# YONGE CHARLOTTE MARY

## THAT STICK

Charlotte Yonge

# That Stick

**Yonge C.**

That Stick / C. Yonge — «Public Domain»,

# Содержание

# Charlotte M. Yonge
# That Stick

## CHAPTER I
## HONOURS

'Oh, there's that stick. What can he want?' sighed one of a pair of dignified elderly ladies, in black silk, to the other, as in a quiet country-town street they saw themselves about to be accosted by a man of about forty, with the air of a managing clerk, who came up breathlessly, with a flush on his usually pale cheeks.

'Miss Lang; I beg pardon! May I be allowed a few words with Miss Marshall? I know it is unusual, but I have something unusual to tell her.'

'Nothing distressing, I hope, Mr. Morton,' said one of the ladies, startled.

'Oh no, quite the reverse,' he said, with a nervous laugh; 'in fact, I have unexpectedly come into a property!'

'Indeed!' with great astonishment, 'I congratulate you,' as the colour mounted in his face, pleasant, honest, but with the subdued expression left by long years of patience in a subordinate position.

'May I ask—' began the other sister.

'I hardly understand it yet,' was the answer; 'but I must go to town by the 5.10 train, and I should like her to hear it from myself.'

'Oh, certainly; it does you honour, Mr. Morton.'

They were entering the sweep of one of those large substantial houses on the outskirts of country towns that have a tendency to become boarding-schools, and such had that of the Misses Lang been long before the days of the High School.

'Fortunately it is recreation-time,' said Miss Lang, as she conducted Mr. Morton to the drawing-room, hung round with coloured drawings, in good taste, if stiff, and chiefly devoted to interviews with parents.

'Poor little Miss Marshall!' murmured one sister, when they had shut him in.

'What a loss she will be!'

'She deserves any good fortune.'

'She does. Is it not twenty years?'

'Twenty-two next August, sister.'

Yes, it was twenty-two years since Mary Marshall had been passed from the Clergy Orphan Asylum to be English governess at Miss Lang's excellent school at Hurminster. In that town resided, with her two sons, Mrs. Morton, the widow of a horse-dealing farmer in the late Mr. Marshall's parish. On discovering the identity of the English governess with the little girl who had admired the foals, lambs, and chickens in past times, Mrs. Morton gave invitations to tea. She was ladylike, the sons unexceptionable, and no objection could reasonably be made by the Misses Lang, though the acquaintance was regretted by them.

Mr. Morton, the father, had died in debt and distress, and the eldest son had been thankful for a clerkship in the office of Mr. Burford, a solicitor in considerable practice, and man of business to several of the county magnates. Frank Morton was not remarkable for talent or enterprise, but he was plodding and trustworthy, methodical and accurate, and he had continued in the same position, except that time had made him senior instead of junior clerk. Partly from natural disposition, partly from weight of responsibility, he had always been a grave, steady youth, one of those whom their

contemporaries rank as sticks and muffs, because not exalted by youthful spirits or love of daring. His mother and brother had always been his primary thought; and his recreations were of the sober-sided sort—the chess club, the institute, the choral society. He was a useful, though not a distinguished, member of the choir of St. Basil's Church, and a punctual and diligent Sunday-school teacher of the least interesting boys. To most of the world of Hurminster he was almost invisible, to the rest utterly insignificant. Even his mother was far less occupied with him than with his brother Charles, who was much handsomer, more amusing and spirited, as well as far less contented or easy to be reckoned upon. But there was one person to whom he was everything, namely, little brown-eyed, soft-voiced Mary Marshall.

She felt herself the happiest of creatures when, after two years of occasional evening teas and walks to Evensong at St. Basil's, it was settled that she should become his wife as soon as his salary should be increased, and Charlie be in condition to assist in supporting his mother. Ever since, Mary had rested on that hope, and the privileges it gave. She had loyally informed the Misses Lang, who were scarcely propitious, but could not interfere, as long as their pupils (or they believed so) surmised nothing. So the Sunday evening intercourse became more frequent, and in the holidays, when the homeless governess had always remained to superintend cleaning and repairs, there were many pleasant hours spent with kind old Mrs. Morton, who, if she had ever wished that Frank had waited longer and chosen some one with means, never betrayed it to the girl whom she soon loved as a daughter.

Two years had at first been thought of as the period of patience. Charles had a situation as clerk in a shipping office at Westhaven, a small seaport about twenty miles off, and his mother was designing to go to keep house for him, when he announced that his banns had been asked with the daughter of the captain and part-owner of a small trading vessel of the port.

The Hurminster couple must defer their plans till further promotion; and so far from helping his mother, Charles ere long was applying to her, when in need, for family expenses.

Then came a terrible catastrophe. Charlie had been ill, and in his convalescence was taken on a voyage by his father-in-law. There was a collision in the Channel, and the *Emma Jane* and all on board were lost. The insurance did not cover the pecuniary loss; debts came to light, and nothing was left for the widow and her three children except a seaside lodging-house in which her father had invested his savings.

The children's education and great part of their maintenance must fall on their uncle; and again his marriage must wait till this burthen was lessened. Old Mrs. Morton died; and meetings thus became more difficult and infrequent. Frank had hoped to retain the little house where he had lived so long; but his sister-in-law's demands were heavy, and he found himself obliged to sell his superfluous furniture, and commit himself to the rough attendance of the housekeeper at the office, where two rooms were granted to him.

Thus had year after year gone by, unmarked except by the growth of the young people at Westhaven and the demand of their mother on the savings that were to have been a nest-egg, while gray threads began to appear in Mary's hair, and Frank's lighter locks to leave his temples bare.

So things stood when, on this strange afternoon, Miss Marshall was summoned mysteriously from watching the due performance of an imposition, and was told, outside the door, that Mr. Morton wanted to speak to her.

It was startling news, for though the Misses Lang were kindly women, and had never thrown obstacles in the way of her engagement, they had merely permitted it, and almost ignored it, except when old Mrs. Morton was dying, and they had freely facilitated her attendance. 'Surely something as dreadful as the running down of the *Emma Jane* must have happened!' thought Mary as she sped to the drawing-room. She was a little brown mouse of a woman, with soft dark eyes, smooth hair, and a clear olive complexion, on which thirty-eight years of life and eighteen of waiting had not left much outward trace; for the mistresses were good women, who had never oppressed their underling,

and though she had not met with much outward sympathy or companionship, the one well of hope and joy might at times suffer drought, but had never run dry, any more than the better fountain within and beyond.

In she came, with eyes alarmed but ready to console. 'Oh, Frank, what is it? What can I do for you?'

'It is no bad news,' was his greeting, as he put his arm round her trembling little figure and kissed her brow. 'Only too good.'

'Oh, is Mrs. Charles going to be married?' the only hopeful contingency she could think of.

'No,' he said; 'but, Mary, an extraordinary incident has taken place. I have inherited a property.'

'A property? You are well off! Oh, thank God!' and she clasped her hands, then held his. 'At last! But what? How? Did you know?'

'I knew of the connection, but that the family had never taken notice of my father. As to the rest I was entirely unprepared. My great-grandfather was a younger son of the first Lord Northmoor, but for some misconduct was cast off and proscribed. As you know, my grandfather and father devoted themselves to horses on the old farm, and made no pretensions to gentility. The elder branch of the family was once numerous, but it must have since dwindled till the old lord was left with only a little grandson, who died of diphtheria a short time before his grandfather.'

'Poor old man!' began Mary. 'Then—oh! do you mean that he died too?'

'Yes; he was ill before, and this was a fatal blow. It appears that he was aware that I was next in the succession, and after the boy's death had desired the solicitor to write to me as heir-at-law.'

'Heir-at-law! Frank, do you mean that you are—' she said, turning pale.

'Baron Northmoor,' he answered, 'and you, my patient Mary, will be the baroness as soon as may be.'

'Oh, Frank!'—and there was a rush of tears—'dear Frank, your hard work and cares are all over!'

'I am not sure of that,' he said gravely; 'but, at least, this long waiting is over, and I can give you everything.'

'But, oh!' she cried, sobbing uncontrollably, with her face hidden in her handkerchief.

'Mary, Mary! what does this mean? Don't you understand? There's nothing to hinder it now.'

She made a gesture as if to put him back from her, and struggled for utterance.

'It is very dear, very good; but—but it can't be now. You must not drag yourself down with me.'

'That is just nonsense, Mary. You are far fitter for this than I am. You are the one joy in it to me.'

'You think so now,' she said, striving to hold herself back; 'but you won't by and by.'

'Do you think me a mere boy to change so easily?' said the new lord earnestly. 'I look on this as a heavy burthen and very serious responsibility: but it is to you whom I look to sweeten it, help me through with it, and guard me from its temptations.'

'If I could.'

'Come, Mary, I am forced to go to London immediately, and then on to the funeral. I shall miss the train if I remain another minute. Don't send me away with a sore heart. Tell me that your affection has not been worn out by these weary years.'

'You cannot think so, Frank,' she sobbed. 'You know it has only grown. I only want to do what is best for you.'

'Not another word,' he said, with a fresh kiss. 'That is all I want for the present.'

He was gone, while Mary crept up to her little attic, there to weep out her agitated, uncertain feelings.

'Oh, he is so good! He deserves to be great. That I should be his first thought! Dear dear fellow! But I ought to give him up. I ought not to be a drag on him. It would not be fair on him. I

can love him and watch him all the same; but oh, how dreary it will be to have no Sunday afternoons! Is this selfish? Is this worldly? Oh, help me to do right, and hold to what is best for him!'

And whenever poor Mary had any time to herself out of sight of curious eyes, she spent it in concocting a letter that went near to the breaking of her constant heart.

# CHAPTER II
# HONOURS REFLECTED

On the beach at Westhaven, beyond the town and harbour, stood a row of houses, each with a garden of tamarisk, thrift, and salt-loving flowers, frequented by lodgers in search of cheap sea breezes, and sometimes by families of yachting personages who liked to have their headquarters on shore.

