

YONGE CHARLOTTE MARY

LADY HESTER; OR,
URSULA'S NARRATIVE

Charlotte Yonge

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Charlotte M. Yonge

Lady Hester; Or, Ursula's Narrative

CHAPTER I

SAULT ST. PIERRE

I write this by desire of my brothers and sisters, that if any reports of our strange family history should come down to after generations the thing may be properly understood.

The old times at Trevorsham seem to me so remote, that I can hardly believe that we are the same who were so happy then. Nay, Jaquetta laughs, and declares that it is not possible to be happier than we have been since, and Fulk would have me remember that all was not always smooth even in those days.

Perhaps not—for him, at least, dear fellow, in those latter times; but when I think of the old home, the worst troubles that rise before me are those of the back-board and the stocks, French in the school-room, and Miss Simmonds' "Lady Ursula, think of your position!"

And as to Jaquetta, she was born under a more benignant star. Nobody could have put a back-board on her any more than on a kitten.

Our mother had died (oh! how happily for herself!) when Jaquetta was a baby, and Miss Simmonds most carefully ruled not only over us, but over Adela Brainerd, my father's ward, who was brought up with us because she had no other relation in the world.

Besides, my father wished her to marry one of my brothers. It would have done very well for either Torwood or Bertram, but unluckily, as it seemed, neither of them could take to the notion. She was a dear little thing, to be sure, and we were all very fond of her; but, as Bertram said, it would have been like marrying Jaquetta, and Torwood had other views, to which my father would not then listen.

Then Bertram's regiment was ordered to Canada, and that was the real cause of it all, though we did not know it till long after.

Bertram was starting out on a sporting expedition with a Canadian gentleman, when about ten miles from Montreal they halted at a farm with a good well-built house, named Sault St. Pierre, all looking prosperous and comfortable, and a young farmer, American in his ways—free-spoken, familiar, and blunt—but very kindly and friendly, was at work there with some French-Canadian labourers.

Bertram's friend knew him and often halted there on hunting expeditions, so they went into the house—very nicely furnished, a pretty parlour with muslin curtains, a piano, and everything pleasant; and Joel Lea called his wife, a handsome, fair young woman. Bertram says from the first she put him in mind of some one, and he was trying to make out who it could be. Then came the wife's mother, a neat little delicate, bent woman, with dark eyes, that looked, Bertram said, as if they had had some great fright and never recovered it. They called her Mrs. Dayman.

She was silent at first, and only helped her daughter and the maid to get the dinner, and an excellent dinner it was; but she kept on looking at Bertram, and she quite started when she heard him called Mr. Trevor. When they were just rising up, and going to take leave, she came up to him in a frightened agitated manner, as if she could not help it, and said—

"Sir, you are so like a gentleman I once knew. Was any relation of yours ever in Canada?"

"My father was in Canada," answered Bertram.

"Oh no," she said then, very much affected, "the Captain Trevor I knew was killed in the Lake Campaign in 1814. It must be a mistake, yet you put me in mind of him so strangely."

Then Bertram protested that she must mean my father, for that he had been a captain in the — th, and had been stationed at York (as Toronto was then called), but was badly wounded in repulsing the American attack on the Lakes in 1814.

"Not dead?" she asked, with her cheeks getting pale, and a sort of excitement about her, that made Bertram wonder, at the moment, if there could have been any old attachment between them, and he explained how my father was shipped off from England between life and death; and how, when he recovered, he found his uncle dying, and the title and property coming to him.

"And he married!" she said, with a bewildered look; and Bertram told her that he had married Lady Mary Lupton—as his uncle and father had wished—and how we four were their children. I can fancy how kindly and tenderly Bertram would speak when he saw that she was anxious and pained; and she took hold of his hand and held him, and when he said something of mentioning that he had seen her, she cried out with a sort of terror, "Oh no, no, Mr. Trevor, I beg you will not. Let him think me dead, as I thought him." And then she drew down Bertram's tall head to her, and fairly kissed his forehead, adding, "I could not help it, sir; an old woman's kiss will do you no harm!"

Then he went away. He never did tell us of the meeting till long after. He was not a great letter writer, and, besides, he thought my father might not wish to have the flirtations of his youth brought up against him. So we little knew!

