

YONGE

CHARLOTTE

MARY

NUTTIE'S FATHER

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Charlotte M. Yonge

Nuttie's Father

CHAPTER I

ST. AMBROSE'S CHOIR

*'For be it known
That their saint's honour is their own.'*—SCOTT.

The town of Micklethwayte was rising and thriving. There were salubrious springs which an enterprising doctor had lately brought into notice. The firm of Greenleaf and Dutton manufactured umbrellas in large quantities, from the stout weather-proof family roof down to the daintiest fringed toy of a parasol. There were a Guild Hall and a handsome Corn Market. There was a Modern School for the boys, and a High School for the girls, and a School of Art, and a School of Cookery, and National Schools, and a British School, and a Board School, also churches of every height, chapels of every denomination, and iron mission rooms budding out in hopes to be replaced by churches.

Like one of the animals which zoologists call radiated, the town was constantly stretching out fresh arms along country roads, all living and working, and gradually absorbing the open spaces between. One of these arms was known as St. Ambrose's Road, in right of the church, an incomplete structure in yellow brick, consisting of a handsome chancel, the stump of a tower, and one aisle just weather-tight and usable, but, by its very aspect, begging for the completion of the beautiful design that was suspended above the alms-box.

It was the evening of a summer day which had been very hot. The choir practice was just over, and the boys came out trooping and chattering; very small ones they were; for as soon as they began to sing tolerably they were sure to try to get into the choir of the old church, which had a foundation that fed, clothed, taught, and finally apprenticed them. So, though the little fellows were clad in surplices and cassocks, and sat in the chancel for correctness sake, there was a space round the harmonium reserved for the more trustworthy band of girls and young women who came forth next, followed by four or five mechanics.

Behind came the nucleus of the choir—a slim, fair-haired youth of twenty; a neat, precise, well-trimmed man, closely shaven, with stooping shoulders, at least fifteen years older, with a black poodle at his heels, as well shorn as his master, newly risen from lying outside the church door; a gentle, somewhat drooping lady in black, not yet middle-aged and very pretty; a small eager, unformed, black-eyed girl, who could hardly keep back her words for the outside of the church door; a tall self-possessed handsome woman, with a fine classical cast of features; and lastly, a brown-faced, wiry hardworking clergyman, without an atom of superfluous flesh, but with an air of great energy.

'Oh! vicar, where are we to go?' was the question so eager to break forth.

'Not to the Crystal Palace, Nuttie. The funds won't bear it. Mr. Dutton says we must spend as little as possible on locomotion.'

'I'm sure I don't care for the Crystal Palace. A trumpery tinsel place, all shams.'

'Hush, hush, my dear, not so loud,' said the quiet lady; but Nuttie only wriggled her shoulders, though her voice was a trifle lowered. 'If it were the British Museum now, or Westminster Abbey.'

'Or the Alps,' chimed in a quieter voice, 'or the Ufizzi.'

'Now, Mr. Dutton, that's not what I want. Our people aren't ready for that, but what they have let it be real. Miss Mary, don't you see what I mean?'

'Rather better than Miss Egremont herself,' said Mr. Dutton.

'Well,' said the vicar, interposing in the wordy war, 'Mrs. Greenleaf's children have scarlatina, so we can't go to Horton Bishop. The choice seems to be between South Beach and Monks Horton.'

'That's no harm,' cried Nuttie; 'Mrs. Greenleaf is so patronising!'

'And both that and South Beach are so stale,' said the youth.

'As if the dear sea could ever be stale,' cried the young girl.

'I thought Monks Horton was forbidden ground,' said Miss Mary.

'So it was with the last regime', said the vicar; 'but now the new people are come I expect great things from them. I hear they are very friendly.'

'I expect nothing from them,' said Nuttie so sententiously that all her hearers laughed and asked 'her exquisite reason,' as Mr. Dutton put it.

'Lady Kirkaldy and a whole lot of them came into the School of Art.'

'And didn't appreciate "Head of Antinous by Miss Ursula Egremont,"' was the cry that interrupted her, but she went on with dignity unruffled—'Anything so foolish and inane as their whole talk and all their observations I never heard. "I don't like this style," one of them said. "Such ugly useless things! I never see anything pretty and neatly finished such as we used to do."' The girl gave it in a tone of mimicry of the nonchalant voice, adding, with fresh imitation, "'And another did not approve of drawing from the life—models might be such strange people.'"

'My ears were not equally open to their profanities,' said Miss Mary. 'I confess that I was struck by the good breeding and courtesy of the leader of the party, who, I think, was Lady Kirkaldy herself.'

'I saw! I thought she was patronising you, and my blood boiled!' cried Nuttie.

'Will boiling blood endure a picnic in the park of so much ignorance, folly, and patronage?' asked Mr. Dutton.

'Oh, indeed, Mr. Dutton, Nuttie never said that,' exclaimed gentle Mrs. Egremont.

'Whether it is fully worth the doing is the question,' said the vicar.

'Grass and shade do not despise,' said Miss Mary.

'There surely must be some ecclesiastical remains,' said the young man.

'And there is a river,' added the vicar.

'I shall get a stickleback for my aquarium,' cried Nuttie. 'We shall make some discoveries for the Scientific Society. I shall note down every individual creature I see! I say! you are sure it is not a sham waterfall or Temple of Tivoli?'

'It would please the choir boys and G. F. S. girls quite as much, if not more, in that case,' said Miss Mary; 'but you need not expect that, Nuttie. Landscape-gardening is gone by.'

'Even with the county people?' said Nuttie.

'By at least half a century,' said Mr. Dutton, 'with all deference to this young lady's experience.'

'It was out of their own mouths,' cried the girl defiantly. 'That's all I know about county people, and so I hope it will be.'

'Come in, my dear, you are talking very fast,' interposed Mrs. Egremont, with some pain in the soft sweet voice, which, if it had been a little stronger, would have been the best in the choir.

These houses in St. Ambrose's Road were semi-detached. The pair which the party had reached had their entrances at the angles, with a narrow gravel path leading by a tiny grass plat to each. One, which was covered with a rich pall of purple clematis, was the home of Mrs. Egremont, her aunt, and Nuttie; the other, adorned with a Gloire de Dijon rose in second bloom, was the abode of Mary Nugent, with her mother, the widow of a naval captain. Farther on, with adjoining gardens, was another couple of houses, in one of which lived Mr. Dutton; in the other lodged the youth, Gerard Godfrey, together with the partner of the principal medical man. The opposite neighbours were a master of the Modern School and a scholar. Indeed, the saying of the vicar, the Rev. Francis Spyers, was, and St. Ambrose's Road was proud of it, that it was a professional place. Every one had something to do either with schools or umbrellas, scarcely excepting the doctor and the solicitor,

for the former attended the pupils and the latter supplied them. Mr. Dutton was a partner in the umbrella factory, and lived, as the younger folk said, as the old bachelor of the Road. Had he not a housekeeper, a poodle, and a cat; and was not his house, with lovely sill boxes full of flowers in the windows, the neatest of the neat; and did not the tiny conservatory over his dining-room window always produce the flowers most needed for the altar vases, and likewise bouquets for the tables of favoured ladies. Why, the very daisies never durst lift their heads on his little lawn, which even bore a French looking-glass globe in the centre. Miss Nugent, or Miss Mary as every one still called her, as her elder sister's marriage was recent, was assistant teacher at the School of Art, and gave private drawing lessons, so as to supplement the pension on which her mother lived. They also received girls as boarders attending the High School.

So did Miss Headworth, who had all her life been one of those people who seem condemned to toil to make up for the errors or disasters of others. First she helped to educate a brother, and soon he had died to leave an orphan daughter to be bred up at her cost. The girl had married from her first situation; but had almost immediately lost her husband at sea, and on this her aunt had settled at Micklethwayte to make a home for her and her child, at first taking pupils, but when the High School was set up, changing these into boarders; while Mrs. Egremont went as daily governess to the children of a family of somewhat higher pretensions. Little Ursula, or Nuttie, as she was called, according to the local contraction, was like the child of all the party, and after climbing up through the High School to the last form, hoped, after passing the Cambridge examination, to become a teacher there in another year.

CHAPTER II

MONKS HORTON

*'And we will all the pleasures prove,
By shallow rivers, by whose falls
Melodious birds sing madrigals.'*—Old Ballad.