Two girls were making their way to one of these. One was so tall though very slight, that in spite of the dark hair streaming in the wind, she looked more than her fifteen years, and her brilliant pink-and-white complexioned face confirmed the impression. Her sister, keeping as much as she could under her lee, was about twelve years old, much more childish as well as softer, smaller, with lighter colouring and blue eyes. Going round the end of the house, they entered by the back door, and turning into a little parlour, they threw off their hats and gloves. The younger one began to lay the table for dinner, while the elder, throwing herself down panting, called out—

'Ma, here's a letter from uncle. I'll open it. I hope he's not crusty about that horrid low millinery business.'

'Yes, do,' called back a voice across the tiled passage. 'I've had no time. This girl has put me about so with Mrs. Leeson's luncheon that I've not had a moment. Of all the sluts I've ever been plagued with, she's the very worst, and so I tell her till I'm ready to drop. What is it then, Ida?' as an inarticulate noise was heard.

'Ma! ma! uncle is a lord!' came back in a gasp.

'What?'

'Uncle's a lord! Oh!'

'Your uncle! That stick of a man! Don't be putting your jokes on me, when I'm worrited to death!' exclaimed Mrs. Morton, in fretful tones.

'No joke. It's true—Lord Northmoor.' And this brought Mrs. Morton out of the kitchen in her apron and bib, with a knife in one hand and a bunch of parsley in the other. She was a handsome woman, in the same style as Ida, but her complexion had grown harder than accorded with the slightly sentimental air she assumed when she had time to pity herself.

'It is! it is!' persisted Ida, reading scraps from the letter; '"Title and estates devolve on me—family bereavements—elder line extinct."'

'Give me the letter. Oh, you gave me such a turn!' said Mrs. Morton, sinking into a chair.

'What's the row?' said another voice, as a sturdy bright-eyed boy, between the ages of his sisters, came bouncing in. 'I say, I want my grub—and be quick!'

'Oh, Herbert, my dear boy,' and his mother hugged him, 'your uncle is a lord, and you'll be one one of these days.'

'I say, don't lug a man's head off. Who has been making a fool of you?'

'Uncle Frank is Lord Northmoor,' said Ida impressively.

'I say, that's a good one!' and Herbert threw himself into a chair in fits of laughter.

'It is quite true, Herbert,' said his mother. 'Here is the letter.'

A bell rang sharply.

'Bless me! I shall not hear much more of that bell, I hope. Run up, Conny, and say Mrs. Leeson's lunch will be up in a moment, but we were hindered by unexpected news,' said Mrs. Morton, bustling into the kitchen. 'Oh dear! one doesn't know where one is.'

'Let her ring,' said Ida. 'Send her off, bag and baggage! We've done with lodgings and milliners and telegraphs, and all that's low. We shall all be lords and ladies, and ever so rich.'

'Hold hard!' said Herbert, who had got possession of the letter. 'He doesn't say so.'

'He'll be nasty and mean, I daresay,' said Ida. 'What does he say? I hadn't time to see.'

Herbert read from the neat, formal, distinct writing: "I do not yet know what is in my power, nor what means I may be able to command; but I hope to make your position more comfortable and to give my nephew and nieces a really superior education. You had better, however, not take any steps till you hear from me again." There, Ida, lots of schooling, that's all.'

'Nonsense, Bertie; he must—if he is a lord, what are we?'

Hunger postponed this great question for a little while; but dinner had been delayed till the afternoon school hour had passed, and indeed the young people agreed that they were far above going to their present teachers any more.

'We must acquire a few accomplishments,' said Ida. 'Uncle never would afford me lessons on the piano—such a shame; but he can't refuse me now. Dancing lessons, too, we will have; and then, oh, Conny! we will go to Court, and how they will admire us!'

At which Herbert burst out laughing loudly, and his mother rebuked him. 'You will be a nobleman, Herbert, and your sisters a nobleman's sisters. Why should they not go to Court like the best of them?'

'That's all my eye!' said Herbert. 'The governor has got a young woman of his own, hasn't he?'

'That dowdy old teacher!' said Ida. 'Of course he won't marry her now.'

'She will be artful enough to try to hold him to it, you may depend on it,' said Mrs. Morton; 'but I shall take care he knows what a shame and disgrace it would be. Oh no; he will not dare.'

'She is awfully old,' said Ida.

'Not near so old as Miss Pottle, who was married yesterday,' said Constance, who, at the time of her father's death, and at other times when the presence of a young child was felt to be inconvenient at home, had stayed with her grandmother at Hurminster, and had grown fond of Miss Marshall.

'Don't talk about what you know nothing about, Constance,' broke in her mother. 'Your uncle, Lord Northmoor, ain't going to lower and demean himself by dragging a mere school teacher up into the peerage, to cut out poor Herbert and all his family. There's that bell again! I shall go and let Mrs. Leeson know how we are situated, and that I shall give her notice one of these days. Clear the table, girls; we don't know who may be dropping in.'

This done, chiefly by Constance, the sisters put on their hats, and sallied forth with their astounding news to such of their friends as were within reach, and by the time they had finished their expedition they were convinced of their own nobility, and prepared to be called Lady Ida and Lady Constance Northmoor on the spot.

When they came in they found the parlour being prepared for company, and were sent to procure sausages and muffins for tea. Mrs. Morton had, on reflection, decided that it was inexpedient to answer her brother-in-law till she had ascertained, as she said, her just rights, and she had invited to tea Mr. and Mrs. Rollstone and, to Constance's delight, his little daughter Rose, their neighbours a few doors off; but as Rose was attending classes, it had been useless to go to her before.

Mr. Rollstone was a great authority, for he had spent the best part of his life in what he termed the first families of the highest circles. He had been hall boy to a duke, footman to a viscountess, valet to an earl, butler to a right honourable baronet, M.P., and when he had retired on the death of the baronet and marriage with the housekeeper he had brought away a red volume, by name *Burke's Peerage*, by which, as well as by his previous knowledge, he was enabled to serve as an oracle respecting all owners of yachts worthy of consideration. If their names were not recorded in that book, he scorned them as '*parvenoos*,' however perfect their vessels might be in the eyes of mariners. The edition was indeed a quarter of a century old, but he had kept it up to date, by marking in neatly all the births, deaths, and marriages from the *Gazette*—his daily study. His daughter, a nice, modest-looking girl of fourteen, Constance's chief friend, came too.

His wife was detained by her lodgers, but when he rolled in, with the book under his arm, there was a certain resemblance between himself and it, for both were broad and slightly dilapidated—the

one from gout, the other from wear, and the red cover had faded into a nondescript whity-brown, or browny-white, not unlike the complexion of a close-shaven face. He was carefully arrayed in evening costume, and was very choice in his language, being, in fact, much grander than all his aristocratic masters rolled into one; so that though Mrs. Morton tried to recollect that she was a great lady and he had been a servant, force of habit made her feel his condescension when he held out his puffy white hand; and, with a gracious bend of his yellow-gray head, said, 'Allow me to offer my congratulations, Mrs. Morton. I little suspected my proximity to a lady so nearly allied to the aristocracy.'

'I am sure you are very kind, Mr. Rollstone. I had no notion—Ida can tell you I was quite overcome—though when I came to think of it, my poor, dear Morton always did say he had high connections, but I always thought it was one of his jokes.'

'Then as I understand, Mrs. Morton, the lamented deceased was junior to the present Lord Northmoor?'

'Yes, poor dear! Oh, if he had but lived and been eldest, he would have become his honours ever so much better!'

'And oh, Mr. Rollstone, what are we?' put in Ida breathlessly, while Rose squeezed Constance's hand in schoolgirl fashion.

'Indeed, Miss Ida, I fear I cannot flatter you with any change in your designation. If your respected parent had survived he might have become the Honourable Charles, but only by special grant from Her Majesty. It was so in the case of the Honourable Frances Fordingham, when her brother inherited the title.'

'Then at least I am an Honourable!' exclaimed Mrs. Morton.

'I am afraid not, Mrs. Morton. I know of no precedent for such honours being bestowed on a relict; but as I understand that Lord Northmoor is no longer in his first youth, your son might succeed to the title, and, in that case, his sisters might be'—he paused for a word—'ennobled.'

'Then does not it really make any difference to us?' exclaimed Mrs. Morton.

'That would rest in the bosom of his lordship,' said Mr. Rollstone solemnly.

'I declare it is an awful shame,' burst out Ida, while Constance cooed 'Dear uncle!'

'Hush, hush, Ida!' said her mother. 'Your uncle has always treated us handsomely, and we have every reason to expect that he will continue to do so.'

'He ought to have us to live with him in his house in London, and take us to Court,' said Ida. 'Oh, Mr. Rollstone, is he not bound to do that?'

And Constance breathed, 'How delicious!'

Mr. Rollstone perhaps had his doubts of the figures Mrs. and Miss Morton would cut in society, but he contented himself with saying, 'It may be well to moderate your expectations, Miss Ida, and to remember that Lord Northmoor is not compulsorily bound to consult any interests but his own.'

'If he does not, it is perfectly abominable,' cried Mrs. Morton, 'towards his poor, only brother's children, with Herbert his next heir-apparent.'

'Heir-presumptuous,' solemnly corrected Mr. Rollstone, at which Ida looked at Constance, but Constance respected Rosie's feelings, and would not return her sister's glance, only blushed, and sniggered.

'Heir-apparent is only the eldest son, who cannot be displaced by any contingency.'

'And there's a horrid, little, artful school teacher, who drew him in years ago—before I was married even,' said Mrs. Morton. 'No doubt she will try to keep him now. Most likely she always knew what was going to happen. Cannot he be set free from the entanglement?'

'Oh!' gasped Constance.

'That is serious,' observed Mr. Rollstone gravely. 'It would be an unfortunate commencement to have an action for breach of promise of marriage.'

'She would never dare,' said Mrs. Morton. 'She is as poor as a rat, and could not do it!'

'Well, Mrs. Morton,' said Mr. Rollstone, 'if I may be allowed to tender my poor advice, it would be that you should be very cautious and careful not to give any offence to his lordship, or to utter what might be reported to him in a sinister manner.'

'Oh, I know every one has enemies!' said Mrs. Morton, tossing her head.