But it seems that the daughter and son-in-law were just as much amazed as Bertram, and when he was gone, and the poor old lady sank into her chair and burst out crying, and as they came and asked who or what this was, she sobbed out, "Your brother Hester! Oh! so like him—my husband!" or something to that effect, as unawares. She wanted to take it back again, but of course Hester would not let her, and made her tell the whole.

It seems that her name was Faith Le Blanc; she was half English, half French-Canadian, and lived in a village in a very unsettled part, where Captain Trevor used to come to hunt, and where he made love to her, and ended by marrying her—with the knowledge of her family and his brother officers, but not of his family—just before he was ordered to the Lake frontier. The war had stirred up the Indians to acts of violence they had not committed for many years, and a tribe of them came down on the village, plundering, burning, killing, and torturing those whom they had known in friendly intercourse.

Faith Le Blanc had once given some milk to a papoose upon its mother's back, and perhaps for this reason she was spared, but everyone belonging to her was, she believed, destroyed, and she was carried away by the tribe, who wanted to make her one of themselves; and she knew that if she offended them, such horrors as she had seen practised on others would come on her.

However, they had gone to another resort of theirs, where there was a young hunter who often visited them, and was on friendly terms. When he found that there was a white woman living as a captive among them, he spared no effort to rescue her. Both he and she were often in exceeding danger; but he contrived her escape at last, and brought her through the woods to a place of safety, and there her child was born.

It was over the American frontier, and it was long before she could write to her husband. She never knew what became of her letter, but the hunter friend, Piers Dayman, showed her an American paper which mentioned Captain Trevor among the officers killed in their attack. Dayman was devoted to her, and insisted on marrying her, and bringing up her daughter as his own. I fancy she was a woman of gentle passive temper, and had been crushed and terrified by all she had gone through, so as to have little instinct left but that of clinging to the protector who had taken her up when she had lost everything else; and she married him. Nor did Hester guess till that very day that Piers Dayman was not her father!

There were other children, sons who have given themselves to hunting and trapping in the Hudson's Bay Company's territory; but Hester remained the only daughter, and they educated her

well, sending her to a convent at Montreal, where she learnt a good many accomplishments. They were not Roman Catholics; but it was the only way of getting an education.

Dayman must have been a warm-hearted, tenderly affectionate person. Hester loved him very much. But he had lived a wild sportsman's life, and never was happy at rest. They changed home often; and at last he was snowed up and frozen to death, with one of his boys, on a bear hunting expedition.

Not very long after, Hester married this sturdy American, Joel Lea, who had bought some land on the Canadian side of the border, and her mother came home to live with them. They had been married four or five years, but none of their children had lived.

So it was when the discovery came upon poor old Mrs. Dayman (I do not know what else to call her), that Fulk Torwood Trevor, the husband of her youth, was not dead, but was Earl of Trevorsham; married, and the father of four children in England.

Poor old thing! She would have buried her secret to the last, as much in pity and love to him as in shame and grief for herself; and consideration, too, for the sons, for whom the discovery was only less bad than for us, as they had less to lose. Hester herself hardly fully understood what it all involved, and it only gradually grew on her.

That winter her mother fell ill, and Mr. Lea felt it right that the small property she had had for her life should be properly secured to her sons, according to the division their father had intended. So a lawyer was brought from Montreal and her will was made. Thus another person knew about it, and he was much struck, and explained to Hester that she was really a lady of rank, and probably the only child of her father who had any legal claim to his estates. Lea, with a good deal of the old American Republican temper, would not be stirred up. He despised lords and ladies, and would none of it; but the lawyer held that it would be doing wrong not to preserve the record. Hester had grown excited, and seconded him; and one day, when Lea was out, the lawyer brought a magistrate to take Mrs. Dayman's affidavit as to all her past history—marriage witnesses and all. She was a good deal overcome and agitated, and quite implored Hester never to use the knowledge against her father; but she must have been always a passive, docile being, and they made her tell all that was wanted, and sign her deposition, as she had signed her will, as Faith Trevor, commonly known as Faith Dayman.