It was holiday-time, and liberties were taken such as were not permissible, when they might have afforded a bad precedent to the boarders. Therefore, when two afternoons later Mary Nugent, returning from district visiting, came out into her garden behind the house, she was not scandalised to see a pair of little black feet under a holland skirt resting on a laurel branch, and going a few steps more she beheld a big shady hat, and a pair of little hands busy with a pencil and a blank book; as Ursula sat on the low wall between the gardens, shaded by the laburnum which facilitated the ascent on her own side.

'Oh Miss Mary! Delicious! Come up here! You don't know how charming this is.'

She moved aside so as to leave the ascent—by an inverted flower-pot and a laurel branch—open to her friend, thus knocking down one of the pile of books which she had taken to the top of the wall. Miss Nugent picked it up, 'Marie Stuart! Is this your way of studying her?'

'Now, you know 'tis holiday time, and volunteer work; besides, she was waiting for you, and I could not help doing this.' She held out a hand, which was scarcely needed, and Mary sprang lightly to share her perch upon the wall. 'Look here!'

'Am I to guess the subject as in the game of historic outlines,' said Miss Nugent, as the book was laid on her lap. 'It looks like a modern—no, a mediaeval—edition of Marcus Curtius about to leap into the capital opening for a young man, only with his dogs instead of his horse. That hound seems very rationally to object.'

'Now don't! Guess in earnest.'

'A compliment to your name. The Boy of Egremont, poor fellow, just about to bound across the strid.'

'Exactly! I always feel sure that my father must have done something like this.'

'Was it so heroic?' said Miss Mary. 'You know it was for the hundredth time, and he had no reason to expect any special danger.'

'Oh, but his mother was waiting, and he had to go. Now, I'll tell you how it must have been with my father. You know he sailed away in a yacht before I was born, and poor mother never saw him again; but I know what happened. There was a ship on fire like the Birkenhead, and the little yacht went near to pick up the people, and my father called out, like Sir Humphrey Gilbert—

"Do not fear, Heaven is as near
By water as by land."

And the little yacht was so close when the great ship blew up that it got sucked down in the whirlpool, and rescuers and all died a noble death together!'

'Has your mother been telling you?' asked Miss Mary.

'Oh no! she never mentions him. She does not know. No one does; but I am quite sure he died nobly, with no one to tell the tale, only the angels to look on, and that makes it all the finer. Or just suppose he was on a desert island all the time, and came back again to find us! I sometimes think he is.'

'What? When you are *quite sure* of the other theory?'

'I mean I am quite sure while I am thinking about it, or reading Robinson Crusoe, or the Swiss Family.'

'Oh!'

'Miss Mary, has no one ever told you anything about my father?'

'No one.'

'They never tell me. Mother cries, and aunt Ursula puts on her "there's-an-end-of-it look." Do you think there is anything they are waiting to tell me till I am older?'

'If there were, I am sure you had better not try to find it out beforehand.'

'You don't think I would do anything of *that sort*? But I thought you might know. Do you remember their first settling here?'

'Scarcely. I was a very small child then.'

Miss Nugent had a few vague recollections which she did not think it expedient to mention. A dim remembrance rose before her of mysterious whisperings about that beautiful young widow, and that it had been said that the rector of the Old Church had declared himself to know the ladies well, and had heartily recommended them. She thought it wiser only to speak of having been one of their first scholars, telling of the awe Miss Headworth inspired; but the pleasure it was to bring a lesson to pretty Mrs. Egremont, who always rewarded a good one with a kiss, 'and she was so nice to kiss—yes, and is.'

'Aunt Ursel and mother both were governesses,' continued the girl, 'and yet they don't want me to go out. They had rather I was a teacher at the High School.'

'They don't want to trust their Little Bear out in the world.'

'I think it is more than that,' said the girl. 'I can't help thinking that he—my father—must have been some one rather grand, with such a beautiful name as Alwyn Piercefield Egremont. Yes; I know it was that, for I saw my baptismal certificate when I stood for the scholarship; it was Dieppe,—Ursula Alice, daughter of Alwyn Piercefield and Alice Elizabeth Egremont, May 15, 1860. James Everett—I think he was the chaplain at Dieppe.'

Mary Nugent thought it the wisest way to laugh and say: 'You, of all people in the world, to want to make out a connection with the aristocracy!'

'True love is different,' said Ursula. 'He must have been cast off by his family for her sake, and have chosen poverty—'

"To make the croon a pund, my Alwyn gaed to sea,
And the croon and the pund, they were baith for me."

Miss Mary did not think a yacht a likely place for the conversion of a croon into a pound, and the utter silence of mother and aunt did not seem to her satisfactory; but she feared either to damp the youthful enthusiasm for the lost father, or to foster curiosity that might lead to some painful discovery, so she took refuge in an inarticulate sound.

'I think Mr. Dutton knows,' proceeded Nuttie.

'You don't mean to ask him?'

'Catch me! I know how he would look at me.'

'Slang! A forfeit!'

'Oh, it's holiday time, and the boarders can't hear. There's Mr. Dutton's door!'

This might in one way be a relief to Miss Nugent, but she did not like being caught upon the wall, and therefore made a rapid descent, though not without a moment's entanglement of skirt, which delayed her long enough to show where she had been, as Mr. Dutton was at the same moment advancing to his own wall on the opposite side of the Nugent garden. Perhaps he would have pretended to see nothing but for Nuttie's cry of glee.

'You wicked elf,' said Miss Mary, 'to inveigle people into predicaments, and then go shouting ho! ho! ho! like Robin Goodfellow himself.'

'You should have kept your elevation and dignity like me,' retorted Ursula; 'and then you would have had the pleasure of seeing Mr. Dutton climbing his wall and coming to our feet.'

'Mischievous elves deserve no good news,' said Mr. Dutton, who was by no means so venerable that the crossing the wall was any effort or compromise of dignity, and who had by this time joined Mary on her grass plat.

'Oh, what is it! Are we to go to Monks Horton?' cried Nuttie.

'Here is a gracious permission from Lord Kirkaldy, the only stipulations being that no vestiges of the meal, such as sandwich papers or gooseberry skins, be left on the grass; and that nobody does any mischief,' he added in an awful tone of personality. 'So if I see anybody rooting up holly trees I shall be bound to interfere.'

'Now, Mr. Dutton, it was only a baby holly in a chink.'

'Only a holly tree! Just like the giant's daughter when she only carried off waggon, peasant, oxen, and all in her pinafore.'

'It is not longer than my finger now!'

'Well, remember, mischief either wanton or scientific is forbidden. You are to set an example to the choir-boys.'

'Scientific mischief is a fatal thing to rare plants,' said Mary.

'If I'm not to touch anything, I may as well stay at home,' pouted Nuttie.

'You may gather as many buttercups and daisies as the sweet child pleases,' said Mr. Dutton; whereupon she threatened to throw her books at his head.

Miss Nugent asked how they were to go, and Mr. Dutton explained that there was only a quarter of a mile's walk from the station; that return tickets would be furnished at a tariff of fourpence a head; and that there would be trains at 1.15 and 7.30.

'How hungry the children will be.'

'They will eat all the way. That's the worst of this sort of outing. They eat to live and live to eat.'

'At least they don't eat at church,' said Nuttie.

'Not since the peppermint day, when Mr. Spyers suspended Dickie Drake,' put in Mary. And the Spa Terrace Church people said it was incense.'

'No. Nuttie!'

'Indeed they did. Louisa Barnet attacked us about it at school, and I said I wished it had been. Only they mustn't eat peppermint in the train, for it makes mother quite ill.'

'Do you mean that Mrs. Egremont will come?' exclaimed Mr. Dutton.

'Oh yes, she shall. It is not too far, and it will be very good for her. I shall make her.'

'There's young England's filial duty!' said Mary.

'Why, I know what is good for her, and she always does as "I wish."'

'Beneficent despotism!' said Mr. Dutton. 'May I ask if Miss Headworth is an equally obedient subject.'

'Oh! Aunt Ursel is very seldom tiresome.'

'Nuttie! Nuttie! my dear,' and a head with the snows of more than half a century appeared on the other side of the wall, under a cap and parasol. 'I am sorry to interrupt you, but it is cool enough for your mother to go into the town, and I wish you to go with her.'

CHAPTER III HEIR HUNTING

*'And she put on her gown of green,
And left her mother at sixteen,
To marry Peter Bell!'—WORDSWORTH.*

In the shrubberies of Monks Horton were walking a lady somewhat past middle age, but full of activity and vigour, with one of those bright faces that never grow old, and with her a young man, a few years over twenty, with a grave and almost careworn countenance.

