her replying that Papa or Mary *always* let her do it; till at last she was ordered, very decidedly, never again to quote Mr. and Miss Wardour, and especially not to call him Papa.

Kate's eyes flashed at this; and she was so angry, that no words would come but a passionate stammering "I can't—I can't leave off; I won't!"

Lady Barbara looked stern and grave. "You must be taught what is suitable to your position, Lady Caergwent; and until you have learnt to feel it yourself, I shall request Mrs. Lacy to give you an additional lesson every time you call Mr. Wardour by that name."

Aunt Barbara's low slow way of speaking when in great displeasure was a terrific thing, and so was the set look of her handsome mouth and eyes. Kate burst into a violent fit of crying, and was sent away in dire disgrace. When she had spent her tears and sobs, she began to think over her aunt's cruelty and ingratitude, and the wickedness of trying to make her ungrateful too; and she composed a thrilling speech, as she called it—"Lady Barbara Umfraville, when the orphan was poor and neglected, my Uncle Wardour was a true father to me. You may tear me with wild horses ere I will cease to give him the title of— No; and I will call him papa—no, father—with my last breath!"

What the countess might have done if Lady Barbara had torn her with wild horses must remain uncertain. It is quite certain that the mere fixing of those great dark eyes was sufficient to cut off Pa—at its first syllable, and turn it into a faltering "my uncle;" and that, though Kate's heart was very sore and angry, she never, except once or twice when the word slipped out by chance, incurred

the penalty, though she would have respected herself more if she had been brave enough to bear something for the sake of showing her love to Mr. Wardour.

And the fact was, that self-justification and carelessness of exact correctness of truth had brought all this upon her, and given her aunt this bad opinion of her friends!

But this is going a long way from the description of Kate's days in Bruton Street.

After breakfast, she was sent out with Mrs. Lacy for a walk. If she had a letter from home, she read it while Josephine dressed her as if she had been a doll; or else she had a story book in hand, and was usually lost in it when Mrs. Lacy looked into her room to see if she were ready.

To walk along the dull street, and pace round and round the gardens in Berkeley Square, was not so entertaining as morning games in the garden with Sylvia; and these were times of feeling very like a prisoner. Other children in the gardens seemed to be friends, and played together; but this the aunts had forbidden her, and she could only look on, and think of Sylvia and Charlie, and feel as if one real game of play would do her all the good in the world.

To be sure she could talk to Mrs. Lacy, and tell her about Sylvia, and deliver opinions upon the characters in her histories and stories; but it often happened that the low grave "Yes, my dear," showed by the very tone that her governess had heard not a word; and at the best, it was dreary work to look up and discourse to nothing but the black crape veil that Mrs. Lacy always kept down.

"I cannot think why I should have a governess in affliction; it is very hard upon me!" said Kate to herself.

Why did she never bethink herself how hard the afflictions were upon Mrs. Lacy, and what good it would have done her if her pupil had tried to be like a gentle little daughter to her, instead of merely striving for all the fun she could get?

The lesson time followed. Kate first repeated what she had learnt the day before; and then had a French master two days in the week; on two more, one for arithmetic and geography; and on the other two, a drawing master. She liked these lessons, and did well in all, as soon as she left off citing Mary Wardour's pronunciations, and ways of doing sums. Indeed, she had more lively conversation with her French master, who was a very good-natured old man, than with anyone else, except Josephine; and she liked writing French letters for him to correct, making them be from the imaginary little girls whom she was so fond of drawing, and sending them to Sylvia.

After the master was gone, Kate prepared for him for the next day, and did a little Italian reading with Mrs. Lacy; after which followed reading of history, and needle-work. Lady Barbara was very particular that she should learn to work well, and was a good deal shocked at her very poor performances. "She had thought that plain needle-work, at least, would be taught in a clergyman's family."

"Mary tried to teach me; but she says all my fingers are thumbs."

And so poor Mrs. Lacy found them.