She did not live many days after. It was on the 3rd of February, 1836, that she died; and in the course of the summer Hester had a son, who thrived as none of her babies had done.

Then she lay and brooded over him and the rights she fancied he was deprived of, till she worked herself up to a strong and fixed purpose, and insisted upon making all known to her father. Now that her mother was gone she persuaded herself that he had been a cruel, faithless tyrant, who had wilfully deserted his young wife.

Joel Lea would not listen to her. Why should she wish to make his son a good-for-nothing English lord? That was his view. Nothing but misery, distress, and temptation could come of not letting things alone. He held to that, and there were no means forthcoming either of coming to England to present herself. The family were well to do, but had no ready money to lay out on a passage across the Atlantic. Nor would Hester wait. She had persuaded herself that a letter would be suppressed, even if she had known how to address it; but to claim her son's rights, and make an earl of him, had become her fixed idea, and she began laying aside every farthing in her power.

In this she was encouraged, not by the lawyer who had made the will—and who, considering that poor Faith's witnesses had been destroyed, and her certificate and her wedding ring taken from her by the Indians, thought that the marriage could not be substantiated—but by a clever young clerk, who had managed to find out the state of things; a man named Perrault, who used to come to the farm, always when Lea was out, and talk her into a further state of excitement about her child's expectations, and the injuries she was suffering. It was her one idea. She says she really believes she should have gone mad if the saving had not occupied her; and a very dreary life poor Joel must have had whilst she was scraping together the passage-money. He still steadily and sternly disapproved the whole, and when at two years' end she had put together enough to bring her and her boy home,

and maintain them there for a few weeks, he still refused to go with her. The last thing he said was, "Remember, Hester, what was the price of all the kingdoms of the world! Thou wilt have it, then! Would that I could say, my blessing go with thee." And he took his child, and held him long in his arms, and never spoke one word over him but, "My poor boy!"

CHAPTER II

TREVORSHAM

I suppose I had better tell what we had been doing all this time. Adela and I had come out, and had a season or two in London, and my father had enjoyed our pleasure in it, and paid a good deal of court to our pretty Adela, because there was no driving Torwood into anything warmer than easy brotherly companionship.

In fact, Torwood had never cared for anyone but little Emily Deerhurst. Once he had come to her rescue, when she was only nine or ten years old, and her schoolboy cousins were teasing her, and at every Twelfth-day party since she and he had come together as by right. There was something irresistible in her great soft plaintive brown eyes, though she was scarcely pretty otherwise, and we used to call her the White Doe of Rylstone. Torwood was six or seven years older, and no one supposed that he seriously cared for her, till she was sixteen. Then, when my father spoke point blank to him about Adela, he was driven into owning what he wished.

My father thought it utter absurdity. The connection was not pleasant to him; Mrs. Deerhurst was always looked on as a designing widow, who managed to marry off her daughters cleverly, and he could believe no good of Emily.

Now Adela always had more power with papa than any of us. She had a coaxing way, which his stately old-school courtesy never could resist. She used when we were children to beg for holidays, and get treats for us; and even now, many a request which we should never have dared to utter, she could, with her droll arch way, make him think the most sensible thing in the world.

What odd things people can do who have lived together like brothers and sisters! I can hardly help laughing when I think of Torwood coming disconsolately up from the library, and replying, in answer to our vigorous demands, that his lordship had some besotted notion past all reason.

Then we pressed him harder—Adela with indignation, and I with sympathy—till we forced out of him that he had been forbidden ever to think or speak again of Emily, and all his faith in her laughed to scorn, as delusions induced by Mrs. Deerhurst.

"I'm sure I hope you'll take Ormerod, Adela," I remember he ended; "then at least you would be out of the way."

For Sir John Ormerod's courtship was an evident fact to all the family, as, indeed, Adela was heiress enough to be a good deal troubled with suitors, though she had hitherto managed to make them all keep their distance.

Adela laughed at him for his kind wishes, but I could see she meant to plead for him. She had her chance, for Sir John Ormerod brought matters to a crisis at the next ball; and though she thought, as she said, "she had settled him," he followed it up with her guardian, and Adela was invited to a conference in the library.