After this disappointment there was rather less interest displayed when Mr. Rollstone proceeded to track out and explain the whole Northmoor pedigree, from the great lawyer, Sir Michael Morton, who had gained the peerage, down to the failure of the direct line, tracing the son from whom Francis and Charles Morton were descended. Certainly Miss Marshall must have been wonderfully foresighted if she had engaged herself with a view to the succession, for at the time it began, the last Lord Northmoor had two sons and a brother living! There was also a daughter, the Honourable Bertha Augusta.

'Is she married?' demanded Mrs. Morton.

'It is not marked here, and if it had been mentioned in the papers, I should not have failed to record it.'

'And how old is she?'

'The author of this peerage would never be guilty of the solecism of recording a lady's age,' said Mr. Rollstone gravely; 'but as the Honourable Arthur was born in 1848, and the Honourable Michael in 1850, we may infer that the young lady is no longer in her first youth.'

'And not married? Nearly Fr—Lord Northmoor's age. She must be an old cat who will set her mind on marrying him,' sighed Mrs. Morton, 'and will make him cut all his own relations.'

'Then Mary Marshall might be the better lookout,' said Ida.

'She could never be unkind,' breathed little Constance.

'There is no knowing,' said Mr. Rollstone oracularly; 'but the result of my observations has been that the true high-bred aristocracy are usually far more affable and condescending than those elevated from a lower rank.'

'Oh, I do hope for Miss Marshall,' said Constance in a whisper to Rose.

'Nasty old thing—a horrid old governess,' returned Ida; and they tittered, scarcely pausing to hear Mr. Rollstone's announcement of the discovery that he had entered the marriage in 1879 of the Honourable Arthur Michael to Lady Adela Emily, only daughter of the Earl of Arlington, and the death of the said Honourable Arthur by a carriage accident four years later.

Then Herbert tumbled in, bringing a scent of tea and tar, and was greeted with an imploring injunction to brush his hair and wash his hands—both which operations he declared that he had performed, spreading out his brown hands, which might be called clean, except for ingrained streaks of tar. Mr. Rollstone tried to console his mother by declaring that it was aristocratic to know how to handle the ropes; and Herbert, sitting among the girls, began, while devouring sausages, to express his intention of having a yacht, in which Rose should be taken on a voyage. No, not Ida; she would only make a fool of herself on board; and besides, she had such horrid sticking-out ears, with a pull at them, which made her scream, and her mother rebuke him; while Mr. Rollstone observed that the young gentleman had much to learn if he was to conform to aristocratic manners, and Herbert under his breath hung aristocratic manners, and added that he was not to be bored, at any rate, till he was a lord; and then to salve any shock to his visitor, proceeded to say that his yacht should be the *Rose*, and invite her to a voyage.

'Certainly not till you can behave yourself,' replied Rose; and there was a general titter among the young people.

# CHAPTER III
# WHAT IS HONOUR?

'Here is a bit of news for you,' said Sir Edward Kenton, as, after a morning of work with his agent, both came in to the family luncheon. 'Mr. Burford tells me that the Northmoor title has descended on his agent, Morton.'

'That stick!' exclaimed George, the son and heir.

'Not altogether a stick, Mr. Kenton,' said the bald-headed gentlemanly agent. 'He is very worthy and industrious!'

Frederica Kenton and her brother looked at each other as if this character were not inconsistent with that of a stick.

'Poor man!' said their mother. 'Is it not a great misfortune to him?'

'I should think him sensible and methodical,' said Sir Edward. 'By the way, did you not tell me that it was his diligence that discovered the clause to which our success was owing in the Stockpen suit?'

'Yes, Sir Edward, through his indefatigable diligence in reading over every document connected with the matter. I take shame to myself,' he added, smiling, 'for it was in a letter that I had read and put aside, missing that passage.'

'Then I am under great obligations to him?' said Sir Edward.

'I could also tell of what only came to my knowledge many years later, and not through himself, of attempts made to tamper with his integrity, and gain private information from him which he had steadily baffled.'

'There must be much in him,' said Lady Kenton, 'if only he is not spoilt!'

'I am afraid he is heavily weighted,' said Mr. Burford. 'His brother's widow and children are almost entirely dependent on him, more so, in my opinion, than he should have allowed.'

'Exactly what I should expect from such a sheep,' said George Kenton.

'There is this advantage,' said the lawyer, 'it has prevented his marrying.'

'At least that fatal step has been averted,' said the lady, smiling.

'But unluckily there is an entanglement, an endless engagement to a governess at Miss Lang's.'

'Oh,' cried Freda, who once, during a long absence of the family abroad, had been disposed of at Miss Lang's, 'there was always a kind of whisper among us that Miss Marshall was engaged, though it was high treason to be supposed to know.'

'Was that the one you called Creepmouse?' asked her brother.

'George, you should not bring up old misdeeds! She was a harmless old thing. I believe the tinies were very fond of her, but we elders had not much to do with her, only we used to think her horridly particular.'

'Does that mean conscientious?' asked her father.

'Perhaps it does; and though I was rather a goose then, I really believe she was very kind, and did not want to be tiresome.'

'A lady?' asked her mother.

'I suppose so, but she was so awfully quiet there was no knowing.'

'Poor thing!' observed Lady Kenton, in a tone of commiseration.

'I think Morton told me that she was a clergy-orphan,' said Mr. Burford, 'and considered her as rather above him, for his father was a ruined farmer and horse-breeder, and I only took him into my office out of respect for his mother, though I never had a better bargain in my life. Of course, however, this unlucky engagement cannot stand.'

'Indeed!' said the Baronet drily. 'Would you have him begin his career with an act of baseness?'

'No—no, Sir Edward, I did not mean—' said Mr. Burford, rather abashed; 'but the lady might be worked on to resign her pretensions, since persistence might not be for the happiness of either party; and he really ought to marry a lady of fortune, say his cousin, Miss Morton, for I understand that the Northmoor property was never considerable. The late Mr. Morton was very extravagant, and there are heavy burthens on the estate, by the settlement on his widow, Lady Adela, and on the late Lord's daughter. Miss Lang tells me likewise that Miss Marshall is full of doubts and scruples, and is almost persuaded that it is incumbent on her to drop the engagement at any cost to herself. She is very conscientious!'

'Poor thing!' sighed more than one voice.

'It is a serious question,' continued the solicitor, 'and I own that I think it would be better for both if she were induced to release him.'

'Has she no relations of her own?'

'None that I ever heard of. She has always spent her holidays at Miss Lang's.'

'Well, Mr. Burford,' exclaimed Freda, 'I think you are frightfully cruel to my poor little Creep-mouse.'

'Nay, Freda,' said her mother; 'all that Mr. Burford is considering is whether it would be for the happiness or welfare of either to be raised to a position for which she is not prepared.'

'I thought you were on her side, mother.'

'There are no sides, Freda,' said her father reprovingly. 'The whole must rest with the persons chiefly concerned, and no one ought to interfere or influence them in either direction.' Having thus rebuked Mr. Burford quite as much as his daughter, he added, 'Where is Lord Northmoor now?'

'He wrote to me from Northmoor after the funeral, Sir Edward, saying that he would return on Saturday. Of course, though three months' notice would be due, I should not expect it, as I told him at first; but he assures me that he will not leave me till my arrangements for supplying his place are complete, and he will assist me as usual.'

'It is very proper of him,' said Sir Edward.

'It will be awkward in some ways,' said Mr. Burford. 'Yet I do not know what I could otherwise have done, he had become so necessary to me.'

'Stick or no stick,' was the family comment of the Kentons, 'there must be something in the man, if only his head is not turned.'

'Which,' observed Sir Edward, 'is not possible to a stick with a real head, but only too easy to a sham one.'

# CHAPTER IV
# HONOURS WANING

'And who is the man?' So asked a lady in deep mourning of another still more becraped, as they sat together in the darkened room of a Northmoor house on the day before the funeral.

The speaker had her bonnet by her side, and showed a kindly, clever, middle-aged face. She was Mrs. Bury, a widow, niece of the late Lord; the other was his daughter, Bertha Morton, a few years younger. She was not tearful, but had dark rings round her eyes, and looked haggard and worn.

'The man? I never heard of him till this terrible loss of poor little Mikey.'

'Then did he put in a claim?'

'Oh no, but Hailes knew about him, and so, indeed, did my father. It seems that three generations ago there was a son who followed the instincts of our race further than usual, and married a jockey's daughter, or something of that sort. He was set up in a horse-breeding farm and cut the connection; but it seems that there was always a sort of communication of family events, so that Hailes knew exactly where to look for an heir.'

'Not a jockey!'

'Oh no, nothing so diverting. That would be fun!' Bertha said, with a laugh that had no merriment in it. 'He is a clerk—an attorney's clerk! What do you think of that, Lettice?'

'Better than the jockey.'

'Oh, very respectable, they say'—with a sound of disgust.

'Is he young?'

'No; caught early, something might be done with him, but there's not that hope. He is not much less than forty. Fancy a creature that has pettifogged, as an underling too, all his life.'

'Married?'

'Thank goodness, no, and all the mammas in London and in the country will be running after him. Not that he will be any great catch, for of course he has nothing—and the poor place will be brought to a low ebb.'

'And what do you mean to do, Birdie?'

'Get out of sight of it all as fast as possible! Forget that horses ever existed except as means of locomotion,' and Bertha got up and walked towards the window as if restless with pain, then came back.

'I shall get rid of all I can—and come to live as near as I can to Whitechapel, and slum! I'm free now.' Then looking at her cousin's sorrowful, wistful face, 'Work, work, work, that's all that's good for me. Soberly, Lettice, this is my plan,' she added, sitting down again. 'I know how it all is left. This new man is to have enough to go on upon, so as not to be too beggarly and bring the title into contempt. He is only coming for to-morrow, having to wind up his business; but I shall stay on till he comes back, and settle what to do with the things here. Adela and I have our choice of them, and don't want to leave the place too bare. Then I shall sell the London house, and all the rest of the encumbrances, and set up for myself.'

'Not with Adela?'

'Oh no; Adela means to stick by the old place, and I couldn't do that for a constancy—oh no,' with a shudder.

'Does she?' in some wonder.