Mrs. Lacy and her pupil dined at the ladies' luncheon; and this was pleasanter than the breakfast, from the presence of Aunt Jane, whose kiss of greeting was a comforting cheering moment, and who always was so much distressed and hurt at the sight of her sister's displeasure, that Aunt Barbara seldom reproved before her. She always had a kind word to say; Mrs. Lacy seemed brighter and less oppressed in the sound of her voice; everyone was more at ease; and when speaking to her, or waiting upon her, Lady Barbara was no longer stern in manner nor dry in voice. The meal was not lively; there was nothing like the talk about parish matters, nor the jokes that she was used to; and though she was helped first, and ceremoniously waited on, she might not speak unless she was spoken to; and was it not very cruel, first to make everything so dull that no one could help yawning, and then to treat a yawn as a dire offence?

The length of the luncheon was a great infliction, because all the time from that to three o'clock was her own. It was a poor remnant of the entire afternoons which she and Sylvia had usually disposed of much as they pleased; and even what there was of it, was not to be spent in the way for which

the young limbs longed. No one was likely to play at blind man's buff and hare and hounds in that house; and even her poor attempt at throwing her gloves or a pen-wiper against the wall, and catching them in the rebound, and her scampers up-stairs two steps at once, and runs down with a leap down the last four steps, were summarily stopped, as unladylike, and too noisy for Aunt Jane. Kate did get a private run and leap whenever she could, but never with a safe conscience; and that spoilt the pleasure, or made it guilty and alarmed.

All she could do really in peace was reading or drawing, or writing letters to Sylvia. Nobody had interfered with any of these occupations, though Kate knew that none of them were perfectly agreeable to Aunt Barbara, who had been heard to speak of children's reading far too many silly story-books now-a-days, and had declared that the child would cramp her hand for writing or good drawing with that nonsense.

However, Lady Jane had several times submitted most complacently to have a whole long history in pictures explained to her, smiling very kindly, but not apparently much the wiser. And one, at least, of the old visions of wealth was fulfilled, for Kate's pocket-money enabled her to keep herself in story-books and unlimited white paper, as well as to set up a paint-box with real good colours. But somehow, a new tale every week had not half the zest that stories had when a fresh book only came into the house by rare and much prized chances; and though the paper was smooth, and the blue and red lovely, it was not half so nice to draw and paint as with Sylvia helping, and the remains of Mary's rubbings for making illuminations; nay, Lily spoiling everything, and Armyn and Charlie laughing at her were now remembered as ingredients in her pleasure; and she would hardly have had the heart to go on drawing but that she could still send her pictorial stories to Sylvia, and receive remarks on them. There were no more Lady Ethelindas in flounces in Kate's drawings now; her heroines were always clergymen's daughters, or those of colonists cutting down trees and making the butter.

At three o'clock the carriage came to the door; and on Mondays and Thursdays took Lady Caergwent and her governess to a mistress who taught dancing and calisthenic exercises, and to whom her aunts trusted to make her a little more like a countess than she was at present. Those were poor Kate's black days of the week; when her feet were pinched, and her arms turned the wrong way, as it seemed to her; and she was in perpetual disgrace. And oh, that polite disgrace! Those wishes that her Ladyship would assume a more aristocratic deportment, were so infinitely worse than a good scolding! Nothing could make it more dreadful, except Aunt Barbara's coming in at the end to see how she was getting on.

The aunts, when Lady Jane was well enough, used to take their drive while the dancing lesson was in progress, and send the carriage afterwards to bring their niece home. On the other days of the week, when it was fine, the carriage set Mrs. Lacy and Kate down in Hyde Park for their walk, while the aunts drove about; and this, after the first novelty, was nearly as dull as the morning walk. The quiet decorous pacing along was very tiresome after skipping in the lanes at home; and once, when Mrs. Lacy had let her run freely in Kensington Gardens, Lady Barbara was much displeased with her, and said Lady Caergwent was too old for such habits.