It happened that as she ran upstairs, all in a glow, she came on Torwood at the landing. She couldn't help saying in her odd half-laughing, half-crying voice—

"It will come right, Torwood; I've made terms, I'm out of your way."

"Not Ormerod!" he exclaimed.

"Oh! no, no!" I can hear her dash of scorn now, for I was just behind my brother, but she went on out of breath—

"You may go on seeing her, provided you don't say a word—till—till she's been out two years."

"Adela! you queen of girls, how have you done it?" he began, but she thrust him aside and flew up into my arms; and when I had her in her own room it came out, I hardly know how, that she had so shown that she cared for no one she had ever seen except my father, that they found they *did* love each other; and—and—in short they were going to be married.

Really it seemed much less wonderful then than it does in thinking of it afterwards. My father was much handsomer than any young man I ever saw, with a hawk nose, a clear rosy skin, pure pink and white like a boy's, curly little rings of white hair, blue eyes clear and bright as the sky, a tall upright soldierly figure, and a magnificent stately bearing, courteous and grand to all, but sweetly tender to a very few, and to her above all. It always had been so ever since he had brought her home an orphan of six years old from her mother's death-bed at Nice. And he was youthful, could ride or hunt all day without so much fatigue as either of his sons, and was as fresh and eager in all his ways as a lad.

And she, our pretty darling! I don't think Torwood and I in the least felt the incongruity of her becoming our step-mother, only that papa was making her more entirely his own.

I am glad we did not mar the sunshine. It did not last long. She came home thoroughly unwell from their journey to Switzerland, and never got better. By the time the spring had come round again, she was lying in the vault at Trevorsham, and we were trying to keep poor little Alured alive and help my poor father to bear it.

He was stricken to the very heart, and never was the same man again. His age seemed to come upon him all at once; and whereas at sixty-five he had been like a man ten years younger, he suddenly became like one ten years older; and though he never was actually ill, he failed from month to month.

He could not bear the sight or sound of the poor baby. Poor Adela had scarcely lived to hear it was a boy, and all she had said about it was, "Ursula, you'll be his mother." And, oh! I have tried. If love would do it, I think he could not be more even to dear Adela!

What a frail little life it was! What nights and days we had with him; doctors saying that skill could not do it, but care might; and nurses knowing how to be more effective than I could be; yet while I durst not touch him I could not bear not to see him. And I do think I was the first person he began to know.

Meantime, there was a great difference in Torwood. He had been very much of a big boy hitherto. No one but myself could have guessed that he cared for much besides a lazy kind of enjoyment of all the best and nicest things in this world. He did what he was told, but in an uninterested sort of way, just as if politics and county business, and work at the estate, were just as much tasks thrust on him as Virgil and Homer had been; and put his spirit into sporting, &c.

But when he was allowed to think hopefully of Emily, it seemed to make a man of him, and he took up all that he had to do, as if it really concerned him, and was not only a burden laid on him by his father.

And, as my father became less able to exert himself, Torwood came forward more, and was something substantial to lean upon. Dear fellow! I am sure he did well earn the consent he gained at last, though not with much satisfaction, from papa.

Emily had grown into great sweetness and grace, and Mrs. Deerhurst had gone on very well. Of course, people were unkind enough to say, it was only because she had such prey in view as Lord Torwood; but, whatever withheld her, it is certain that Emily only had the most suitable and reasonable pleasures for a young lady, and was altogether as nice, and gentle, and sensible, as could be desired. There never was a bit of acting in her, she was only allowed to grow in what seemed natural to her. She was just one of the nice simple girls of that day, doing her quiet bit of solid reading, and her practice, and her neat little smooth pencil drawing from a print, as a kind of duty to her accomplishments every day; and filling books with neat up-and-down MS. copies of all the poetry that pleased her. Dainty in all her ways, timid, submissive, and as it seemed to me, colourless.

But Fulk taught her Wordsworth, who was his great passion then, and found her a perfect listener to all his Tory hopes, fears, and usages.

Papa could not help liking her when she came to stay with us, after they were engaged, at the end of two years. He allowed that, away from her mother and all her belongings, she would do very well; and she was so pretty and sweet in her respectful fear of him—I might almost say awe—that

his graceful, chivalrous courtesy woke up again; and he was beginning absolutely to enjoy her, as she became a little more confident and understood him better.