'Her own people don't want her. The Arlingtons are with her now, but I fancy she would rather be sitting with us—or alone best of all, poor dear. You see, she is a mixture of the angel that is too much for some people. How she got it I don't know, not among us, I should think, though she came to us straight out of the schoolroom, or I fancy she would never have come at all. But oh, Lettice, if

you could have seen her how patient she has been throughout with my father, reading him all about every race, just because she thought it was less gall and wormwood to her than to me, and going out to the stables to satisfy him about his dear Night Hawk, and all the rest of it. When she was away for that fortnight over poor little Michael, I found to the full what she had been, and then after that, back she comes again, as white as a sheet, but all she ever was to my father, and more wonderful than all, setting herself to reconcile him to the notion of this new heir of his—and I do believe, if my father had not so suddenly grown worse, she would have made us have him up to be introduced—all out of rectitude and duty, you know, for Adela is the shyest of mortals, and recoils by nature from the underbred far more than we do. In fact, I rather like it. It gives me a sensation. I had ten times rather this man were a common sailor, or a tinker, than just a stupid stick of a clerk!'

'Then Adela means to stay at the Dower House?'

'Yes, she has rooted herself there by all her love to her poor people, and I fancy, too, that she does not want to bring Amice up among all the Arlington children, who are not after her pattern, so she intends to bear the brunt of it, and not leave Northmoor, unless the new-comers turn out unbearable.'

'She goes away with her brother now.'

'Oh yes, she must, and Lord Arlington is fond of her in a way! Can't you stay on with me, Lettice?'

'I wish I could, my dear Birdie, but I am anxious about Mary; I don't think I must stay later than Sunday.'

'Yes; you are too devoted a mother for me to absorb. Never mind, you will be in London, and I shall soon be within reach of you. You are a comfortable person, Lettice.'

# CHAPTER V
# THE PEER

Poor Miss Lang! After all her care that her young pupils' heads should not be turned by folly about marriage and noblemen, the very event she had always viewed as most absurdly improbable had really occurred, and it was impossible to keep it a secret; though Miss Marshall did her very best to appear as usual, heard lessons with her accustomed diligence, conducted the daily exercises, watched over the instructions by masters, and presided over the needlework. But she grew whiter, more pinched, and her little face more mouse-like every day, and the elder girls whispered fancies about her. 'She had no doubt heard that Lord Northmoor had broken it off!'—'A little poky attorney's clerk, of course he would.'—'Poor dear thing, she will go into a consumption! Didn't you hear her cough last night?'—'And then we'll all throw wreaths into her grave!'—'Oh, that was only Elsie Harris!'—'Nonsense, Mabel, I'm sure it was her, poor thing. Prenez garde, la vieille Dragonne vient.'

That Lord Northmoor was to come back by the mail train was known, and Miss Lang had sent a polite note to invite him to afternoon tea on the Sunday. The church to which he had been for many years devoted was a district one, and Miss Lang's establishment had their places in the old parish church, so there was not much chance of meeting in the morning, though one pupil observed to another that 'she should think him a beast if they did not meet him on the way to church.'

It is to be feared that she had to form this opinion, but on the other hand, by the early dinner-time, tidings pervaded the school that Lord Northmoor had been at St. Basil's, and sung in his surplice just as if nothing had happened! The more sensational party of girls further averred that he had been base enough to walk thither with Miss Burford, and that Miss Marshall had been crying all church time. Whether this was true or not, it was certain that she ate scarcely any dinner, and that Miss Lang insisted on administering a glass of wine.

Moreover, when dinner was finally over, she quietly crept up to her own room, and resumed her church-going bonnet—a little black net, with a long-enduring bunch of violets. Then she knelt down and entreated, 'Oh, show me Thy will, and give me strength and judgment to do that which may be best for him, and may neither of us be beguiled by the world or by ambition.'

Then she peeped out to make sure that the coast was clear—not that she was not quite free to go where she pleased, but she dreaded eyes and titters—out at the door, to the corner of the lane where for many a Sunday afternoon there had been a quiet tryste and walk. Her heart beat so as almost to choke her, and she hardly durst raise her eyes to see if the accustomed figure awaited her.

Was it the accustomed figure? Her eyes dazzled so under her little holland parasol that she could hardly see, and though there was a movement towards her, she felt unable to look up till she heard the words, 'Mary, at last!' and felt the clasp of the hand.

'Oh, Frank—I mean—'

'You mean Frank, your own Frank; nothing else to you.'

'Ought you?' And as she murmured she looked up. It was the same, but still a certain change was there, almost indescribable, but still to be felt, as if a line of toil and weariness had passed from the cheek. The quiet gray eyes were brighter and more eager, the bearing as if ten years had been taken from the forty, and though Mary did not perceive the details, the dress showing that his mourning had not come from the country town tailor and outfitter, even the soft hat a very different article from that which was wont to replace the well-cherished tall one of Sunday mornings.

'I had not much time,' he said, 'but I thought this would be of the most use,' and he began clasping on her arm a gold bracelet with a tiny watch on it. 'I thought you would like best to keep our old ring.'

'If—if I ought to keep it at all,' she faltered.

'Now, Mary, I will not have an afternoon spoilt by any folly of that sort,' he said.

'Is it folly? Nay, listen. Should you not get on far far better without such a poor little stupid thing as I am?'

'I always thought I was the stupid one.'

'You—but you are a man.'

'So much the worse!'

'Yes; but, Frank, don't you see what I mean? This thing has come to you, and you can't help it, and you are descended from these people really; but it would be choice for me, and I could not bear to feel that you were ashamed of me.'

'Never!' he exclaimed. 'Look here, Mary. What should I do without you to come back to and be at rest with? All the time I was talking to those ladies and going through those fine rooms, I was thinking of the one comfort I should have when I have you all to myself. See,' he added, going over the arguments that he had no doubt prepared, 'it is not as if you were like poor Emma. You are a lady all over, and have always lived with ladies; and yet you are not too grand for me. Think what you would leave me to—to be wretched by myself, or else— I could never be at home with those high-bred folk. I felt it every moment, though Miss Morton was very kind, and even wanted me to call her Birdie. I *did* feel thankful I could tell her I was engaged.'

'You did!'

'Yes; and she was very kind, and said she was glad of it, and hoped soon to know you.'

'Oh, Frank dear, I am sure no one ever was more really noble-hearted than you,' she almost sobbed; 'you know how I shall always feel it; but yet, but yet I can't help thinking you ought to leave it a little more unsettled till you have looked about a little and seen whether I should be a very great disadvantage to you.'

'Seen whether I could find such a dear, unselfish little woman, eh? No, no, Mary, put all that out of your head. We have not loved one another for twenty years for a trumpery title to come between us now! And you need not fear being too well off for the position. The agent, Hailes, has been continually apologising to me for the smallness of the means. He says either we must have no house in London, or else let Northmoor. He cannot tell me yet exactly what income we shall have, but the farms don't let well, and there is not much ready money.'

'Every one says you ought to marry a lady of fortune.'

'My dear Mary, to what would you condemn me? What sort of lady of fortune do you think would take an old stick like me for the sake of being my Lady? I really shall begin to believe you are tired of it.'

'Stick! oh no, no. Staff, if'—and the manner in which she began to cling was answer full and complete; indeed, as she saw that her resistance had begun to hurt him as much as herself, she felt herself free to throw herself into the interests, and ask, 'Is Northmoor a very nice place?'

'Not so pretty as Cotes Kenton outside. A great white house, with a portico for carriages to drive under, and not kept up very well, patches of plaster coming off; but there is a beautiful view over the woods, with a purple moor beyond.'

'And inside?'

'Well, rather dreary, waiting for you to make it homelike. They have not lived there much for some time past. Lady Adela has lived in the Dower House, and will continue there.'

'Did you see much of them?'

'Not Lady Adela. Poor lady, she had her own relations with her. She had not by any means recovered the loss of her little boy, and I can quite understand that it must have been too trying for her to see me in his place. I understand from Hailes—'

'Your Mr. Burford,' said Mary, smiling.

'That she is a very refined, rather exclusive and domestic lady, devoted to her little girl, and extremely kind to the poor. Indeed, so is Miss Morton, but she prefers the London poor, and is

altogether rather flighty, and what Hailes calls an unconventional young lady. There was a very nice lady with her, Mrs. Bury, the daughter of a brother of the late Lord, a widow, and very kind and friendly. Both were very good-natured, Miss Morton always acted hostess, and talked continually.'

'About her father?'

'Oh no, I do not think he had been a very affectionate father, and their habits and tastes had been very different. Lady Adela seems to have latterly been more to him. Miss Morton was chiefly concerned to advise me about politics and social questions, and how to deal with the estate and the tenants.'

He seemed somewhat to shudder at the recollection, and Mary certainly conceived a dread of the ladies of Northmoor. It was further elicited that he meant to help Mr. Burford through all the work and arrangements consequent on his own succession, indeed, to remain at his post either till a successor was found, or the junior sufficiently indoctrinated to take the place. Of course, as he said, six months' notice was due, but Mr. Burford has waived this. During this time he meant to go to see 'poor Emma' at Westhaven, but it was not an expedition he seemed much to relish, and he wished to defer it till he could definitely tell what it would be in his power to do for her and her children, for whose education he was really anxious, rejoicing that they were still young enough to be moulded.

Then came the tea at Miss Lang's—a stately meal, when the two ladies were grand; Lord Northmoor became shy and frozen, monosyllabic, and only spasmodically able to utter; and Mary felt it in all her nerves and subsided into her smallest self, under the sense that nobody ever would do him justice.

# CHAPTER VI
# THE WEIGHT OF HONOURS

The next was a fortnight of strange and new experiences. Lord Northmoor spent most of his days over the papers in the office, so much his usual self, that Mr. Burford generally forgot, and called to him as 'Morton' so naturally that after the first the other clerks left off sniggering.

There Sir Edward called on him, and in an interview in his sitting-room at the office asked him to a quiet dinner, together with the solicitor; but this was hardly a success, for Mr. Burford, being at home with the family, did all the talking, and Frank could not but feel in the presence of his master, and had not a word to say for himself, especially as George and Freda looked critical, and as if 'That stick' was in their minds, if not on their lips. The only time when he approached a thaw was when in the hot summer evening Lady Kenton made him her companion in a twilight stroll on the terraces, when he looked at the roses with delight, and volunteered a question about the best sorts, saying that the garden at Northmoor had been much neglected, and he wanted to have it in good order, 'that is'—blushing and correcting himself—'if we can live there.'