More and more confidential waxed the conversation, for the lady was making fresh acquaintance with a nephew seldom seen since he had been her pet and darling as almost a baby, and he was experiencing the inexpressible charm of tone and manner that recalled the young mother he had lost in early boyhood.

'Then your mind is made up,' she said; 'you are quite right to decide on having a profession; but how does your father take it?'

'He is quite convinced that to repeat my uncle's life, dangling on as heir, would be the most fatal mistake.'

'Assuredly, and all the legal knowledge you acquire is so much in favour of your usefulness as the squire.'

'If I ever am the squire, of which I have my doubts.'

'You expect Mr. Egremont to marry?'

'Not a future marriage, but one in the past.'

'A private marriage! Do you suspect it?'

'I don't suspect it—I know it. I have been hoping to talk the matter over with you. Do you remember our first governess, Miss Headworth?'

'My dear Mark, did I not lose at Pera the charms of your infancy?'

'Then neither my mother nor my grandmother ever wrote to you about her?'

'I do remember that it struck me that immunity from governesses was a compensation for the lack of daughters.'

'Can you tell me no details,' said Mark anxiously. 'Have you no letters? It was about the time when Blanche was born, when we were living at Raxley.'

'I am sorry to say that our roving life prevented my keeping old letters. I have often regretted it. Let me see, there was one who boxed May's ears.'

'That was long after. I think it was that woman's barbarity that made my father marry again, and a very good thing that was. It was wretched before. Miss Headworth was in my own mother's time.'

'I begin to remember something happening that your mother seemed unable to write about, and your grandmother said that she had been greatly upset by "that miserable affair," but I was never exactly told what it had been.'

'Miss Headworth came when I was four or five years old. Edda, as we used to call her in May's language, was the first person who gave me a sense of beauty. She had dark eyes and a lovely complexion. I remember in after times being silenced for saying, "not so pretty as my Edda." I was extremely fond of her, enough to have my small jealousy excited when my uncle joined us in our walks, and monopolised her, turning May and me over to play with his dog!'

'But, Mark, Mr. Egremont is some years older than your father. He could not have been a young man at that time.'

'So much the worse. Most likely he seemed to her quite paternal. The next thing I recollect was our being in the Isle of Wight, we two children, with Miss Headworth and the German nurse, and our being told of our new sister. Uncle Alwyn and his yacht were there, and we went on board once or twice. Then matters became confused with me, I recollect a confusion, papa and grandmamma suddenly arriving, everybody seeming to us to have become very cross, our dear Miss Headworth nowhere to be found, our attendants being changed, and our being forbidden to speak of her again. I certainly never thought of the matter till a month ago. You know my uncle's eyes have been much affected by his illness, and he has made a good deal of use of me. He has got a valet, a fellow of no particular country, more Savoyard than anything else, I fancy. He is a legacy, like other evils, from the old General, and seems a sort of necessity to my uncle's existence. Gregorio they call him. He was plainly used to absolute government, and viewed the coming down amongst us as an assertion of liberty much against his will. We could see that he was awfully jealous of my father and me, and would do anything to keep us out; but providentially he can't write English decently, though he can speak any language you please. Well, the man and I came into collision about a scamp of a groom who was doing intolerable mischief in the village, and whom they put it on me to get discharged. On that occasion Mr. Gregorio grew insolent, and intimated to me that I need not make so sure of the succession. He knew that which might make the Chanoine and me change our note. Well, my father is always for avoiding rows; he said it was an unmeaning threat, it was of no use to complain of Gregorio, and we must digest his insolence. But just after, Uncle Alwyn sent me to hunt up a paper that was missing, and in searching a writing-case I came upon an unmistakable marriage certificate between Alwyn Piercefield Egremont and Alice Headworth, and then the dim recollections I told you of began to return.'

'What did you do?'

'I thought I had better consult my father, expecting to hear that she was dead, and that no further notice need be taken of the matter. But he was greatly disturbed to hear of the certificate, and would hardly believe me. He said that some friend of my grandmother had written her word of goings on at Freshwater between his brother and the young governess, and that they went off at once to put a stop to it, but found us left with the German maid, who declared that Miss Headworth had gone off with Mr. Egremont in the yacht. No more was heard of my uncle for six weeks, and when he came back there was a great row with the old General, but he absolutely denied being married. I am afraid that was all the old sinner wished, and they went off together in the yacht to the West Indies, where it was burnt; but they, as you know, never came to England again, going straight off to the Mediterranean, having their headquarters at Sorrento, and cruising about till the General's death ten years ago.'

'Yes, I once met them at Florence, and thought them two weary pitiable men. One looked at the General as a curious relic of the old buck of the Regency days, and compassionated his nephew for having had his life spoilt by dangling after the old man. It was a warning indeed, and I am glad you have profited by it, Mark.'

'He came back, after the old man died, to club life in London, and seldom has been near the old place; indeed, it has been let till recently, and he wants to let it again, but it is altogether too dilapidated for that without repairs. So he came down to see about it, and was taken ill there. But to return to what my father told me. He was shocked to hear of the certificate, for he had implicitly believed his brother's denial of the marriage, and he said Miss Headworth was so childish and simple that she might easily have been taken in by a sham ceremony. He said that he now saw he had done very wrong in letting his mother-in-law take all the letters about "that unhappy business" off his hands without looking at them, but he was much engrossed by my mother's illness, and, as he said, it never occurred to him as a duty to trace out what became of the poor thing, and see that she was provided for safely. You know Mrs. Egremont says *laissez faire* is our family failing, and that our first thought is how *not* to do it.'

'Yes, utter repudiation of such cases was the line taken by the last generation; and I am afraid my mother would be very severe.'

'Another thing that actuated my father was the fear of getting his brother into trouble with General Egremont, as he himself would have been the one to profit by it. So I do not wonder so much at his letting the whole drop without inquiry, and never even looking at the letters, which there certainly were. I could not get him to begin upon it with my uncle, but Mrs. Egremont was strongly on my side in thinking that such a thing ought to be looked into, and as I had found the paper it would be best that I should speak. Besides that there was no enduring that Gregorio should be pretending to hold us in terror by such hints.'

'Well, and has there been a wife and family in a cottage all this time?'

'Aunt Margaret, he has never seen or heard of her since he left her at Dieppe! Would you believe it, he thinks himself a victim? He never meant more than to amuse himself with the pretty little governess; and he took on board a Mr. and Mrs. Houghton to do propriety, shady sort of people I imagine, but that she did not know.'

'I have heard of them,' said Lady Kirkaldy, significantly.

'She must have been a kind friend to the poor girl,' said Mark. 'On some report that Lady de Lyonnais was coming down on her, wrathful and terrible, the poor foolish girl let herself be persuaded to be carried off in the yacht, but there Mrs. Houghton watched over her like a dragon. She made them put in at some little place in Jersey, put in the banns, all unknown to my uncle, and got them married. Each was trying to outwit the other, while Miss Headworth herself was quite innocent and unconscious, and, I don't know whether to call it an excuse for Uncle Alwyn or not, but to this hour he is not sure whether it was a legal marriage, and my father believes it was not, looking on it as a youthful indiscretion. He put her in lodgings at Dieppe, under Mrs. Houghton's protection, while he returned home on a peremptory summons from the General. He found the old man in such a state of body and mind as he tries to persuade me was an excuse for denying the whole thing, and from that time he represents himself as bound hand and foot by the General's tyranny. He meant to have kept the secret, given her an allowance, and run over from time to time to see her, but he only could get there once before the voyage to the West Indies. The whole affair was, as he said, complicated by his debts, those debts that the estate has never paid off. The General probably distrusted him, for he curtailed his allowance, and scarcely let him out of sight; and he—he submitted for the sake of his prospects, and thinking the old man much nearer his end than he proved to be. I declare as I listened, it came near to hearing him say he had sold his soul to Satan! From the day he sailed in the Ninon he has never written, never attempted any communication with the woman whose life he had wrecked, except one inquiry at Dieppe, and that was through Gregorio.'

'What! the valet?'

Yes. I believe I seemed surprised at such a medium being employed, for Uncle Alwyn explained that the man had got hold of the secret somehow—servants always know everything—and being a foreigner he was likely to be able to trace her out.

'I daresay he profited by the knowledge to keep Alwyn in bondage during the old man's lifetime.'