How well I remember that last evening! I was happier than I had been for weeks about little Alured: the convulsions had quite gone off, the teeth that had caused them were through, and he had been laughing and playing on my lap quite brightly—cooing to his mother's miniature in my locket. He was such an intelligent little fellow for eighteen months! I came down so glad, and it was so pleasant to see Emily, in her white dress, leaning over my father while he had gone so happily into his old delight of showing his prints and engravings; and Torwood, standing by the fire, watching them with the look of a conqueror, and Jaquetta—like the absurd child she loved to be—teasing them with ridiculous questions about their housekeeping.

They were to have Spinney Lawn bought for them, just a mile away, and the business was in hand. Jacquy was enquiring whether there was a parlour for The Cid, Torwood's hunter, whom she declared was as dear to him as Emily herself. Indeed, Emily did go out every morning after breakfast to feed him with bread. I can see her now on Torwood's arm, with big Rollo and little Malta rolling over one another after them.

Then came an afternoon when we had all walked to Spinney Lawn, laid out the gardens together, and wandered about the empty rooms, planning for them. The birds were singing in the March sunshine, and the tomtits were calling "peter" in the trees, and Jaquetta went racing about after the dogs, like a thing of seven years old, instead of seventeen. And Torwood was cutting out a root of primroses, leaves and all, for Emily, when we saw a fly go along the lane, and wondered, with a sort of idle wonder. We supposed it must be visitors for the parsonage, and so we strolled home, looking for violets by the way, and Jaquetta getting shiny studs of celandine. Ah! I remember those glistening stars were all closed before we came back.

Well, it must come, so it is silly to linger! There stood the fly at the hall-door, and the butler met us, saying—

"There's a person with his lordship, my lord. She would not wait till you came in, though I told her he saw no one on business without you—"

Torwood hastened on before this, expecting to see some importunate person bothering my father with a petition. What he did see was my father leaning back in his chair, with a white, confounded, bewildered look, and a woman, with a child on her lap, opposite. Her back was to the door, and Torwood's first impression was that she was a well-dressed impostor threatening him; so he came quickly to my father's side, and said—

"What is it father? I'm here."

My poor father put out his hand feebly to him, and said—

"It is all true, Torwood. God forgive me; I did not know it!"

"Know what?" he asked anxiously. "What is it that distresses you, father? Let me speak to this person—"

Then she broke out—not loud, not coarsely, but very determinately—"No, sir; you would be very glad to suppress me, and my child, and my evidence, no doubt; but the Earl of Trevorsham has acknowledged the truth of my claim, and I will not leave this spot till he has acknowledged my mother as his only lawful wife, and my child, Trevor Lea, as his only lawful heir!"

Torwood thought her insane and only said quietly, as he offered my father his arm, "I will talk it over with you presently; Lord Trevorsham is not equal to discuss it now."

"I see what you mean!" she said quickly. "You would like to make me out crazy, but Lord Trevorsham knows better. Do not you, my father?" she said, with a strong emphasis, the more marked, because it was concentrated, not loud.

My poor father was shuddering all over with involuntary trembling; but he put Torwood's hand away from him, and looked up piteously, as if his heart was breaking (as it was); but he spoke steadily. "It is true. It is true, Torwood. I was married to poor Faith, when I was a young man, in Canada. They

sent me proofs that all had perished when the Indians attacked the village; but—" and then he put his hands over his face. It must have been dreadful to see; but Hester Lea was too much bent on her rights to feel a moment's pity; and she spoke on in a hard tone, with her eyes fixed on my brother's face.

"But you failed to discover that she was rescued from the Indians; gave birth to me, your daughter, Hester; and only died two years ago."

"You hear! My boy, my poor boy, forgive me; don't leave me to her," was what my poor father had said—he who had been so strong.

My brother saw what it all meant now. "Never fear that, sir," he said; "I am your son still, any way, you know."

"You will do justice to me," she began, in her fierce tone; but my brother met it calmly with, "Certainly, we will do our best that justice should be done. You have brought proof?"