There was no sight-seeing. Kate had told Lady Jane how much she wished to see the Zoological Gardens and British Museum, and had been answered that some day when she was very good Aunt Barbara would take her there; but the day never came, though whenever Kate had been in no particular scrape for a little while, she hoped it was coming. Though certainly days without scrapes were not many: the loud tones, the screams of laughing that betrayed her undignified play with Josephine, the attitudes, the skipping and jumping like the gambols of a calf, the wonderful tendency of her clothes to get into mischief—all were continually bringing trouble upon her.

If a splash of mud was in the street, it always came on her stockings; her meals left reminiscences on all her newest dresses; her hat was always blowing off; and her skirts curiously entangled themselves in rails and balusters, caught upon nails, and tore into ribbons; and though all the repairs fell to

Josephine's lot, and the purchase of new garments was no such difficulty as of old, Aunt Barbara was even more severe on such mishaps than Mary, who had all the trouble and expense of them.

After the walk, Kate had lessons to learn for the next day—poetry, dates, grammar, and the like; and after them came her tea; and then her evening toilette, when, as the aunts were out of hearing, she refreshed herself with play and chatter with Josephine. She was supposed to talk French to her; but it was very odd sort of French, and Josephine did not insist on its being better. She was very good-natured, and thought "Miladi" had a dull life; so she allowed a good many things that a more thoughtful person would have known to be inconsistent with obedience to Lady Barbara.

When dressed, Kate had to descend to the drawing-room, and there await her aunts coming up from dinner. She generally had a book of her own, or else she read bits of those lying on the tables, till Lady Barbara caught her, and in spite of her protest that at home she might always read any book on the table ordered her never to touch any without express permission.

Sometimes the aunts worked; sometimes Lady Barbara played and sang. They wanted Kate to sit up as they did with fancy work, and she had a bunch of flowers in Berlin wool which she was supposed to be grounding; but she much disliked it, and seldom set three stitches when her aunts' eyes were not upon her. Lady Jane was a great worker, and tried to teach her some pretty stitches; but though she began by liking to sit by the soft gentle aunt, she was so clumsy a pupil, that Lady Barbara declared that her sister must not be worried, and put a stop to the lessons. So Kate sometimes read, or dawdled over her grounding; or when Aunt Barbara was singing, she would nestle up to her other aunt, and go off into some dreamy fancy of growing up, getting home to the Wardours, or having them to live with her at her own home; or even of a great revolution, in which, after the pattern of the French nobility, she should have to maintain Aunt Jane by the labour of her hands! What was to become of Aunt Barbara was uncertain; perhaps she was to be in prison, and Kate to bring food to her in a little basket every day; or else she was to run away: but Aunt Jane was to live in a nice little lodging, with no one to wait on her but her dear little niece, who was to paint beautiful screens for her livelihood, and make her coffee with her own hands. Poor Lady Jane!

Bed-time came at last—horrible bed-time, with all its terrors! At first Kate persuaded Josephine and her light to stay till sleep came to put an end to them; but Lady Barbara came up one evening, declared that a girl of eleven years old must not be permitted in such childish nonsense, and ordered Josephine to go down at once, and always to put out the candle as soon as Lady Caergwent was in bed.

Lady Barbara would hardly have done so if she had known how much suffering she caused; but she had always been too sensible to know what the misery of fancies could be, nor how the silly little brain imagined everything possible and impossible; sometimes that thieves were breaking in—sometimes that the house was on fire—sometimes that she should be smothered with pillows, like the princes in the Tower, for the sake of her title—sometimes that the Gunpowder Plot would be acted under the house!

Most often of all it was a thought that was not foolish and unreal like the rest. It was the thought that the Last Judgment might be about to begin. But Kate did not use that thought as it was meant to be used when we are bidden to "watch." If she had done so, she would have striven every morning to "live this day as if the last." But she never thought of it in the morning, nor made it a guide to her actions; or else she would have dreaded it less. And at night it did not make her particular about obedience. It only made her want to keep Josephine; as if Josephine and a candle could protect her from that Day and Hour! And if the moment had come, would she not have been safer trying to endure hardness for the sake of obedience—with the holy verses Mr. Wardour had taught her on her lips, alone with her God and her good angel—than trying to forget all in idle chatter with her maid, and contrary to known commands, detaining her by foolish excuses?