'I have no doubt of it, and he expected to play the same game with me. The fellow reminds me, whenever I look at him, of a sort of incarnate familiar demon. When I asked my uncle whether he could guess what had become of her, he held up his hands with a hideous French grimace. I could have taken him by the throat.'

'Nay, one must pity him. The morals of George IV.'s set had been handed on to him by the General,' said Lady Kirkaldy, rejoicing in the genuine indignation of the young face, free from all taint of vice, if somewhat rigid. 'And what now?'

'He assured me that he could make all secure to my father and me, as if that were the important point; but finally he perceived that we had no right to stand still without endeavouring to discover

whether there be a nearer heir, and my father made him consent to my making the search, grinning at its Quixotism all the time.'

'Have you done anything?'

'Yes. I have been to Jersey, seen the register—July 20, 1859—and an old French-speaking clerk, who perfectly recollected the party coming from the yacht, and spoke of her as *tres belle*. I have also ascertained that there is no doubt of the validity of the marriage. Then, deeply mistrusting Master Gregorio, I went on to Dieppe, where I entirely failed to find any one who knew or remembered anything about them—there is such a shifting population of English visitors and residents, and it was so long ago. I elicited from my uncle that she had an aunt, he thought, of the same name as herself; but my father cannot remember who recommended her, or anything that can be a clue. Has any one looked over my grandmother's letters?'

'I think not. My brother spoke of keeping them till I came to London. That might give a chance, or the Houghtons might know about her. I think my husband could get them hunted up. They are sure to be at some continental resort.'

'What's that?' as a sound of singing was heard.

'"Auld Langsyne." The natives are picnicking in the ravine below there. They used to be rigidly excluded, but we can't stand that; and this is the first experiment of admitting them on condition that they don't make themselves obnoxious.'

'Which they can't help.'

'We have yet to see if this is worse than an Austrian or Italian festival. See, we can look down from behind this yew tree. It really is a pretty sight from this distance.'

'There's the cleric heading his little boys and their cricket, and there are the tuneful party in the fern on the opposite side. They have rather good voices, unless they gain by distance.'

'And there's a girl botanising by the river.'

'Sentimentalising over forget-me-nots, more likely.'

'My dear Mark, for a specimen of young England, you are greatly behindhand in perception of progress!'

'Ah! you are used to foreigners, Aunt Margaret. You have never fathomed English vulgarity.'

'It would serve you right to send you to carry the invitation to go round the gardens and houses.'

'Do you mean it, aunt?'

'Mean it? Don't you see your uncle advancing down the road—there—accosting the clergyman—what's his name—either Towers or Spires—something ecclesiastical I know. We only waited to reconnoitre and see whether the numbers were unmanageable.'

'And yet he does not want to sit for Micklethwayte?'

'So you think no one can be neighbourly except for electioneering! O Mark, I must take you in hand.'

'Meantime the host is collecting. I abscond. Which is the least showy part of the establishment?'

'I recommend the coal cellar—'and, as he went off—'poor boy, he is a dear good fellow, but how little he knows how to be laughed at!'

CHAPTER IV

A NAME

*'Sigh no more lady, lady sigh no more,
Men were deceivers ever,
One foot on sea and one on land—
To one thing constant never.'*—Old Ballad.

'So you have ventured out again,' said Lady Kirkaldy, as her nephew strolled up to her afternoon tea-table under a great cedar tree:

'The coast being clear, and only distant shouts being heard in the ravine—

'''Like an army defeated
The choir retreated;
And now doth fare well
In the valley's soft swell,'''

said the aunt.

'At least you have survived; or is this the reaction,' said the nephew, putting on a languid air.

'There were some very nice people among them, on whom the pictures were by no means thrown away. What would you say, Mark, if I told you that I strongly suspect that I have seen your lost aunt?'

'Nonsense!' cried Mark, as emphatically as disrespectfully.

'I am not joking in the least,' said Lady Kirkaldy, looking up at him. 'I heard the name of Egremont, and made out that it belonged to a very lady-like pretty-looking woman in gray and white; she seemed to be trying to check and tame a bright girl of eighteen or so, who was in a perfect state of rapture over the Vandykes. I managed to ask the clergyman who the lady was, and he told me she was a Mrs. Egremont, who lives with her aunt, a Miss Headworth, who boards girls for the High School; very worthy people, he added.'

'Headworth?'

'Yes.'

'But if it were, she would have known your name.'

'Hardly. The title had not come in those days; and if she heard of us at all it would be as Kerrs. I ventured further to put out a feeler by asking whether he knew what her husband had been, and he said he believed he had been lost at sea, but he, Mr. Spyers I mean, had only been at Micklethwayte three or four years, and had merely known her as a widow.'

'I suppose it is worth following up,' said Mark, rather reluctantly. 'I wish I had seen her. I think I should know Miss Headworth again, and she would hardly know me.'

'You see what comes of absconding.'

'After all, it was best,' said Mark. 'Supposing her to be the real woman, which I don't expect, it might have been awkward if she had heard my name! How can we ascertain the history of this person without committing ourselves?'

Lord Kirkaldy, an able man, who had been for many years a diplomatist, here joined the party, and the whole story was laid before him. He was new to Micklethwayte, having succeeded a somewhat distant kinsman, and did not know enough of the place to be able to fix on any one to whom to apply for information; but the result of the consultation was that Lady Kirkaldy should go alone to call on

Miss Headworth, and explain that she was come to inquire about a young lady of the same name, who had once been governess to the children of her sister, Lady Adelaide Egremont. Mark was rather a study to his uncle and aunt all the evening. He was as upright and honourable as the day, and not only acted on high principle, but had a tender feeling to the beautiful playfellow governess, no doubt enhanced by painful experiences of successors chosen for their utter dissimilarity to her. Still it was evidently rather flat to find himself probably so near the tangible goal of his romantic search; and the existence of a first cousin had been startling to him, though his distaste was more to the taking her from second-rate folk in a country town than to the overthrow of his own heirship. At least so he manifestly and honestly believed, and knowing it to be one of those faiths that make themselves facts, the Kirkaldys did not disturb him in it, nor commiserate him for a loss which they thought the best thing possible for him.

Miss Headworth was accustomed to receive visitors anent boarders, so when Lady Kirkaldy's card was brought to her, the first impression was that some such arrangement was to be made. She was sitting in her pretty little drawing-room alone, for Nuttie and her mother had gone out for a walk with Miss Nugent.

The room, opening on the garden, and cool with blinds, had a certain homely grace about the faded furniture. The drawings on the walls were good, the work quaint and tasteful. There was a grand vase of foxgloves before the empty grate, and some Marshal Nial roses in a glass on the table. The old lady herself—with alert black eyes and a sweet expression—rose from her chair in the window to receive her guest.

Lady Kirkaldy felt reassured as to the refinement of the surroundings, and liked the gentle but self-possessed tones of the old lady. She noticed the foxgloves.

'Yes,' said Miss Headworth, 'they are the fruits of yesterday's expedition. My two children, as I call them, brought them home in triumph. I cannot tell you what pleasure Lord Kirkaldy's kindness gave them—and many more.'

'I am glad,' said the lady, while she said to herself, 'now for it,' and sat forward. 'It struck me,' she said, 'on hearing your name that you might be related to—to a young lady who lived a good while ago in the family of my sister, Lady Adelaide Egremont.'

A strange look came into Miss Headworth's eyes, her lips trembled, she clutched tightly the arm of her chair, but then cast a puzzled glance at her visitor.

'Perhaps if you heard of me then,' said the latter, 'it was as Lady Margaret Kerr.'

'Yes,' said Miss Headworth, then pausing, she collected herself and said in an anxious voice, 'Do I understand that your ladyship is come to inquire for my niece, being aware of the circumstances.'

'I only became aware of them yesterday,' said Lady Kirkaldy. 'I was in Turkey at the time, and no particulars were given to me; but my nephew, Mark Egremont, your niece's old pupil, came to consult us, having just discovered among his uncle's papers evidence of the marriage, of which of course he had been ignorant.'

'Then,' exclaimed Miss Headworth, holding her hands tightly clasped, 'Shall I really see justice done at last to my poor child?'

'It is young Mark's most earnest wish and his father—'Lady Kirkaldy hesitated for a word, and Miss Headworth put in:

'His father! Why would he never even acknowledge either Alice's letters or mine? We wrote several times both to him and Lady Adelaide, and never received any reply, except one short one, desiring he might not be troubled on such a subject. It was cruel! Alice said it was not in his writing. She had done very wrong, and the family might well be offended, but a poor child like her, just eighteen, might have been treated with some pity.'