His quietness overawed her, and she pointed to the papers on the table. They were her mother's attested narrative, and the certificate of her burial.

My brother read aloud, "The 3rd of February, 1836," then he turned to my father and said, "You observe, father, the difference this may make, if true, is that of putting little Alured into the place I have held. My father's last marriage was on the 15th of April, 1836," he added to her. He says she quite glared at him with mortification, as if he had invented poor little Alured on purpose to baffle her; but my father breathed more freely.

"And is nothing—nothing to be done for my child, your own grandson?" exclaimed she, "after these years."

Torwood silenced her by one of his looks. "We only wish to do justice," he said. "If it be as you say, you will have a right to a great deal, and it will not be disputed; but you must be aware that a claim made in this manner requires investigation, and you can see that my father is not in a state for an exciting discussion."

"*Your* father!" she said, with a bitter tone of scorn; but he took it firmly, though the blood seemed to come boiling to his temples.

"Yes," he said, "my father! and if you are indeed his daughter, you should show some pity and filial duty, by not forcing the discussion on him while he can so little bear it."

That staggered her a little, but she said, "I do not wish to do him any harm, but I have my child's interests to think of. How do I know what advantage may be taken against him?"

Torwood saw my father lying back in the chair, trembling, and he dreaded a fit every moment.

"I give you my word," he said, "that no injustice shall be done you;" and as she looked keenly at him, as if she distrusted him, he said, "Yes, you may trust me. I was bred an English gentleman, whatever I was born, and I promise you never to come between you and your rights, when your identity as Lord Trevorsham's daughter is fully established. Meantime, do you not see that your presence is killing him? Tell me where you may be heard of?"

"I shall stay at the Shinglebay Hotel till I am secure of the justice I claim," she said. "Come, my boy, since your own grandfather will not so much as look at you."

Torwood walked her across the hall. He was a little touched by those last words, and felt that she might have looked for a daughter's reception, so he said in the hall—

"You must remember this is a very sudden shock to us all. When my father has grown accustomed to the idea, no doubt he will wish to see you again; but in his present state of health, he must be our first consideration. And unprepared as my sisters are, it would be impossible to ask you to stay in the house."

She was always a little subdued by my brother's manner; I think its courtesy and polish almost frightened her, high-spirited, resolute woman as she was.

"I understand," she said, with a stiff, cold tone. Jaquetta heard the echo of it, and wondered.

"But," he added, "when they understand all, and when my father is equal to it, you shall be sent for."

When he went back to the library he found my poor father unconscious. It was really only fainting then, and he came round without anyone being called, and he shrank from seeing anyone but Torwood, explaining to him most earnestly how, though he was too ill himself to go to the place, his brother-officer, General Poyntz, had done so for him, and had been persuaded that the whole settlement and all the inhabitants had been swept off. It was such a shock to him that it nearly killed him. Poor father! it was grievous to hear him wish it had quite done so!

We only knew that the woman had upset my father very much, and that Torwood could not leave him. Word was sent us to sit down to dinner without them, and Torwood sent for some gravy soup and some wine for him. He went on talking—sometimes about us, but more often about poor Faith, who seemed to have come back on him in all the beauty and charm of his first love. He seemed to be talking himself feverish, and after a time Torwood thought that silence would be better for him; so he got him to go to bed, and sent good old Blake, the butler, who had been his servant in the army, to sit in the dressing-room. Blake, it turned out, had known all about the old story, so he was a safe person. Not that safety mattered much. "Lady Hester Lea"—she called herself so now, as, indeed, she had every right—was making it known at Shinglebay.

So Torwood came out. I was very anxious, of course, and had been hovering about on the nursery stairs, where I had gone to see whether baby was quietly asleep, and I overtook him as he was going down-stairs.

"How is papa?" I asked.

I shall never forget the white look of the face he raised up to mine as he said, "Poor father! Ursula, I can only call the news terrible. Will you try to stand up against it bravely?"

And then he held out his arms and gathered me into them, and I believe I said, "I can bear anything when you do that!"