It is true that Kate did not feel as if obedience to Lady Barbara was the same duty as obedience to “Papa.” Perhaps it was not in the nature of things that she should; but no one can habitually practise petty disobedience to one “placed in authority over” her, without hurting the whole disposition.

CHAPTER IV

"Thursday morning! Bother—calisthenic day!—I'll go to sleep again, to put it off as long as I can. If I was only a little countess in her own feudal keep, I would get up in the dawn, and gather flowers in the May dew—primroses and eglantine!—Charlie says it is affected to call sweet-briar eglantine.—Sylvia! Sylvia! that thorn has got hold of me; and there's Aunt Barbara coming down the lane in the baker's jiggeting cart.—Oh dear! was it only dreaming? I thought I was gathering dog-roses with Charlie and Sylvia in the lane; and now it is only Thursday, and horrid calisthenic day! I suppose I must wake up.

'Awake, my soul, and with the sun
Thy daily stage of duty run.'

I'm sure it's a very tiresome sort of stage! We used to say, 'As happy as a queen:' I am sure if the Queen is as much less happy than a countess as I am than a common little girl, she must be miserable indeed! It is like a rule-of-three sum. Let me see—if a common little girl has one hundred happinesses a day, and a countess only—only five—how many has the Queen? No—but how much higher is a queen than a countess? If I were Queen, I would put an end to aunts and to calisthenic exercises; and I would send for all my orphan nobility, and let them choose their own governesses and playfellows, and always live with country clergymen! I am sure nobody ought to be oppressed as Aunt Barbara oppresses me: it is just like James V. of Scotland when the Douglases got hold of him! I wonder what is the use of being a countess, if one never is to do anything to please oneself, and one is to live with a cross old aunt!"

Most likely everyone is of Lady Caergwent's morning opinion—that Lady Barbara Umfraville was cross, and that it was a hard lot to live in subjection to her. But there are two sides to a question; and there were other hardships in that house besides those of the Countess of Caergwent.

Forty years ago, two little sisters had been growing up together, so fond of each other that they were like one; and though the youngest, Barbara, was always brighter, stronger, braver, and cleverer, than gentle Jane, she never enjoyed what her sister could not do; and neither of them ever wanted any amusement beyond quiet play with their dolls and puzzles, contrivances in pretty fancy works, and walks with their governess in trim gravel paths. They had two elder brothers and one younger; but they had never played out of doors with them, and had not run about or romped since they were almost babies; they would not have known how; and Jane was always sickly and feeble, and would have been very unhappy with loud or active ways.

As time passed on, Jane became more weakly and delicate while Barbara grew up very handsome, and full of life and spirit, but fonder of her sister than ever, and always coming home from her parties and gaieties, as if telling Jane about them was the best part of all.

At last, Lady Barbara was engaged to be married to a brother officer of her second brother, James; but just then poor Jane fell so ill, that the doctors said she could not live through the year. Barbara loved her sister far too well to think of marrying at such a time, and said she must attend to no one else. All that winter and spring she was nursing her sister day and night, watching over her, and quite keeping up the little spark of life, the doctors said, by her tender care. And though Lady Jane lived on day after day, she never grew so much better as to be fit to hear of the engagement and that if she recovered her sister would be separated from her; and so weeks went on, and still nothing could be done about the marriage.

As it turned out, this was the best thing that could have happened to Lady Barbara; for in the course of this time, it came to her father's knowledge that her brother and her lover had both behaved disgracefully, and that, if she had married, she must have led a very unhappy life. He caused the

engagement to be broken off. She knew it was right, and made no complaint to anybody; but she always believed that it was her brother James who had been the tempter, who had led his friend astray; and from that time, though she was more devoted than ever to her sick sister, she was soft and bright to nobody else. She did not complain, but she thought that things had been very hard with her; and when people repine their troubles do not make them kinder, but the brave grow stern and the soft grow fretful.