'My sister was in declining health. He was very much engrossed. He left the matter to—to others,' said Lady Kirkaldy. 'He is very sorry now that he acquiesced in what was then thought right. He did not then know that there had been a marriage.'

'I should have thought in that case a clergyman would have been bound to show the more compassion.'

Lady Kirkaldy knew that the cruel silence had been chiefly the work of the stem Puritan pitilessness of her mother, so she passed this over, saying, 'We are all very anxious to atone, as far as possible, for what is past, but we know little or nothing, only what my nephew Mark has been able to gather.'

'Little Mark! Alice always talked of him with great affection. How pleased she will be to hear of his remembering her.'

'Would you object to telling me what you know of this history?' said Lady Kirkaldy. 'I am afraid it is very painful to you, but I think we should understand it clearly. Please speak to me as a friend, as woman to woman.'

'Your ladyship is very kind,' said the poor old lady. 'I have only mentioned the subject once since we came to settle here, seventeen years ago, but such things one cannot forget. If you will excuse me, I have some dates that will assist my accuracy.'

She hurried away, and came back in a few moments, having evidently dried some tears, perhaps of thankfulness, but she paused as if reluctant to begin.

'I think your niece had no nearer relation than yourself,' said Lady Kirkaldy, anxious to set her off and at ease.

'Oh no, or she never would have been so treated. She was an orphan. My poor brother was a curate. He married—as young men will—on insufficient means, his strength gave way, and he died of diphtheria when this poor child was only two years old. Indeed, two little ones died at the same time, and the mother married again and went to Shanghai. She did not long live there, poor thing, and little Alice was sent home to me. I thought I did my best for her by keeping her at a good school. I have often wished that I had given up my situation, and become an assistant there, so as to have her more under my own eyes; but I fancied it important to receive a salary out of which I could save. I am wearying your ladyship, but I can't but dwell on the excuses for my poor child.'

'Indeed I wish to hear all the details,' was the sincere and gentle answer.

'I had her with me generally in the holidays, and I confess I was absolutely alarmed to see how pretty the child was growing, knowing how great a disadvantage it often is. She was always a good girl, not naturally so studious as could be wished, but docile, merry, gentle, a favourite with every one, and peculiarly innocent and childish. I wished her to remain a few years longer as teacher, but it so happened that Lady Adelaide Egremont, coming to consult the head of the establishment about a nursery-governess, saw Alice, and was so much struck with her sweet face, which was all sunshine then, as to insist on engaging her.'

'Ah! my dear sister, I remember her enthusiastic letter about her pretty governess, and her boy's affection for her, an affection that has lasted—'

'It seemed so safe. A clergyman's family in the country, and so kind a lady at the head, that, though Alice had been educated for a superior governess, it appeared the best beginning she could have. And she was very happy, and met with great kindness. Only, unfortunately, Lady Adelaide was delicate, and for many weeks entirely confined to the sofa. Mr. Egremont's elder brother was much there. He seemed to my poor inexperienced child quite elderly, and his attentions like those of—of an old uncle—she told me afterwards—'

'He must really have been over forty—'

'No doubt my poor Alice was unguarded. We know what a merry, happy, childish girl may be, but I never heard that her conduct was even censured while she remained at Baxley, though I find that Captain Egremont used to join them in their walks, under pretext of playing with the children. Then she was sent to Freshwater with the two eldest children during Lady Adelaide's confinement, and there, most unjustifiably, Captain Egremont continually visited them from his yacht, and offered to take them out in it. Alice knew she ought not to go without a married lady on board, and he brought

a Mr. and Mrs. Houghton to call, who were very kind and caressing to her and the children, so that she thought all was right. Oh! Lady Kirkaldy, I don't mean to defend her, I daresay she was very giddy and silly, she reproaches herself, poor dear, but I do say that a wicked advantage was taken of her innocence and ignorance. She says that she had begun to grow a little uneasy at the way people looked when Captain Egremont joined them on the beach; and the nurse, a German, said something that she could not understand. On the 1st of July—yes—but I have the date here—came a telegram to the hotel to have rooms for Lady de Lyonnais and Mr. Egremont ready by the evening. The whole place knew it, and some meddling person burst on Alice with the news, roughly and coarsely given, that they were coming to call her to account for her goings on. Captain Egremont found her crying in the utmost terror, and—she really hardly knew what he said to her—she thinks he offered to shelter her on board the Ninon, from Lady de Lyonnais' first wrath while he and Mrs. Houghton explained matters; but she cannot tell, for she lost her senses with fright, only knew that he was kind and sweet to her in her distress, and thought only of escaping. Well, I don't excuse her. Of course it was the most terrible and fatal thing she could have done, and—' The good old lady was quite overcome, and Lady Kirkaldy had tears in her eyes as she said,

'It was frightful folly—but she was guarded.'

'Yes, her innocence was guarded, thank God,' said Miss Headworth fervently. 'You see she did know that Mr. and Mrs. Houghton were on board, and Mrs. Houghton was a truly kind protector who deserved her confidence, though, poor lady, she admitted to me that her own conduct had not been-strictly correct.'

'How long was it before you heard of her?'

'There was a dreadful letter from Mr. Egremont enclosing what was due of her salary, and then I heard no more for seven months. I went to the Isle of Wight and made all inquiries, but the nurse and children had gone away immediately, and I could obtain no trace of them.'

'Then she—your niece, never wrote.'

'She was afraid, poor dear. She had never been at her ease with me. Her mother had taught her to think me strict and harsh, and she had never opened to me in those days. Besides, he had forbidden her. At last, however, in January, came a letter from this Mrs. Houghton, telling me that my Alice was very unwell at Dieppe, that nothing had been heard of her husband, Captain Egremont, to whom she had been married on the 20th of July at St. Philippe, in Jersey, and that she herself was obliged to leave the place almost immediately; but she would, if possible, wait till my arrival, as Mrs. Egremont was not in a condition to be left alone. My dear friends, with whom I was then living, were as kind as possible, and set me free to go. I was there in three days, and truly the dear, beautiful, merry girl I had parted with only a year before was a sad piteous sight. Mrs. Houghton seemed broken-hearted at leaving her, thinking there was little chance of her living; but Mr. Houghton, who, I am afraid, was a professed gambler, had got into some scrape, and was gone to Paris, where she had to follow him. She told me all about it, and how, when Captain Egremont fancied that a marriage in the Channel Islands was one he could play fast and loose with, she had taken care that the formalities should be such as to make all secure. Foolish and wrong as poor Alice had been, she had awakened all the best side of that poor woman's nature, and no mother could have been more careful and tender. She gave me the certificate—here it is—and assured me that it would hold good. I have shown it to a lawyer, and he said the same; but when I sent a copy to Mr. Egremont, my letter was returned unopened.'

'Captain Egremont had denied the marriage, and they believed him,' said Lady Kirkaldy. 'It is hard to believe that he could be so heartless, but he was in bondage to the old General Egremont, and dreaded losing his inheritance.'

'So he told them in his one visit to Dieppe. He said he must keep his marriage secret, but promised an allowance, on condition that Alice would live quietly at Dieppe, and not communicate with any one of her own family or his. He had left £100 with her, but that was nearly gone, and she had never heard from him. It had preyed on her, and she was so ill that I never expected, any more

than Mrs. Houghton, to see her recover. I stayed there with her; she could not be moved, even if she would have consented, when she was continually expecting him; but at last—four days after her little girl was born—came the news of the Ninon having been burnt, with all on board, three months before. Do you know, strange to say, though I had feared so much to tell her, she began to revive from that time. The suspense and watching were over. She saw that he had not deserted her, and believed that he had loved her to the last. She cried a great deal, but it was in a peaceful, natural way. I wrote then, as I had already written, to Lady Adelaide and to Mr. Egremont, but was not answered.'

'I can account for that,' said Lady Kirkaldy. 'My sister had been ordered to Madeira in the autumn, and there they remained till her death in May. All the letters were sent to my mother, and she did not think fit to forward, or open, any bearing on the subject. In the meantime Mr. Egremont was presented to the family living, and on his return moved to Bridgefield Egremont. And you came here?'