Lady Kenton noted the 'we' and was sorry to be here interrupted. 'We shall do nothing with him till we get him alone,' she said. 'We must have him apart from Mr. Burford.'

Before this, however, they had to meet him at a very splendid party, given with all the resources of the Burford family at their villa, when the county folks, who had no small curiosity to see the new peer, were invited in full force, and the poor peer felt capable of fewer words than ever to throw at them.

Lady Kenton ventured on asking Mrs. Burford to introduce her to Miss Marshall, taking such presence for granted.

'Oh, Lady Kenton, really now I did not think that foolish affair should be encouraged. It is such an unfortunate thing for him; and as Miss Lang and I agreed, it would be so much better for both of them if it were given up.'

'Is there anything against her?'

'Oh no, not at all; only that, poor thing, she is quite unfitted for the position, and between ourselves, in the condition of the property, it is really incumbent on his Lordship to marry a lady of fortune. At his age he cannot afford romance,' she added with a laugh, being in fact rather inferior to her husband in tone, or perhaps in manners. Indeed, she was of all others the person who most shrivelled up the man whom she had always treated like a poor dependent, till her politeness became still more embarrassing. Among all the party, Sir Edward and Lady Kenton were those with whom he was most nearly at ease, for they had nothing to revoke in their manners towards him, and could, without any change, treat him as an equal whom they respected; nor did they try to force him forward into general conversation—as did his host—with the best intentions.

Lady Kenton, under cover of Miss Burford's piano, asked him whether she might call on Miss Marshall, and saw him flush with gratitude and pleasure, as he answered, 'It will be very kind in you.'

Lady Kenton knew enough of the ways of the school to understand when to make her visit, so as to have a previous conversation with Miss Lang, whom of course she already knew. That lady received her in one of the drawing-rooms, the folding doors into the other were shut.

'I have told Miss Marshall,' said Miss Lang, 'that the room is always at her service to receive Lord Northmoor, though, in fact, he never comes till after business hours.'

'He is behaving very well.'

'Very honourably indeed; but poor Miss Marshall is in a very distressing position.'

'Indeed! Is she not very happy in his constancy?'

'She is in great doubt and difficulty,' said Miss Lang, 'and we really hardly know how to advise her. She seems sure of his affection, but she shrinks from entering on a position for which she is so unfit.'

'Is she really unfit?'

Miss Lang hesitated. 'She is a complete lady, and as good and conscientious a creature as ever existed; but you see, Lady Kenton, her whole life has been spent here, ever since she was sixteen, she has known nothing beyond the schoolroom, and how she is ever to fulfil the duties of a peeress, and the head of a large establishment, I really cannot see. It might be just misery to her, and to him, too.'

'Has she good sense?'

'Yes, very fair sense. We can trust to her judgment implicitly in dealing with the girls, and she teaches well, but she is not at all clever, and could never shine.'

'Perhaps a person who wanted to shine might be embarrassing,' said Lady Kenton, rather amused.

'Well, it might be so. The poor man is certainly no star himself, but surely he needs some one who would draw him out, and push him forward, make a way in society, in fact.'

'That might not be for his domestic happiness.'

'Perhaps not, but your Ladyship has not seen what a poor little insignificant creature she is—though, indeed, we are both very fond of her, and should be very much relieved not to think we ought to strengthen her scruples. For, indeed,' and tears actually came into the good lady's eyes, 'I am sure that though she would release him for his good, that it would break her heart. Shall I call her? Ah!' as a voice began to become very audible on the other side of the doors, 'she has a visitor.'

'Not Lord Northmoor. It is a woman's voice, and a loud one.'

Presently, indeed, there was a tone that made Lady Kenton say, 'People do scent things very fast. It must be some one wanting to apply for patronage.'

'I am a little afraid it is that sister-in-law of his,' said Miss Lang, lowering her voice. 'I saw her once at the choral festival—and—and I wasn't delighted.'

'Perhaps I had better come another day,' said Lady Kenton. 'We seem to be almost listening.'

Even as the lady was taking her leave, the words were plainly heard—

'Artful, mean-spirited, time-serving viper as you are, bent on dragging him down to destruction!'

# CHAPTER VII
# MORTONS AND MANNERS

'Shillyshally,' quoth Mrs. Charles Morton over her brother-in-law's letter. 'Does he think a mother is to be put off like that?'

So she arrayed herself in panoply of glittering jet and nodding plumes, and set forth by train to Hurminster to assert her rights, and those of her children, armed with a black sunshade, and three pocket-handkerchiefs. She did not usually wear mourning, but this was an assertion of her nobility.

In his sitting-room, wearing his old office coat, pale, wearied, and worried, the Frank Morton, 'who could be turned round the finger of any one who knew how,' appeared at her summons.

She met him with an effusive kiss of congratulation. 'Dearest Frank! No, I must not say Frank! I could hardly believe my eyes when I read the news.'

'Nor I,' said he.

'Nor the dear children. Oh, if your dear brother were only here! We are longing to hear all about it,' she said, as she settled herself in the arm-chair, a relic of his mother.

He repeated what he had told Mary about the family, the Park, and the London house.

'I suppose there is a fine establishment of servants and carriages?'

'The servants are to be paid off. As to the carriages and the rest of the personal property, they go to Miss Morton; but the executors are arranging about my paying for such furniture as I shall want.'

'And jewels?'

'There are some heirlooms, but I have not seen them. How are the children?'

'Very well; very much delighted. Dear Herbert is the noblest boy. He was ready to begin on his navigation studies this next term, but of course there is no occasion for that now.'

'It is a pity, with his taste for the sea, that he is too old to be a naval cadet.'

'The army is a gentleman's profession, if he must have one.'

'I must consider what is best for him.'

'Yes, my Lord,' impressively. 'I am hoping to know what you mean to do for your dear brother's dear orphans,' and her handkerchief went up to her eyes.

'I hope at any rate to give Herbert the education of a gentleman, and to send his sisters to good schools. How are they getting on?'

'Dear Ida, she is that clever and superior that a master in music and French is all she would want. Besides, you know, she is that delicate. Connie is the bookish one; she is so eager about the examination that she will go on at her school; though I would have taken her away from such a low place at once.'

'It is a good school, and will have given her a good foundation. I must see what may be best for them.'

'And, of course, you will put us in a situation becoming the family of your dear brother,' she added, with another application of the handkerchief.

'I mean to do what I can, you may be sure, but at present it is impossible to name any amount. I neither know what income is coming to me, nor what will be my expenses. I meant to come and see you as soon as there was anything explicit to tell you; but of course this first year there will be much less in hand than later.'

'Well,' she said, pouting, 'I can put up with something less in the meantime, for of course your poor dear brother's widow and children are your first consideration, and even a nobleman as a bachelor cannot have so many expenses.'

'I shall not long continue a bachelor,' was the answer, given with a sort of shy resolution.

'Now, Lord Northmoor! You don't mean to say that you intend to go on with that ridiculous affair; when, if you marry at all, it ought to be one who will bring something handsome into the family.'

'Once for all, Emma, I will hear no more on that subject. A twenty years' engagement is not lightly to be broken.'

'A wretched little teacher,' she began, but she was cut short.

'Remember, I will hear no more of this, and' (nothing but despair of other means could have inspired him) 'it is for your own interest to abstain from insulting my future wife and myself by such remonstrances.'

Even then she muttered, 'Very hard! Not even good-looking.'

'That is as one may think,' said he, mentally contrasting the flaunting, hardened complexion before him with the sweet countenance he had never perceived to be pinched or faded; and as he heard something between a scornful sniff and a sob, he added, 'I am wanted in the office, so, if you have no more to say of any consequence, I must leave you, and Hannah shall give you some tea.'

'Oh, oh, that you should leave your poor brother's widow in this way!' and she melted into tears and sobs.

'I can't help it, Emma,' he said, distressed and perplexed. 'They want me about some business of Mr. Claughton's, and I can't keep them waiting. These are office hours, you know. Have some tea, and I will come to you again.'

But Mrs. Emma swallowed her sobs as soon as he was gone, and instead of waiting for the tea, set forth for Miss Lang's. On asking for Miss Marshall she was shown into the drawing-room, where, after she had waited a few minutes, nursing her wrath to keep it warm, the small figure appeared, whom she had no hesitation in accosting thus—

'Now, Miss Marshall, do I understand that you are resolved to attempt thrusting yourself on his Lordship, Lord Northmoor's family?'

Mary, entirely taken by surprise, could only falter, 'I can only do whatever he wishes.'

'That is just a mere pretence. I wonder you are not ashamed to play on his honourable feelings, when you know everything is changed, and that it is absolutely ridiculous and derogatory for a peer of the realm to stoop to a mere drudge of a teacher.'

'It is,' owned Mary; but she went back to her formulary, 'it must be as he wishes.'

'If he is infatuated enough to pretend to wish it, I tell you it is your simple duty to refuse him.'

Whatever might be Mary's own views of her duty, to have it inculcated in such a manner stirred her whole soul into opposition, which was shown, not in words, but in a tiny curve of the lips, such as infuriated her visitor, so that vulgarity and violence were under no restraint, and whether all self-command was lost in passion, or whether there was an idea that bullying might gain the day, Mrs. Morton's voice rose into a shrill scream as she denounced the nasty, mean-spirited viper, worming herself—

The folding doors suddenly opened and in a dignified tone Miss Lang announced, 'Lady Kenton wishes to be introduced to you, Miss Marshall.'

Mary made her little formal bend as well as her trembling limbs would allow her. Her cheeks were hot, her eyes swam, her hand shook as Lady Kenton took it kindly, while Mrs. Morton, too strong in her own convictions to perceive how the land lay, exclaimed, 'Your Ladyship is come for the same purpose as me, to let Miss Marshall know how detrimental and improper it is in her to persist in holding my brother, Lord Northmoor, to the unfortunate engagement she inveigled him into.'

To utter this with moderate coolness cost such an effort that she thought Mr. Rollstone could not have done it better, and was astonished when Lady Kenton replied, 'Indeed, I came to have the pleasure of congratulating Miss Marshall on, if it be not impertinent to say so, a beautiful and rare perseverance and constancy being rewarded.'