All this had been over for nearly thirty years, and the brother and the friend had both been long dead. Lady Barbara was very anxious to do all that she thought right; and she was so wise and sensible, and so careful of her sister Jane, that all the family respected her and looked up to her. She thought she had quite forgiven all that had passed: she did not know why it was so hard to her to take any notice of her brother James's only son. Perhaps, if she had, she would have forced herself to try to be more warm and kind to him, and not have inflamed Lord Caergwent's displeasure when he married imprudently. Her sister Jane had never known all that had passed: she had been too ill to hear of it at the time; and it was not Lady Barbara's way to talk to other people of her own troubles. But Jane was always led by her sister, and never thought of people, or judged events, otherwise than as Barbara told her; so that, kind and gentle as she was by nature, she was like a double of her sister, instead of by her mildness telling on the family counsels. The other brother, Giles, had been aware of all, and saw how it was; but he was so much younger than the rest, that he was looked on by them like a boy long after he was grown up, and had not felt entitled to break through his sister Barbara's reserve, so as to venture on opening out the sorrows so long past, and pleading for his brother James's family, though he had done all he could for them himself. He had indeed been almost constantly on foreign service, and had seen very little of his sisters.

Since their father's death, the two sisters had lived their quiet life together. They were just rich enough to live in the way they thought the duty of persons in their rank, keeping their carriage for Lady Jane's daily drive, and spending two months every year by the sea, and one at Caergwent Castle with their eldest brother. They always had a spare room for any old friend who wanted to come up to town; and they did many acts of kindness, and gave a great deal to be spent on the poor of their parish. They did the same quiet things every day: one liked what the other liked; and Lady Barbara thought, morning, noon, and night, what would be good for her sister's health; while Lady Jane rested on Barbara's care, and was always pleased with whatever came in her way.

And so the two sisters had gone on year after year, and were very happy in their own way, till the great grief came of losing their eldest brother; and not long after him, his son, the nephew who had been their great pride and delight, and for whom they had so many plans and hopes.

And with his death, there came what they felt to be the duty and necessity of trying to fit the poor little heiress for her station. They were not fond of any children; and it upset all their ways very much to have to make room for a little girl, her maid, and her governess; but still, if she had been such a little girl as they had been, and always like the well-behaved children whom they saw in drawing-rooms, they would have known what kind of creature had come into their hands.

But was it not very hard on them that their niece should turn out a little wild harum-scarum creature, such as they had never dreamt of—really unable to move without noises that startled Lady Jane's nerves, and threw Lady Barbara into despair at the harm they would do—a child whose untutored movements were a constant eye-sore and distress to them; and though she could sometimes be bright and fairy-like if unconstrained, always grew abrupt and uncouth when under restraint—a child very far from silly, but apt to say the silliest things—learning quickly all that was mere head-work, but hopelessly or obstinately dull at what was to be done by the fingers—a child whose ways could not be called vulgar, but would have been completely tom-boyish, except for a certain timidity that deprived them of the one merit of courage, and a certain frightened consciousness that was in truth modesty, though it did not look like it? To have such a being to endure, and more than that,

to break into the habits of civilized life, and the dignity of a lady of rank, was no small burden for them; but they thought it right, and made up their minds to bear it.

Of course it would have been better if they had taken home the little orphan when she was destitute and an additional weight to Mr. Wardour; and had she been actually in poverty or distress, with no one to take care of her, Lady Barbara would have thought it a duty to provide for her: but knowing her to be in good hands, it had not then seemed needful to inflict the child on her sister, or to conquer her own distaste to all connected with her unhappy brother James. No one had ever thought of the little Katharine Aileve Umfraville becoming the head of the family; for then young Lord Umfraville was in his full health and strength.