'Of course I could not part with my poor Alice again. Mr. and Mrs. Fordyce, whose daughter I had long ago educated, had always kept up a correspondence with me, and, knowing all the story, proposed to me to come here. He was then rector of the old church, and by their help and recommendation, with such capital as I had, we were able to begin a little school; and though that has had to give way to the High School, what with boarders, and with Alice's employment as daily governess, we have, I am thankful to say, gone on very well and comfortably, and my dear child has recovered her cheerfulness, though she can never be quite what—I think she was meant to be,' said the old lady, with a sad smile, 'though perhaps she is something better.'

'Do you think she was absolutely convinced of his death?'

'Do you mean that he is alive?' exclaimed Miss Headworth in dismay. 'Oh! he is a wickeder man than even I supposed, to have forsaken her all these years. Is my poor child in his power? Must her peace, now she has attained it, be disturbed?'

'There is a great deal to take into consideration,' said Lady Kirkaldy. 'I had better tell you how this visit of mine came about, and explain some matters about the Egremont family.'

She then told how Captain Egremont, after a brief service in the Life Guards, had been made to retire, that the old General, whose heir he was, might keep him in attendance on him. Already self-indulgent and extravagant, the idleness of the life he led with the worn-out old roue had deadened his better feelings, and habituated him to dissipation, while his debts, his expensive habits, and his dread of losing the inheritance, had bound him over to the General. Both had been saved from the fire in the Ninon, whence they were picked up by a Chilian vessel, and they had been long in communicating with home. The General hated England, and was in broken health. He had spent the remaining years of his life at various continental resorts, where he could enjoy a warm climate, combined with facilities for high play.

When at length, he died, Captain Egremont had continued the life to which he had become accustomed, and had of late manifested an expectation that his nephew Mark should play the same part by him as he had done by the General, but the youth, bred in a very different tone, would on no account thus surrender himself to an evil bondage. Indeed he felt all the severity of youthful virtue, and had little toleration for his uncle's ways of thinking; though, when the old man had come home ill, dejected, and half blind, he had allowed himself to be made useful on business matters. And thus he had discovered the marriage, and had taken up the cause with the ardour stimulated by a chivalrous feeling for the beautiful vision of his childhood, whose sudden disappearance had ended his brightest days.

'I suppose it is right and generous of the young man,' said Miss Headworth. 'But since the—the man is alive, I wish my poor Alice could have been left at peace!'

'You forget that her daughter has rights which must be taken into consideration.'

'Little Nuttie! Dear child! I should so far like her to be provided for, so far as that she need not go out in the world to earn her own livelihood. But no! better be as we are than accept anything from that man!'

'I quite understand and respect your feeling, Miss Headworth,' returned the lady; 'but may I return to my question whether you think your niece has any doubt of her husband being dead.'

Miss Headworth considered. 'Since you ask me, I think she has kept the possibility of the life before her. We have never mentioned the subject, and, as I said, the belief in his death ended a great suspense and sense of wounded affection. She began soon and vigorously to turn her attention to the support of her child, and has found a fair measure of happiness; but at the same time she has shrunk from all notice and society, more than would be natural in so very young a widow and so attractive, more than I should have expected from her original character. And once, when she did apprehend symptoms of admiration, she insisted that I should tell the history, enough, as she said, to make it plain that it was impossible. There was one night too, when she had scarlatina, and was a little lightheaded, only four years ago, when she talked a good deal about his coming back; but that might have been only the old impression on her brain, of that long watching at Dieppe. He—Captain Egremont, does not yet know where she is?'

'No, certainly not. But I fear he must.'

'I suppose he ought,' sighed Miss Headworth; 'but in the meantime, till we know what line he takes, surely she need not be unsettled by the knowledge of his existence.'

'By no means. You had better act as you think best about that. But you will not object to my nephew, her old pupil, Mark, coming to see her? I will make him promise not to enter upon the subject.'

Miss Headworth had only time to make a sign of reluctant acquiescence when the door opened and mother and daughter came in. Nuttie first, eager as usual and open-mouthed, unaware that any one was there, for Lady Kirkaldy, wishing to avoid talk and observation, had left her carriage at the livery stables, and walked to St. Ambrose Road. The girl, whom in a moment she classed as small, dark, and oddly like May Egremont, stopped short at sight of a stranger; the mother would have retreated but for Miss Headworth's nervous call 'Alice, my dear, here is Lady Kirkaldy.'

Very lovely was Lady Kirkaldy's impression as she saw a slender figure in a dark gray linen dress, and a face of refined, though not intellectual, beauty and sweetness, under a large straw hat with a good deal of white gauziness about it, and the curtsey was full of natural grace.

'You do not know me,' said Lady Kirkaldy, taking her hand, 'but I am aunt to some former pupils of yours, one of whom, Mark Egremont, is very anxious to come and see you.'

'Mark! My dear little Mark,' and her face lighted up. 'How very kind of him. But he is not little Mark now.'

'He is not a very big Mark either. Most of the Egremonts are small. I see your daughter takes after them,' said Lady Kirkaldy, shaking hands with Ursula, who looked at her in unmitigated amazement.

Alice faltered something about Lady Adelaide.

'My dear sister fell into a decline, and died while the three children were still babies. Poor things, I believe they had a sad time till their father married a Miss Condamine, who has been an excellent stepmother to them. I have been to see them, but Mark was not then at home, so he has come to me at Monks Horton. When will he find you at home? Or may I bring him in at once. He was to meet me at Micklethwayte.'

'I should like very much to see him,' was the answer. And Miss Headworth was obliged to say something about her ladyship taking a cup of tea. Lady Kirkaldy, knowing that Mark was on the watch, set off in search of him, and found him, as she expected, pacing the pavement in front of the church. There was no great distance in which to utter her explanations and cautions, warning him of her promise that the intelligence of the husband's being alive was to be withheld for a fitter time, but he promised dutifully, and his aunt then took him in with her.

The recognition of her claims was a less stunning shock to Alice Egremont than to her aunt. Shielded by her illness, as well as by her simplicity and ignorance, she had never been aware of her

aunt's attempted correspondence with the Egremonts, nor of their deafness to appeals made on her behalf. Far less had it ever occurred to her that the validity of her marriage could be denied, and the heinous error of her elopement seemed to her quite sufficient to account for her having been so entirely cast off by the family. The idea that as wife or widow she had any claims on them, or that Ursula might have rights above those of Mark, had not come into her mind, which, indeed, at the moment was chiefly occupied by the doubt whether the milk was come in, and by ordering in the best teacups, presented by the boarders.

Thus she was in the passage when Mark entered, and his exclamation instantly was 'Oh, Edda, dear old Edda! You aren't a bit altered!' and he put his head under her hat and kissed her, adding, as she seemed rather startled, 'You are my aunt, you know; and where's my cousin? You are Ursula?'

He advanced upon Nuttie, took her by the hand and kissed her forehead before she was aware, but she flashed at him with her black eyes, and looked stiff and defiant. She had no notion of kisses to herself, still less to her pretty mother whom she protected with a half proud, half jealous fondness. How could the man presume to call her by that foolish name? However, that single effusion had exhausted Mark's powers of cordiality, or else Nuttie's stiffness froze him. They were all embarrassed, and had reason to be grateful to Lady Kirkaldy's practised powers as a diplomate's wife. She made the most of Mrs. Egremont's shy spasmodic inquiries, and Mark's jerks of information, such as that they were all living at Bridgefield Egremont, now, that his sister May was very like his new cousin, that Blanche was come out and was very like his mother, etc. etc. Every one was more at ease when Lady Kirkaldy carried the conversation off to yesterday's entertainment, hoping no one had been overtired, and the like. Mrs. Egremont lighted up a little and began telling some of the expressions of delight she had heard, and in the midst, Nuttie, waking from her trance of stiff displeasure, came plump in with 'Oh! and there's a water-soldier, a real *Stratiotes aculeatus* in your lake. May we get it? Mr. Dutton didn't think we ought, but it would be such a prize!'

'Ursula means a rare water-plant,' said Mrs. Egremont gently, seeing that Lady Kirkaldy had no notion of the treasure she possessed. 'She and some of her friends are very eager botanists.'

'I am sure you may,' said the lady, amused.

'Thank you! Then, O mother! Miss Mary and I will go. And we'll wait till after office hours, and then Gerard Godfrey can come and fish it out for us! Oh, thank you. He wants the pattern of the Abbot's cross for an illumination, and he can get some ferns for the church.'

Soon after this ebullition, Lady Kirkaldy carried off her nephew, and his first utterance outside the door was 'A woman like that will be the salvation of my uncle.'