'As if she had not known what she was about,' muttered Mrs. Morton, not even yet quite confounded, but as she saw the lady lay another hand over that of still trembling Mary, she added,

‘Well, if that is the case, my lady, and she is to be encouraged in her obstinacy, I have no more to say, except that it is a cruel shame on his poor dear brother’s children, that—that he has made so much of, and have the best right—’ and she began to sob again.

‘Come,’ said Miss Lang, as if talking to a naughty girl, ‘if you are overcome like that, you had better come away.’

Wherewith authoritative habits made it possible to her to get Mrs. Morton out of the room; while Mary, well used to self-restraint, was struggling with choking tears, but when warm-hearted Lady Kenton drew her close and kissed her, they began to flow uncontrollably, so that she could only gasp, ‘Oh, I beg your pardon, my lady!’

‘Never mind,’ was the answer; ‘I don’t wonder! There’s no word for that language but brutal.’

‘Oh, don’t,’ was Mary’s cry. ‘She is *his*, Lord Northmoor’s sister-in-law, and he has done everything for her ever since his brother’s death.’

‘That is no reason she should speak to you in that way. I must ask you to excuse me, but we could not help hearing, she was so loud, and then I felt impelled to break in.’

‘It was very very kind! But oh, I wish I knew whether she is not in the right after all!’

‘I am sure Lord Northmoor is deeply attached—quite in earnest,’ said Lady Kenton, feeling rather as if she was taking a liberty.

‘Yes, I know it would grieve him most dreadfully, if it came to an end now, dear fellow. I know it would break my heart, too, but never mind that, I would go away, out of his reach, and he might get over it. Would it not be better than his being always ashamed of an inferior, incompetent creature, always dragging after him?’

‘I do not think you can be either, after what my daughter and Miss Lang have told me.’

‘You see, it is not even as if I had been a governess in a private family, I have always been here. I know nothing about servants, or great houses, or society, not so much as our least little girl, who has a home.’

‘May I tell you what I think, my dear,’ said Lady Kenton, greatly touched. ‘You have nothing to unlearn, and there is nothing needful to the position but what any person of moderate ability and good sense can acquire, and I am quite sure that Lord Northmoor would be far less happy without you, even in the long-run, besides the distress you would cause him now. It is not a brilliant, showy person that he needs, but one to understand and make him a real home.’

‘That is what he is always telling me,’ said Mary, somewhat cheered.

‘Yes, and he could not help showing where his heart is,’ said the lady. ‘Now the holidays are near, are they not?’

‘The 11th of July.’

‘Then, if you have no other plans, will you come and stay with me? We are very quiet people, but you would have an opportunity of understanding something of the kind of life.’

‘Oh, how very kind of you! Nobody has been so good to me.’

‘I think I can help you in some of the difficulties if you will let me,’ said Lady Kenton, quite convinced herself, and leaving a much happier woman than she had found.

# CHAPTER VIII
# SECOND THOUGHTS

Though Miss Lang was shocked and indignant at Mrs. Morton's violence, she was a wise woman, and felt that it would be better tact not to let such a person depart without an attempt at pacification; so she did her best at dignified soothing, and listened to a good deal of grumbling and lamentation.

She contrived, however, to give the impression that as things stood, Mrs. Morton would be far wiser to make no more resistance, but to consult family peace by accepting Miss Marshall, who, she assured the visitor, was a very kind and excellent person, not likely to influence Lord Northmoor against his own family, except on great provocation.

Mrs. Morton actually yielded so far as to declare she had only spoken for her dear brother-in-law's own good, and that since he was so infatuated, she supposed, for her dear children's sake, she must endure it. Having no desire to encounter him again, she went off by the next train, leaving a message that she had had tea at Miss Lang's. She related at home to her expectant daughter that Lord Northmoor had grown 'that high and stuck-up, there was no speaking to him, and that there Miss Marshall was an artful puss, as knew how to play her cards and get *in* with the quality.'

'I wish you had taken me, ma,' said Ida, 'I should have known what to say to them.'

'I can't tell, child, you might only have made it worse. I see how it is now, and we must be mum, or it may be the worse for us. He says he will do what he can for us, but I know what that means. She will hold the purse-strings, and make him meaner than he is already. He will never know how to spend his fortune now he has got it! If your poor, dear pa had only been alive now, he would never have let you be wronged.'

'But you gave it to them?' cried Ida.

'That I did! Only that lady, Lady Kenton, came in all stuck-up and haughty, and cut me short, interfering as she had no business to, or I would have brought Miss Mary to her marrow-bones. She hadn't a word to say for herself, but now she has got those fine folks on her side, the thing will go on as sure as fate. However, I've done my dooty, that's one comfort; and now, I suppose I shall have to patch it up as best I can.'

'I wouldn't!' said Ida hotly.

'Ah, Ida, my dear, you don't know what a mother won't do for her children.'

A sigh that was often reiterated as Mrs. Morton composed a letter to her brother-in-law, with some hints from Ida on the spelling, and some from Mr. Rollstone on the address. The upshot was that her dear brother and his *fiancée* were to believe her actuated by the purest sense of the duty and anxiety she owed to them and her dear children, the orphans of his dear deceased brother. Now that she had once expressed herself, she trusted to her dear Frank's affectionate nature to bury all in oblivion, and to believe that she should be ready to welcome her new sister-in-law with the warmest affection. Therewith followed a request for five pounds, to pay for her mourning and darling Ida's, which they had felt due to him!

Lord Northmoor did not quite see how it was due to him, nor did he intend to give whatever his dear sister-in-law might demand, but she had made him so angry that he felt that he must prove his forgiveness to himself. Mary had not thought it needful to describe the force of the attack upon herself, or perhaps his pardon might not have gone so far. He sent the note, and added that as he was wanted at Northmoor for a day or two, he would take his nephew Herbert with him.

This was something like, as Mrs. Morton said, a kind of tangible acknowledgment of their relationship and of Herbert as his heir, and it was a magnificent thing to tell all her acquaintances that her son was gone to the family seat with his uncle, Lord Northmoor. She would fain have obtained

for him some instructions in the manners of the upper ten thousand from Mr. Rollstone, but Herbert entirely repudiated listening to that old fogey, observing that after all it was only old Frank, and he wasn't going to bother himself for the like of him.

The uncle was fond of his brother's boy, and had devised this plan partly for the sake of the pleasure it would give, and partly because it was impossible to form any judgment of his character while with the mother. He was a fine, well-grown, manly boy, and when seen among his companions, had an indefinable air of good blood about him. He had hitherto been at a good day-school which prepared boys for the merchant service, and his tastes were so much in the direction of the sea, that it was much to be regretted that at fourteen and a half it was useless to think of preparation for a naval cadetship. He was sent up by train to join his uncle at Hurminster, and the first question after the greeting was, 'I say, uncle, shan't you have a yacht?'

'I could not afford it, if I wished it,' was the answer, while *Punch* was handed over to him, and Lord Northmoor applied himself to a long blue letter.

'Landlubber!' sighed Herbert to himself, with true marine contempt for a man who had sat on an office-stool all his life. 'He doesn't look a bit more of a swell than he used to. It is well there's some one with some pluck in the family.'

# CHAPTER IX
# THE HEIR-PRESUMPTUOUS

Herbert began to be impressed when, on the train arriving at a little country station, a servant in mourning, with finger to his hat, inquired after his Lordship's luggage, and another was seen presiding over a coroneted brougham.

'I say,' he breathed forth, when they were shut in, 'is this yours?'

'It is Miss Morton's, I believe, at present. I am to arrange whether to keep it or not.'

They were driving over an open heath in its summer carpet-like state of purple heather, dwarf gorse, and bracken. Lord Northmoor looked out, with thoughtfulness in his face. By and by there was a gate, a lodge, a curtseying woman, and as they passed it, he said, 'Now, this is Northmoor.'

'Yours, uncle?'

'Yes.'

'My—!' was all Herbert could utter. It semed to his town-bred eyes a huge space before they reached, through some rather scanty plantations, another lodge, and a park, not very extensive, but with a few fine trees, and they thundered up beneath the pillars to what was, to his idea, a palace—with servants standing about in a great hall.

His uncle would have turned one way, but a servant said, 'Miss Morton is in the morning-room, my Lord,' and ushered them into a room where a lady in black came forward.

'You did not expect to find me here still,' she said cordially; 'but Adela is gone to her brother's, and I thought I had better stay for the division of—of the things.'

'Oh, certainly—I am—glad,' he stammered, with a blush as one not quite sure of the correctness of the proceeding. 'I wouldn't have intruded—'

'Bosh! I'm the intruder. Letitia Bury is gone—alas—but,' said she, laughing, 'Hailes is here—staying,' she added to relieve him and to lessen the confusion that amused her, 'and I see you have a companion. Your nephew—?'

'Yes, Herbert, my late brother's son. I would not have brought him if I had known.'

'A cousin,' she said, smiling, and shaking hands with him. 'Boys are my delight. This is quite a new experience.'

Herbert looked up surprised, not much liking to become an experience. He had had less intercourse with ladies than many boys of humbler pretensions, for his mother had always scouted the idea of sending her children to a Sunday-school, and she was neither like his mother's friends nor his preconceived notions. 'There! for want of an introduction, I must introduce myself. Your cousin Bertha, or Birdie, whichever you like best.'

Frank was by no means prepared to say even Bertha, and was in agonies lest Herbert should presume on the liberty given him; but if the boy had been in the palace of Truth, he would have said, 'You old girl, you are awfully old to call yourself Birdie!' For Birdie had been a pet name of Rose Rollstone; and Bertha Morton, though slim and curly-headed, had a worn look about her eyes, and a countenance such as to show her five-and-thirty years, and to the eyes of fourteen was almost antediluvian; indeed, older observers might detect a worn, haggard, strained look. He was somewhat disgusted, too, at the thin rolls of bread-and-butter on the low table, whence she proceeded to hand teacups, as he thought of the substantial meals at home. When they had been conducted to their rooms, and his uncle followed to his, he broke out with his perpetual, 'I say, uncle, is this all the grub great swells have? I'm awfully peckish!'