And why *did* Lady Barbara only now feel the charge of the child a duty? Perhaps it was because, without knowing it, she had been brought up to make an idol of the state and consequence of the earldom, since she thought breeding up the girl for a countess incumbent on her, when she had not felt tender compassion for the brother's orphan grandchild. So somewhat of the pomps of this world may have come in to blind her eyes; but whatever she did was because she thought it right to do, and when Kate thought of her as cross, it was a great mistake. Lady Barbara had great control of temper, and did everything by rule, keeping herself as strictly as she did everyone else except Lady Jane; and though she could not like such a troublesome little incomprehensible wild cat as Katharine, she was always trying to do her strict justice, and give her whatever in her view was good or useful.

But Kate esteemed it a great holiday, when, as sometimes happened, Aunt Barbara went out to spend the evening with some friends; and she, under promise of being very good, used to be Aunt Jane's companion.

Those were the times when her tongue took a holiday, and it must be confessed, rather to the astonishment and confusion of Lady Jane.

"Aunt Jane, do tell me about yourself when you were a little girl?"

"Ah! my dear, that does not seem so very long ago. Time passes very quickly. To think of such a great girl as you being poor James's grandchild!"

"Was my grandpapa much older than you, Aunt Jane?"

"Only three years older, my dear."

"Then do tell me how you played with him?"

"I never did, my dear; I played with your Aunt Barbara."

"Dear me how stupid! One can't do things without boys."

"No, my dear; boys always spoil girls' play, they are so rough."

"Oh! no, no, Aunt Jane; there's no fun unless one is rough—I mean, not rough exactly; but it's no use playing unless one makes a jolly good noise."

"My dear," said Lady Jane, greatly shocked, "I can't bear to hear you talk so, nor to use such words."

"Dear me, Aunt Jane, we say 'Jolly' twenty times a day at St. James's, and nobody minds."

"Ah! yes, you see you played with boys."

"But our boys are not rough, Aunt Jane," persisted Kate, who liked hearing herself talk much better than anyone else. "Mary says Charlie is a great deal less riotous than I am, especially since he went to school; and Armyn is too big to be riotous. Oh dear, I wish Mr. Brown would send Armyn to London; he said he would be sure to come and see me, and he is the jolliest, most delightful fellow in the world!"

"My dear child," said Lady Jane in her soft, distressed voice, "indeed that is not the way young ladies talk of—of—boys."

"Armyn is not a boy, Aunt Jane; he's a man. He is a clerk, you know, and will get a salary in another year."

"A clerk!"

"Yes; in Mr. Brown's office, you know. Aunt Jane, did you ever go out to tea?"

"Yes, my dear; sometimes we drank tea with our little friends in the dolls' tea-cups."

"Oh! you can't think what fun we have when Mrs. Brown asks us to tea. She has got the nicest garden in the world, and a greenhouse, and a great squirt-syringe, I mean, to water it; and we always used to get it, till once, without meaning it, I squirted right through the drawing-room window, and made such a puddle; and Mrs. Brown thought it was Charlie, only I ran in and told of myself, and Mrs. Brown said it was very generous, and gave me a Venetian weight with a little hermit in a snow-storm; only it is worn out now, and won't snow, so I gave it to little Lily when we had the whooping-cough."

By this time Lady Jane was utterly ignorant what the gabble was about, except that Katharine had been in very odd company, and done very strange things with those boys, and she gave a melancholy little sound in the pause; but Kate, taking breath, ran on again—

"It is because Mrs. Brown is not used to educating children, you know, that she fancies one wants a reward for telling the truth; I told her so, but Mary thought it would vex her, and stopped my mouth. Well, then we young ones—that is, Charlie, and Sylvia, and Armyn, and I—drank tea out on the lawn. Mary had to sit up and be company; but we had such fun! There was a great old laurel tree, and Armyn put Sylvia and me up into the fork; and that was our nest, and we were birds, and he fed us with strawberries; and we pretended to be learning to fly, and stood up flapping our frocks and squeaking, and Charlie came under and danced the branches about. We didn't like that; and Armyn said it was a shame, and hunted him away, racing all round the garden; and we scrambled down by ourselves, and came down on the slope. It is a long green slope, right down to the river, all smooth and turfy, you know; and I was standing at the top, when Charlie comes slyly, and saying he would help the little bird to fly, gave me one push, and down I went, roll, roll, tumble, tumble, till Sylvia *really* thought she heard my neck crack! Wasn't it fun?"