'Firstly, if you can bring them together,' said his aunt; 'and secondly, if there is stuff enough in that pretty creature.'

CHAPTER V

SUSPENSE

*'Where shall the traitor rest
He, the deceiver?'—SCOTT.*

Poor Miss Headworth's peace of mind was utterly destroyed. That the niece whom she had nursed back to life and happiness, and brought to love her as a mother, should be at the mercy of a man whom she looked on as a heartless profligate, was dreadful to her beyond measure. And it involved Ursula's young life likewise? Could it be a duty, after these eighteen years, to return to him? What legal rights had he to enforce the resumption of the wife he had deserted. 'I will consult Mr. Dutton,' said the old lady to herself; 'Mr. Dutton is the only person who knows the particulars. He will give me the best advice.'

And while Miss Headworth, over her evening toilette, was coming to this resolution in one bedroom, Nuttie, in another, was standing aghast at her mother's agitation, and receiving a confession which filled her with astonishment.

'I can't think why that gentleman should go and be so affectionate all on a sudden, 'quoth Nuttie; if he is my cousin, and so fond of you, why couldn't he have come to see us before?'

'Oh, Nuttie, dear, you don't understand why it is so good of him! My dear, now this has come, I must tell you—you must hear—the sad thing your mother did. Yes, my dear, I was their governess—and—and I did not—In short, my dear, I eloped.'

'You, mother! Oh what fun!' cried the girl in the utter extremity of wonder.

'Nuttie!' exclaimed Mrs. Egremont, in a tone of horror and indignation—nay, of apprehension.

'O mother—I didn't mean that! But I can't get to believe it. You, little mother mine, you that are so timid and bashful and quiet. That you—you should have done such a thing.'

'Nuttie, my dear, can't you understand that such a thing would make me quiet? I am always feeling when I see people, or they bring their daughters here. "If they only knew—"

'No, no, no! They would still see you were the sweetest dear. But tell me all about it. How very much in love you must have been!' said Nuttie, a magnificent vision of a young sailor with curly hair and open throat rising before her.

'I think I was more frightened than in love,' faintly said Mrs. Egremont. 'At least I didn't know it was love, I thought he was only kind to me.'

'But you liked it?' said Ursula magisterially.

'I liked it, oh, I liked it! It gave me a feeling such as nothing else ever did, but I never thought of its being love, he was so much older.'

'Older!' exclaimed Nuttie, much taken aback. 'Oh! as old as Mr. Dutton?'

'Mr. Dutton is thirty-six, I think. Yes, he was older than that.'

'Mother, how could you?' For to be older than Mr. Dutton seemed to the youthful fancy to be near decrepitude; but she added, 'I suppose he was very noble, and had done great things.'

'He was the grandest gentleman I ever saw, and had such a manner,' said the mother, passing over the latter suggestion. 'Anyway, I never thought what it all meant—all alone with the children as I was—till I found people looking at me, and laughing at me, and then I heard Lady de Lyonnais and Mr. Egremont were coming down, very angry, to send me away. I ought, I know it now, to have waited, for they would have written to my aunt. But I was horribly frightened, and I couldn't bear to think of never seeing him again, and he came and comforted me, and said he would take me to Mrs. Houghton, the kind lady who was staying in the Ninon, and they would make it all square for

me—and then—oh! it was very sweet—but I never knew that we were sailing away to Jersey to be married! I knew it was very dreadful without any one's leave, but it was so noble of him to take the poor little governess and defend her, and it wasn't as if my mother had been alive. I didn't know Aunt Ursel then as I did afterwards. And Mrs. Houghton said there was nothing else to be done.'

'O don't leave off, mother. Do tell me. How long did you have him?'

'Six weeks then—and afterwards one fortnight at Dieppe. He was not free. He had an old uncle, General Egremont, who was sick and hot-tempered, and he was obliged to keep everything secret from him, and therefore from everybody else. And so I was to live at Dieppe, while he went out to take care of his uncle, and you know—you know—'

'Yes, I know, dear mother. But I am sure he was saving somebody else, and it was a noble death! And I know how Aunt Ursel came to Dieppe, and how I—your own little Frenchwoman—came to take care of you. And haven't we been jolly without any of these fine relations that never looked after you all this time? Besides, you know he is very likely to be on a lonely coral island, and will come home yet. I often think he is.'

'My dear child, I have been happier than I deserved,' said Alice Egremont, drying her eyes. 'But oh! Nuttie, I hope you will be a wiser woman than your mother.'

'Come, don't go on in that way! Why, I've such advantages! I've Miss Mary, and Aunt Ursel, and Mr. Spyers, and Mr. Dutton, and you, you poor little thing, had nobody! One good thing is, we shall get the water-soldier. Mr. Dutton needn't come, for he's like a cat, and won't soil his boots, but Gerard is dying to get another look at the old ruin. He can't make up his mind about the cross on one of the stone-coffin lids, so he'll be delighted to come, and he'll get it out of the pond for us. I wonder when we can go. To-night is choir practice, and to-morrow is cutting-out day.'

Miss Headworth was not sorry that the small sociabilities of the friends did not leave her alone with her niece all that evening, or the next day, when there was a grand cutting-out for the working party,—an operation always performed in the holidays. Miss Headworth had of late years been excused from it, and it gave her the opportunity she wanted of a consultation with Mr. Dutton. He was her prime adviser in everything, from her investments (such as they were) to the eccentricities of her timepieces; and as the cuckoo-clock had that night cuckooed all the hours round in succession, no one thought it wonderful that she should send a twisted note entreating him to call as early as he could in the afternoon. Of course Nuttie's chatter had proclaimed the extraordinary visitors, and it needed not the old lady's dash under "on an anxious affair" to bring him to her little drawing-room as soon as he could quit his desk. Perhaps he hastened his work with a hope in his heart which he durst not express, but the agitation on the usually placid face forbade him to entertain it for an instant, and he only said, 'So our expedition has led to unforeseen consequences, Miss Headworth.' And then she answered under her breath, as if afraid of being overheard: 'Mr. Dutton, my poor child does not know it yet, but the man is alive!'

Mr. Dutton compressed his lips. It was the greater shock, for he had actually made inquiries at the Yacht Club, but the officials there either had not been made aware of the reappearance of the two Egremonts, or they did not think it worth while to look beyond the record which declared that all hands had perished, and the connection of the uncle and nephew with the Yacht Club had not been renewed. Presently he said, 'Then hers was a right instinct. There is reason to be thankful.'

Miss Headworth was too full of her own anxieties to heed his causes for thankfulness. She told what she had heard from Lady Kirkaldy and from Mark Egremont, and asked counsel whether it could be Alice's duty to return to the man who had deserted her, or even to accept anything from him. There was an impetuous and indignant spirit at the bottom of the old lady's heart, in spite of the subdued life she had led for so many years, and she hardly brooked the measured considerate manner in which her adviser declared that all depended on circumstances, and the manner in which Captain Egremont made the first move. At present no one was acting but young Mark, and, as Mr. Dutton observed, it was not a matter in which a man was very likely to submit to a nephew's dictation.

There was certainly no need for Mrs. Egremont to *force* her presence on him. But Mr. Dutton did think that for her own sake and her child's there ought to be full recognition of their rights, and that this should be proved by their maintenance.

'I imagine that Ursula may probably be a considerable heiress, and her lights must not be sacrificed.'

'Poor little girl! Will it be for her happiness? I doubt it greatly!'

'Of that I suppose we have no right to judge,' said Mr. Dutton, somewhat tremulously. 'Justice is what we have to look to, and to allow Nuttie to be passed over would be permitting a slur to be cast on her and her mother.'

'I see that,' said Miss Headworth, with an effort. 'I suppose I am after all a selfish, faithless old woman, and it is not in my hands after all. But I must prepare my poor Alice for what may be coming.'

'If any terms are offered to her, she had better put the matter into a lawyer's hands. Dobson would be a safe man to deal with.'

Miss Headworth was amazed that he—who had helped her in many a little question bordering on law—should not proffer his aid now in this greatest stress. He was a resolute, self-controlled man, and she never guessed at the feeling that made him judge himself to be no fitting champion for Alice Egremont against her husband. Ever since, ten years ago, he had learnt that his beautiful neighbour did not regard herself so certainly a widow as to venture to open her heart to any other love, he had lived patiently on, content to serve her as a trustworthy friend, and never betraying the secret hope so long cherished and now entirely crushed.