'That's early tea, my boy,' was the answer, with a smile. 'There's dinner to come, and I hope you will behave yourself well, and not use such expressions.'

'Dinner! that's not such a bad hearing, but I suppose one must eat it like a judge?'

'Certainly; I am afraid I am not a very good model, but don't you do anything you don't see me do. And, Herbert, don't take wine every time the servants offer it.'

At which Herbert made a face.

'Have you got any evening shoes? No! If I had only known that the lady was here! It can't be helped to-day, only wash your face and hands well; there's some hot water.'

'Why, they ain't dirty,' said the boy, surveying them as one to whom the remains of a journey were mere trifles, then, with a sigh, 'It's no end of a place, but you swells have a lot of bores, and no mistake!'

Upstairs Herbert roamed about studying with great curiosity the appliances of the first bedchamber he had ever beheld beyond the degree of his mother's 'first floor,' but downstairs, he was in the mood of the savage, too proud to show wonder or admiration or the sense of awe with which he was inspired by being waited on by the very marrow of Mr. Rollstone, always such grand company at home. This daunted him far more than the presence of the lady, and though his was a spirit not easily daunted, he almost blushed when that personage peremptorily resisted his endeavour to present the wrong glass for champagne, which fortunately he disliked too much at the first taste to make another attempt. Lord Northmoor, for the first time at the foot of his own table, was on thorns all the time, lest he should see his nephew commit some indiscretion, and left most of the conversation to Miss Morton and Mr. Hailes, the solicitor, a fine-looking old gentleman, who was almost fatherly to her, very civil to him, but who cast somewhat critical eyes on the cub who might have to be licked into a shape befitting the heir.

They tried to keep their host in the conversation, but without much success, though he listened as it drifted into immediate interests and affairs of the neighbourhood, and made response, as best he could, to the explanations which, like well-bred people, they from time to time directed to him. He thus learnt that Lady Adela with her little Amice had been carried off 'by main force,' Bertha said, 'by her brother. But she will come back again,' she added. 'She is devoted to the place and her graves—and the poor people.'

'I do not know what they would do without her,' said Mr. Hailes.

'No. She is lady-of-all-work and Pro-parsoness—with all her might'; then seeing, or thinking she saw, a puzzled look, she added, 'I don't know if you discovered, Northmoor, that our Vicar, Mr. Woodman, has no wife, and Adela has supplied the lack to the parish, having a soul for country poor, whereas they are too tame for me. I care about my neighbours, of course, after a sort, but the jolly city sparrows of the slums for me! I long to be away.'

What to say to this Lord Northmoor knew as little as did his nephew, and with some difficulty he managed to utter, 'Are not they very uncivilised?'

'That's the beauty of it,' said Bertha; 'I've spotted my own special preserve of match-girls, newsboys, etc., and Mr. Hailes is going to help me to get a scrumptious little house, whence I can get to it by underground rail. Oh, you may shake your head, Mr. Hailes, but if you will not help me, I shall set my unassisted genius to work, and you'll only suffer agonies in thinking of the muddle I may be making.'

'What does Lady Adela say?' asked Mr. Hailes.

'She thinks me old enough to take care of myself, whatever you do, Mr. Hailes; besides, she knows I can come up to breathe! I long for it!'

The dinner ended by Bertha rising, and proposing to Herbert to come with her. It was not too dark, she said, to look out into the Park and see the rabbits scudding about.

'Ah!' said Mr. Hailes, shaking his head as they went, 'the rabbits ought not to be so near, but there has been sad neglect since poor Mr. Morton's death.'

It was much easier to get on in a *tête-à-tête*, and before long Mr. Hailes had heard some of the perplexities about Herbert, the foremost of which was how to make him presentable for ladies' society in the evening. If Miss Morton's presence had been anticipated, either his uncle would not

have brought him, or would have fitted him out beforehand, for though he looked fit for the fields and woods in male company, evening costume had not yet dawned on his imagination. Mr. Hailes recommended sending him in the morning to the town at Colbeam, under charge of the butler, Prowse —who would rather enjoy the commission, and was quite capable of keeping up any needed authority.

For the future training, the more important matter on which he was next consulted, Mr. Hailes mentioned the name of a private tutor, who was likely to be able to deal with the boy better under present circumstances than a public school could do—since at Herbert's age, his ignorance of the classics on the one hand, and of gentlemanly habits on the other, would tell too much against him.

'But,' said Mr. Hailes, 'Miss Morton will be a very good adviser to you on that head.'

'She is very good-natured to him,' said Frank.

'No one living has a better heart than Miss Morton,' said Mr. Hailes heartily; 'a little eccentric, owing to—to circumstances. She has had her troubles, poor dear; but she has as good a heart as ever was, as you will find, my Lord, in all arrangements with her.'

Nevertheless, Lord Northmoor's feelings towards her might be startled the next morning, when he descended to the dining-room. A screen cut off the door, and as he was coming round it, followed by his nephew, Bertha's clear voice was heard saying, 'Yes, he is inoffensive, but he is a stick. There's no denying it, Mr. Hailes, he is a dreadful stick.'

Frank was too far advanced to retire, before the meaning dawned on him, partly through a little explosion of Herbert behind him, and partly from the guilty consternation and colour with which the other two turned round from the erection of plants among which they were standing.

Yet it was the shy man who spoke first in the predicament, like a timid creature driven to bay.

'Yes, Miss Morton, I know it is too true; no one is more sensible of it than myself. I can only hope to do my best, such as it is.'

'Oh, Northmoor, it was very horrid and unguarded in me, and I can only be sorry and beg your pardon,' and while she laughed and held out her hand, there was a dew in her eyes.

'Truths do not need pardon,' he said, as he gave a cousinly grasp, 'and I think you will try kindly to excuse my deficiencies and disadvantages.'

There was a certain dignity in his tone, and Bertha said heartily—

'Thank you. It is all right in essentials, and chatter is of very little consequence. Now come and have some breakfast.'

They got on together far better after that, and began to feel like relations, before Herbert was sent off with Mr. Prowse to Colbeam. Indeed, throughout the transactions that followed, Bertha showed herself far less devoted to her own interests than to what might be called the honour of the family. Her father's will had been made in haste, after the death of his little grandson, and was as concise as possible, her influence having told upon it. Knowing that the new heir would have nothing to begin with, and aware that if he inherited merely the title, house, and land, he would be in great straits, the old Lord had bequeathed to him nearly what would have been left to the grandson, a fair proportion of the money in the funds and bank, and all the furniture and appurtenances of Northmoor House, excepting such articles as Bertha and Lady Adela might select, each up to a certain value.

Lady Adela's had been few, and already chosen, and Bertha's were manifestly only matters of personal belonging, and not up altogether to the amount named; so as to avoid stripping the place, which, at the best, was only splendid in utterly unaccustomed eyes. Horses and carriages had to be bought of her, and it was she who told him what was absolutely necessary, and fixed the price as low as she could, so as not to make them a gift. And he was not so ignorant in this matter as she had expected—for the old habits of his boyhood served him, he could ride well, and his scruples at Miss Morton's estimate proved that he knew a horse when he saw it—as she said. She would, perhaps, have liked him better if he had been a dissipated horsey man like his father. He would have given her sensations—and on his side, considering the reputation of the family, he was surprised at her eager, almost passionate desire to be rid of the valuable horses and equipages as soon as possible.

When, in the afternoon, she went out of doors to refresh herself with a solitary ramble in the Park after her morning of business, she heard an altercation, and presently encountered a keeper, dragging after him a trespasser, in whom, to her amazement, she recognised Herbert Morton, at the same moment as he exclaimed: 'Cousin Bertha! Miss— Look at this impudent fellow, though I told him I was Lord Northmoor's own nephew.'

'And I told him, ma'am,' said the keeper, touching his hat, 'that if he was ten nephews I wouldn't have him throwing stones at my pheasants, nor his Lordship wouldn't neither, and then he sauced me, and I said I would see what his Lordship said to that.'

'You must excuse him this time, Best,' said Miss Morton; 'he is a town-bred boy, and knows no better, and you had better not worry his Lordship about it.'

'Very well, Miss Morton, if it is your pleasure, but them pheasants are my province, and I must do my dooty.'

'Of course, quite right, Best,' she answered; 'but my cousin here did not understand, and you must make allowance for him.'

Best touched his hat again, and went off with an undercurrent of growl.

'Oh, Herbert, this is a pity!' Miss Morton exclaimed.

'Cheeky chap!' said Herbert sulkily. 'What business had he to meddle with me? A great big wild bird gets up with no end of a row, and I did nothing but shy a stone, and out comes this fellow at me in a regular wax, and didn't care half a farthing when I told him who I was. I fancy he did not believe me.'

'I don't wonder,' said Bertha; 'you have yet to learn that in the eyes of any gentleman, nothing is much more sacred than a pheasant.'

'I never meant to hurt the thing, only one just chucks a stone,' muttered Herbert, abashed, but still defensive and offended. 'I thought my uncle would teach the rascal how to speak to me.'

'I'll tell you what, Herbert, if you take that line with good old servants, who are only doing their duty, you won't have a happy time of it here. I suppose you wish to take your place as a gentleman. Well, the greatest sign of a gentleman is to be courteous and well-behaved to all about him.'

'He wasn't courteous or well-behaved to me.'

'No, because you did not show yourself such a gentleman as he has been used to. If you acted like a tramp or a poacher, no wonder he thought you one'; then, after a pause, 'You will find that much of your pleasure in sport depends on the keepers, and that it would be a great disadvantage to be on bad terms with them, so I strongly advise you, on every account, to treat them with civility, and put out of your head that there is any dignity in being rude.'

Herbert liked Miss Morton, and had been impressed as well as kindly treated by her, and though he sulked now, there was an after-effect.

# CHAPTER X
# COMING HONOURS

With great trepidation did Mary Marshall set forth on her visit to Coles Kenton. She had made up her mind—and a determined mind it could be on occasion—that on it should turn her final acceptance of her twenty years' lover.

Utterly inexperienced as she was, even in domestic, not to say high life, she had perhaps an exaggerated idea, alike of its requirements and of her own deficiencies; and she was resolved to use her own judgment, according to her personal experience, whether she should be hindrance or help to him whom she loved too truly and unselfishly to allow herself to be made the former.