"But the river, my dear!" said Lady Jane, shuddering.

"Oh! there was a good flat place before we came to the river, and I stopped long before that! So then, as we had been the birds of the air, we thought we would be the fishes of the sea; and it was nice and shallow, with dear little caddises and river cray-fish, and great British pearl-shells at the bottom. So we took off our shoes and stockings, and Charlie and Armyn turned up their trousers, and we had such a nice paddling. I really thought I should have got a British pearl then; and you know there were some in the breast-plate of Venus."

"In the river! Did your cousin allow that?"

"Oh yes; we had on our old blue checks; and Mary never minds anything when Armyn is there to take care of us. When they heard in the drawing-room what we had been doing, they made Mary sing 'Auld Lang Syne,' because of 'We twa hae paidlit in the burn frae morning sun till dine;' and whenever in future times I meet Armyn, I mean to say,

'We twa hae paidlit in the burn
  Frae morning sun till dine;
We've wandered many a weary foot
  Sin auld lang syne.'

Or perhaps I shall be able to sing it, and that will be still prettier."

And Kate sat still, thinking of the prettiness of the scene of the stranger, alone in the midst of numbers, in the splendid drawing-rooms, hearing the sweet voice of the lovely young countess at the piano, singing this touching memorial of the simple days of childhood.

Lady Jane meanwhile worked her embroidery, and thought what wonderful disadvantages the poor child had had, and that Barbara really must not be too severe on her, after she had lived with such odd people, and that it was very fortunate that she had been taken away from them before she had grown any older, or more used to them.

Soon after, Kate gave a specimen of her manners with boys. When she went into the dining-room at luncheon time one wet afternoon, she heard steps on the stairs behind her aunt's, and there appeared a very pleasant-looking gentleman, followed by a boy of about her own age.

"Here is our niece," said Lady Barbara. "Katharine, come and speak to Lord de la Poer."

Kate liked his looks, and the way in which he held out his hand to her; but she knew she should be scolded for her awkward greeting: so she put out her hand as if she had no use of her arm above the elbow, hung down her head, and said "—do;" at least no more was audible.

But there was something comfortable and encouraging in the grasp of the strong large hand over the foolish little fingers; and he quite gave them to his son, whose shake was a real treat; the contact with anything young was like meeting a follow-countryman in a foreign land, though neither as yet spoke.

She found out that the boy's name was Ernest, and that his father was taking him to school, but had come to arrange some business matters for her aunts upon the way. She listened with interest to Lord de la Poer's voice, for she liked it, and was sure he was a greater friend there than any she had before seen. He was talking about Giles—that was her uncle, the Colonel in India; and she first gathered from what was passing that her uncle's eldest and only surviving son, an officer in his own regiment, had never recovered a wound he had received at the relief of Lucknow, and that if he did not get better at Simlah, where his mother had just taken him, his father thought of retiring and bringing him home, though all agreed that it would be a very unfortunate thing that the Colonel should be obliged to resign his command before getting promoted; but they fully thought he would do so, for this was the last of his children; another son had been killed in the Mutiny, and two or three little girls had been born and died in India.

Kate had never known this. Her aunts never told her anything, nor talked over family affairs before her; and she was opening her ears most eagerly, and turning her quick bright eyes from one speaker to the other with such earnest attention, that the guest turned kindly to her, and said, "Do you remember your uncle?"

"Oh dear no! I was a little baby when he went away."

Kate never used *dear* as an adjective except at the beginning of a letter, but always, and very unnecessarily, as an interjection; and this time it was so emphatic as to bring Lady Barbara's eyes on her.

"Did you see either Giles or poor Frank before they went out to him?"

"Oh dear no!"

This time the *dear* was from the confusion that made her always do the very thing she ought not to do.

"No; my niece has been too much separated from her own relations," said Lady Barbara, putting this as an excuse for the "Oh dears."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.