I thought it could only be something about Bertram, who had rather a way of getting into scrapes, and I said his name; but just as Fulk was setting me at ease on that score, Jaquetta, who was on the watch, too, opened the door of the green drawing-room, and we were obliged to go in. Then, hardly answering her and Emily, as they asked after papa, he stood straight up in the middle of the rug and told us, beginning with—"Ursula, did you know that our father had been married as a young man in Canada?"

No. We had never guessed it.

"He was," my brother went on, "This is his daughter."

"Our sister!" Jaquetta asked. "Where has she been all this time?"

But I saw there must be more to trouble him, and then it came. "I cannot tell. My father had every reason to believe that—she—his first wife—had been killed in a massacre by the Red Indians; but if what this person says is true, she only died two years ago. But it was in all good faith that he married our mother. He had taken all means to discover—"

Even then we did not perceive what this involved. I felt stunned and numbed chiefly from seeing the great shock it had been to my father and to him; but poor little Jaquetta and Emily were altogether puzzled; and Jaquetta said, "But is this sister of ours such a very disagreeable person, Torwood? Why didn't you bring her in and show her to us?"

Then he exclaimed, almost angrily at her simplicity, "Good heavens! girls, don't you see what it all means? If this is true, I am not Torwood. We are nothing—nobody—nameless."

He turned to the fire, put both elbows on the mantelshelf, and hid his face in his hands. Emily sprang up, and tried to draw down his arm; and she did, but he only used it to put her from him, hold her off at arm's length, and look at her—oh! with such a tender face of firm sorrow!

"Ah! Emily," he said; "you too! It has been all on false pretences! That will have to be all over now."

Then Emily's great brown eyes grew bigger with wonder and dismay.

"False pretences!" she cried, "what false pretences? Not that you cared for me, Torwood."

"Not that I cared for you," he said, with a suppressed tone that made his voice *so* deep! "Not that *I* cared, but that Lord Torwood did—Torwood is the baby upstairs."

"But it is you—you—you—Fulk!" said Emily, trying to creep and sidle up to him, white doe fashion. I believe nobody had ever called him by his Christian name before, and it made it sweeter to him, but still he did not give in.

"Ah! that's all very well," he said, and his voice was softer then, "but what would your mother say?"

"The same as I do," said Emily, undauntedly. "How should it change one's feelings one bit," and she almost cried at being held back.

He did let her nestle up to him then, but with a sad sort of smile. "My child, my darling," he said, "I ought not to allow this! It will only be the worse after!"

But just then a servant's step made them start back, and a message came and brought word that Mr. Blake would be glad if Lord Torwood would step up.

Yes, my poor father was wandering in his speech, and very feverish, mixing up Adela and Faith Le Blanc strangely together sometimes, and at others fancying he was lying ill with his wound, and sending messages to Faith.

We sent for the doctor, but he could not do anything really. It had been a death-blow, though the illness lasted a full week. He knew us generally, and liked to see us, but he always had the sense that something dreadful had happened to us; and he would stroke my hand or Jaquetta's, and pity us. He was haunted, too, by the sense that he ought to do something for us which he could not do. We thought he meant to make a will, securing us something, but he was never in a condition in which my brother would have felt justified in getting him to sign it. Indeed there was so little disease about him, and we thought he would get better, if only we could keep him free from distress and excitement; so we made his room as quiet as possible, and discouraged his talking or thinking.

Lady Hester came every day. My brother had sent for Mr. Eagles, our solicitor, to meet her the first time, and look at her papers.

He said he could not deny that it looked very bad for us. Of the original marriage there was no doubt; indeed, my father had told Torwood where to find the certificate of it, folded up in the secret drawer of his desk, with his commission in the army; and the register of Faith's burial was only too plain. The only chance there was for us was, that her identity could not be established; but Mr. Eagles did not think it would go off on this. The whole of her life seemed to be traceable; besides, there was something about Hester that forbade all suspicion of her being a conscious impostor. Whether she would be able to prove herself my father's daughter was another more doubtful point. That, however, made no difference, except as to her own rank and fortune. If the first wife were proved to have been alive till 1836, then little Alured was the only true heir to the title and estate, and, next after him, stood Hester Lea and her son.