She was glad that for the first few days she should not see him, and should thus be less distracted and biased, but it was with a sinking heart that she heard that Lady Kenton had called to take her up in the carriage. Grateful as she was for the kindness, which saved her the dreariness of a solitary arrival, she was a strange mixture of resolution and self-distrust, of moral courage and timidity, as had been shown by her withstanding all Miss Lang's endeavours to make her improve her dress beyond what was absolutely necessary for the visit, lest it should be presuming on the future.

Lady Kenton had a manner such as to smooth away shyness, and, with tact that perceived with what kind of nature she had to deal, managed to make the tea-table serve only as a renewal of acquaintance with Frederica, and an introduction to Sir Edward, after which Mary was taken to the schoolroom and made known to the governess, a kindly, sensible woman, who, according to previous arrangement, made the visitor free of her domains as a refuge.

The prettiness and luxury of the guest-chamber was quite a shock, and Mary would rather have faced a dozen naughty girls than have taken Sir Edward's arm to go in to dinner. However, her hostess had decided on a quiet course of treatment such as not to frighten this pupil, and it had been agreed only to take enough notice of her to prevent her from feeling herself neglected, until she should begin to be more at ease. Nor was it long before a certain sparkle in the brown eyes showed that she was amused by, and appreciative of, the family talk.

It was true, as Lady Kenton had told her, that she had nothing to unlearn, all she wanted was confidence, experience, and ease, and in so humble, gentle, and refined a nature as hers, the acquisition of these could not lead to the disclosure of anything undesirable. So, after the first day of novelty, when she had learnt the hours, could distinguish between the young people, knew her way about the house so as to be secure of not opening the wrong doors, and when she had learnt where and when she would be welcome and even helpful, she began to enjoy herself and the life, the beauty, and the leisure.

She made friends heartily with the governess, fraternised with Freda, taught the younger girls new games, could hold a sort of conversation with Sir Edward, became less afraid of George, and daily had more of filial devotion to Lady Kenton. The books on the tables were a real delight and pleasure to her, when she found that it was not ill-mannered to sit down and read in the forenoon, and the discussion of them was a great help in what Freda called teaching her to talk. Visitors were very gradually brought upon her, a gentleman or two at first, who knew nothing about her, perhaps thought her the governess and merely bowed to her. There was only one real *contretemps*, when some guests, who lived rather beyond the neighbourhood, arrived for afternoon tea, and, moreover, full of curiosity about Lord Northmoor. Was it true that he was an attorney's clerk, and was not he going to marry a very inferior person?

'Certainly not,' said Lady Kenton. 'He is engaged to my friend, Miss Marshall.'

The said Miss Marshall was handing the sugar, while Freda was pouring out the tea. She had been named on the ladies' entrance, and the colour rose to her eyes but she said nothing, while there was a confusion of, 'I beg pardon. I understand.'

'Report makes a good many mistakes,' said Lady Kenton coolly. 'Mary, my dear, you have given me no sugar.'

It was the first time of calling her by her Christian name, and done for the sake of making the equal intimacy apparent. In fact, Mary was behaving herself better than the visitors, as Lady Kenton absolutely told her when a sort of titter was heard in the hall, where they were expressing to Freda their horror at the scrape, and extorting that Miss Marshall was really a governess.

'But quite a lady,' said Freda stoutly, 'and we are all as fond of her as possible.'

It showed how much progress she had made that even this shock did not set her to express any more faint-hearted doubts, and, when Lord Northmoor arrived the next day, the involuntary radiance on both their faces was token enough that they were all the world to each other. Mary allowed herself to venture on getting Lady Kenton's counsel on the duties of household headship that would fall on her; and instead of being terrified at the great garden-party and dinner-party to be held at Coles Kenton, eagerly availed herself of instruction in the details of their management. She had accepted her fate, and when the two were seen moving about among the people of the party they neither of them looked incongruous with the county aristocracy. Quiet, retiring, and insignificant they might be, but there was nothing to remark by the most curious eyes of those who knew they were to see the new peer and his destined bride; in fact, as George and Freda privately remarked, they were just the people that nobody ever would see at all, unless they were set up upon a pedestal.

Mary still feebly suggested, when the marriage was spoken of, that it might be wiser for Frank to wait a year, get over his first expenses and feel his way; but he would not hear of her going back to her work, and pleaded his solitude so piteously that she could not but consent to let it take place as soon as possible. They would fain have kept it as private as possible, but their good friends were of opinion that it was necessary to give them a start with some *éclat*, and insisted that it should take place with all due honours at Coles Kenton, where Mary was treated like a favoured niece, and assisted with counsel on her *trousseau*. The savings she had made during the long years of her engagement were enough to fit her out sufficiently to feel that she was bringing her own wardrobe, and Lady Kenton actually went to London with her to superintend the outlay.

'Whom would they like to have asked to the wedding?' the lady inquired, herself naming the Langs and Burfords. 'Of course,' she added, smiling, 'Freda and Alice will be only too happy to be bridesmaids. Have you any one whom you would wish to ask? Your old scholars perhaps.'

'I think,' said Mary, hesitating, 'that one reason why we think we ought to decline your kindness was—about *his* relations.'

Lady Kenton had given full license to the propriety of calling *him* Frank with intimate friends, but Mary always had a shyness about it.

'Indeed, I should make no question about asking them, if I had not doubted whether, after what passed—'

'That is all forgotten,' said Mary gently. 'I have had quite a nice letter since, and—'

'Of course they must be asked,' said Lady Kenton; 'I should have proposed it before, but for that scene.'

'That is nothing,' said Mary; 'the doubt is whether, considering the style of people, it would not be better for us to manage it otherwise, and not let you be troubled.'

'Oh, that's nothing! On such an occasion there's no fear of their not behaving like the rest of the world. There are girls, I think; they should be bridesmaids.'

This very real kindness overcame all scruples, and indeed a great deal might be forgiven to Miss Marshall in consideration of the glory of telling all Westhaven of the invitation to be present 'at my brother Lord Northmoor's wedding, at Sir Edward Kenton's, Baronet.' He gave the dresses, not

only the bridesmaids' white and cerise (Freda's choice), but the chocolate moiré which for a minute Mrs. Morton fancied 'the little spiteful cat' had chosen on purpose to suppress her, till assured by all qualified beholders, especially Mrs. Rollstone and a dressmaker friend, that in nothing else would she have looked so entirely quite the lady.

And Lady Kenton's augury was fulfilled. The whole family were subdued enough by their surroundings to comport themselves quite well enough to pass muster.

# CHAPTER XI
# POSSESSION

So Francis Morton, Baron Northmoor of Northmoor, and Mary Marshall, daughter of the late Reverend John Marshall, were man and wife at last. Their honeymoon was ideally happy. It fulfilled a dream of their life, when Frank used, in the holidays spent by Mary with his mother, to read aloud the Waverley novels, and they had calculated, almost as an impossible castle in the air, the possibility of visiting the localities. And now they went, as assuredly they had never thought of going, and not much impeded by the greatness that had been thrust on them. The good-natured Kentons had dispensed his Lordship from the encumbrance of a valet, and though my Lady could not well be allowed to go maidless, Lady Kenton had found a sensible, friendly person for her, of whom she soon ceased to be afraid, and thus felt the advantage of being able to attend to her husband instead of her luggage.

Tourists might look and laugh at their simple delight as at that of a pair of unsophisticated cockneys. This did not trouble them, as they trod what was to them classic ground, tried in vain the impossible feat of 'seeing Melrose aright,' but revelled in what they did see, stood with bated breath at Dryburgh by the Minstrel's tomb, and tracked his magic spells from the Tweed even to Staffa, feeling the full delight for the first time of mountain, sea, and loch. Their enjoyment was perhaps even greater than that of boy and girl, for it was the reaction of chastened lives and hearts 'at leisure from themselves,' nor were spirit and vigour too much spent for enterprise.

They tasted to the full every innocent charm that came in their way, and, above all, the bliss of being together in the perfect sympathy that had been the growth of so many years. Their maid, Harte, might well confide to her congeners that though my lord and my lady were the oldest couple she had known, they were the most attached, in a quiet way.

They were loth to end this state of felicity before taking their new cares upon them, and were glad that the arrangements of the executors made it desirable that they should not take possession till October, when they left behind them the gorgeous autumn beauty of the western coast and journeyed southwards.

The bells were rung, the gates thrown wide open, and lights flashed in the windows as Lord and Lady Northmoor drove up to their home, but it was in the dark, and there was no demonstrative welcome, the indoor servants were all new, the cook-housekeeper hired by Lady Kenton's assistance, and the rest of the maids chosen by her, the butler and his subordinate acquired in like manner.

It was a little dreary. The rooms looked large and empty. Miss Morton's belongings had been just what gave a homelike air to the place, and when these were gone, even the big fires could not greatly cheer the huge spaces. However, these two months had accustomed the new arrivals to their titles, and likewise to being waited upon, and they were less at a loss than they would have been previously, though to Mary especially it was hard to realise that it was her own house, and that she need ask no one's leave. Also that it was not a duty to sit with a fire. She could not well have done so, considering how many were doing their best to enliven the house, and finally she spent the evening in the library, not a very inviting room in itself, but which the late lord had inhabited, and where the present one had already held business interviews. It was, of course, lined with the standard books of the last generation, and Mary, who had heard of many, but never had access to them, flitted over them while her husband opened the letters he had found awaiting him. To her, what some one has called the 'tea, tobacco, and snuff' of an old library where the books are chiefly viewed as appropriate furniture, were all delightful discoveries. Even to 'Hume's *History of England*—nine volumes! I did not know it was so long! Our first class had the Student's *Hume*. Is there much difference?'

'Rather to the Student's advantage, I believe. Half these letters, at least, are mere solicitations for custom! And advertisements!'

'How the books stick together! I wonder when they were opened last!'

'Never, I suspect,' said he. 'I do not imagine the Mortons were much disposed to read.'

'Well, they have left us a delightful store! What's this? Smollett's *Don Quixote*. I always wanted to know about that. Is it not something about giants and windmills? Have you read it?'

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.