People said she was like the family; I never could see it, and always thought the likeness due to their imagination. She took one by surprise. She was a tall, well-made woman, with a narrow waist, and a proud, peculiarly upright bearing, though quick, almost sharp in all her movements, and especially with her eyes. Those eyes, I confess, always startled me. They were clear, bright blue, well opened eyes—honest eyes one would have called them—only they appeared to be always searching about, and darting at one when one least expected it. The red and white of the face too always had a clear hard look, like the eyes; the teeth projected a little, and were so very, very white, that they always seemed to me to flash like the eyes; and if ever she smiled, it was as much as to say, "I don't believe you." Her nose had an amount of hook, too, that always gave me the feeling of having a wild hawk in the room with me. Jaquetta used to call her a panther of the wilderness, but to my mind there was none of the purring cattish tenderness of the panther. However, that might be only because she viewed us as her natural enemies, and was always on her guard against us, though I do not well know why; I am sure we only wanted to know the truth and do justice, and Fulk was so convinced that she

would prove her case, and that there was no help for it, that at the end of hearing Mr. Eagles question her, he said, "Well, the matter must be tried in due time, but since we are brothers and sisters, let us be friendly," and he held out his hand to her. Mr. Eagles, who told me, said he could have beaten him for the imprudent admission, only he did look so generous and sweet and sad; and Lady Hester drew herself up doubtfully and proudly, as if she could hardly bear to own such a brother, but she did take his hand, coldly though, and saying, "Let me see my father."

He was obliged to tell her that this was impossible. I doubt whether she ever believed him—at least she used to gaze at him with her determined eyes, as if she meant to abash him out of falsehood, and she sharply questioned every one about Lord Trevorsham's state.

The determination to be friendly made my brother offer to take her to us. She consented, but not very readily, and I am afraid we were needlessly cold and dry; but we were taken by surprise when my brother brought her into the sitting-room. It was not very easy to welcome the woman who was going to turn us all out, and under such a stigma; and she—she could hardly be expected to look complacently at the interlopers who had her place, and the title she had a right to.

She put us through her hard catechism about my dear father's state, and said at last that she should like to see Lord Torwood.

Taken by surprise, we looked and signed towards him whom that name had always meant. He smiled a little and said, "Little Alured! But, remember, I am bound to concede nothing till judicial minds are convinced. The parties concerned cannot judge. Can you venture to have Baby down, Ursula?"

No, I did not venture. I thought it might have been averted; but I was only obliged to take her up to the nurseries. On the way up she asked which way my father's room lay. I answered, "Oh! across there;" I did not know if she might not make a dash at it.

I think she must have heard at Shinglebay how delicate poor little Alured was, and thence gathered hopes of the succession for her boy, for she asked her sharp questions about his health all the way up, and knew that he had had fits. I could not put her down as one generally can inquisitive people. I suppose it was because she was more sensible of the difference in our real positions than I have as yet felt.

Baby was asleep; and I think she was touched by the actual sight of him. She said he was very like her boy; and though I supposed that a mere assertion at the time, it was quite true. Alured and Trevor Lea have always been remarkably alike. However, she cross-examined Nurse about his health even more minutely, and then took her leave; but she came again every day, walking after the first, as long as my dear father lived.

And she must have talked, for there came a kind of feeling over everyone, as well as ourselves, that something was hanging over us, of which the issue would be known when my father's illness took some turn.

Mr. Decies came every day to inquire, but I could not bear a strange eye, and Hester might have been looking on. I was steeling myself against him. Was I right?—oh! was I right? I have wondered and grieved! For I knew well enough what he had been thinking of for months before; only I did not want it to come to a point. How was I to leave little Alured to Jaquetta? or disturb my father by breaking up his home? I liked him on the whole, and had come the length of thinking that if I ever married at all, it would be— But that's all nonsense; and mine could not have been what other people's love was, or I should not have shrunk from the sight and look of him. If it had been only poverty that was coming, it would have been a different thing; but to be nameless impostors!

Mrs. Deerhurst had gone out on a round of visits, when Emily came to us, taking her younger daughter. They were not a very letter-writing family. It is odd how some people's pen is a real outlet of expression; while others seem to lack the nerve that might convey their thoughts to it, even when they live in more sympathy than Emily could well have had with her mother.

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