He was relieved to escape from the interview, and the poor old lady remained a little more certain as to her duty perhaps, but with a certainty that only made her more unhappy, and she was so restless and nervous that, in the middle of the evening's reading of Archbishop Trench's Lectures on History, Alice suddenly broke off in the very middle of a sentence and exclaimed, 'Aunt Ursel! you are keeping something from me.'

Miss Headworth made a faint attempt by saying something about presently, and glancing with her eyes to indicate that it was to be reserved till after Nuttie's bedtime, but the young lady comprehended the signs and exclaimed, 'Never mind me, Aunt Ursel,—I know all about mother; she told me last night.'

'It is!' broke in Mrs. Egremont, who had been watching her aunt's face. 'You have heard of *him*.'

'Oh, my father! You really have!' cried Nuttie. 'Then he really was on the desert island all this time; I was quite sure of it. How delightful!' She jumped up and looked at the door, as if she expected to see him appear that instant, clad in skins like Robinson Crusoe, but her aunt's nervous agitation found vent in a sharp reproof: 'Nuttie, hold your tongue, and don't be such a foolish child, or I shall send you out of the room this instant!'

'But aunt?' gasped Alice, unable to bear the suspense.

'Yes, my poor dear child. Captain Egremont with the General got off with some of the crew in a boat when the Ninon was burnt. He spent a good many years abroad with the old man, but he has now inherited the family place, and is living there.' Miss Headworth felt as if she had fired a cannon and looked to see the effect.

'Ah, if we could have stayed at Dieppe!' said Mrs. Egremont. 'But we did write back to say where we could be heard of.'

'That was of no use. Mark found no traces of us when he went thither.'

'Did he send Mark?'

'No. My dear Alice, I must not conceal from you that this is all Mr. Mark Egremont's doing. He seems to have been helping his uncle with his papers when he came on the evidence of your marriage, and, remembering you as he does, he forced the confession of it from the captain, and of his own accord set forth to discover what had become of you and to see justice done to you.'

'Dear little Mark!' said she; 'he always was such an affectionate little boy.'

'And now, my dear, you must consider how you will receive any advances on his part.'

'Oh, Aunt Ursel, don't! I can't talk now. Please let me go to bed. Nuttie, dear, you need not come yet.'

The desire for solitude, in which to realise what she had heard, was overpowering, and she fled away in the summer twilight, leaving Nuttie with wide open eyes, looking after her vanished hero and desert island.

'My poor Alice!' sighed the old lady.

'Aunt Ursel!' exclaimed Nuttie, 'was—I mean—is my father a good or a bad man?'

'My dear, should a daughter ask such a question?'

'Aunt Ursel, I can't help it. I think I ought to know all about it,' said Nuttie gravely, putting away her childishness and sitting down by her aunt. 'I did not think so much of it when mother told me they eloped, because, though I know it was very wrong, people do do odd things sometimes when they are very much in love (she said it in a superior patronising tone that would have amused Miss Headworth very much at any other time); and it has not spoilt mother for being the dearest, sweetest, best thing in the world, and, besides, they had neither of them any fathers or mothers to disobey. But, then, when I found he was so old, and that he kept it a secret, and must have told stories only for the sake of money (uttered with extreme contempt), I didn't like it. And if he left her as Theseus left Ariadne, or Sir Lancelot left Elaine, I—I don't think it is nice. Do you think he only pretended to be lost in the Ninon to get rid of her, or that he could not find her?'

'The Ninon was really reported lost with all on board,' said Miss Headworth. 'That was ascertained. He was saved by a Chilian ship, and seems to have been a good while making his way back to Europe. I had taken care that our address should be known at Dieppe, but it is quite possible that he may not have applied to the right people, or that they may not have preserved my letter, so that we cannot feel sore that he was to blame.'

'If he had been worth anything at all, he would have moved heaven and earth to find her!' cried Nuttie; 'and you said yourself it was all *that* Mark's doing!'

'He seems to be a very upright and generous young man, that Mr. Mark Egremont,' said Miss Headworth, a whole romance as to Nuttie's future destiny sweeping across her mind in an instant, with a mental dispensation to first cousins in such a case. 'I think you will find him a staunch champion even against his own interests.'

Perceptions came across Nuttie. 'Oh, then I am a sort of lost heiress, like people in a story! I see! But, Aunt Ursel, what do you think will happen?'

'My dear child, I cannot guess in the least. Perhaps the Egremont property will not concern you, and only go to male heirs. That would be the best thing, since in any case you must be sufficiently provided for. Your father must do that.'

'But about mother?'

'A proper provision must be insisted on for her,' said Miss Headworth. 'It is no use, however, to speculate on the future. We cannot guess how Mr. Mark Egremont's communication will be received, or whether any wish will be expressed for your mother's rejoining your father. In such a case the terms must be distinctly understood, and I have full trust both in Mr. Mark and in Lady Kirkaldy as her champions to see that justice is done to you both.'

'I'm sure he doesn't deserve that mother should go to him.'

'Nor do I expect that he will wish it, or that it would be proper; but he is bound to give her a handsome maintenance, and I think most probably you will be asked to stay with your uncle and cousins,' said Miss Headworth, figuring to herself a kind of Newstead Abbey or some such scene of constant orgies at Bridgefield Egremont.

'I shall accept nothing from the family that does not include mother,' said Nuttie.

'Dear child, I foresee many trials, but you must be her protector.'

'That I will,' said Nuttie; and in the gallant purpose she went to bed, to find her mother either asleep or feigning slumber with tears on her cheek.

CHAPTER VI

THE WATER-SOLDIER

*'Presumptuous maid, with looks intent,
Again she stretched, again she bent,
Nor knew the gulf between.'*—GRAY.

It all seemed like a dream to Ursula, perhaps likewise to her mother, when they rose to the routine of daily life with the ordinary interests of the day before them. There was a latent unwillingness in Mrs. Egremont's mind to discuss the subject with either aunt or daughter; and when the post brought no letter, Ursula, after a moment's sense of flatness, was relieved, and returned to her eager desire to hurry after the water-soldier. It was feasible that very afternoon. Mary Nugent came in with the intelligence.

'And can Gerard come? or we shall only look at it.'

'Yes, Gerard can come, and so will Mr. Dutton,' said Mary, who, standing about half-way between Mrs. Egremont and her daughter, did not think herself quite a sufficient chaperon.

'He will look on like a hen at her ducklings,' said Nuttie. 'It is cruel to take him, poor man!'

'Meantime, Nuttie, do you like an hour of "Marie Stuart?"'

'Oh, thank you!' But she whispered, 'Aunt Ursel, may I tell her?'

'Ask your mother, my dear.'

Leave was given, half reluctantly, and with a prohibition against mentioning the subject to any one else, but both mother and aunt had confidence in Mary Nugent's wisdom and discretion, so the two friends sat on the wall together, and Ursula poured out her heart. Poor little girl! she was greatly discomfited at the vanishing of her noble vision of the heroic self-devoted father, and ready on the other hand to believe him a villain, like Bertram Risingham, or 'the Pirate,' being possessed by this idea on account of his West Indian voyages. At any rate, she was determined not to be accepted or acknowledged without her mother, and was already rehearsing magnanimous letters of refusal.

Miss Mary listened and wondered, feeling sometimes as if this were as much a romance as the little yacht going down with the burning ship; and then came back the recollection that there was a real fact that Nuttie had a father, and that it was entirely uncertain what part he might take, or what the girl might be called on to do. Considering anxiously these bearings of the question, she scarcely heard what she was required to assent to, in one of Nuttie's eager, 'Don't you think so?'

'My dear Nuttie,' she said, rousing herself, 'what I do think is that it will all probably turn out exactly contrariwise to our imaginations, so I believe it would be wisest to build up as few fancies as possible, but only to pray that you may have a right judgment in all things, and have strength to do what is right, whatever you may see that to be.'

'And of course that will be to stick by mother.'

'There can be little doubt of that, but the how? No, dear, do not let us devise all sorts of *hows* when we have nothing to go upon. That would be of no use, and only perplex you when the time comes. It would be much better to "do the nexte thinge," and read our "Marie Stuart."'

Nuttie pouted a little, but submitted, though she now and then broke into a translation with 'You know mother will never stand up for herself,' or 'They think I shall be asked to stay with the Egremonts, but I must work up for the exam.'

However, the school habit of concentrating her attention prevailed, and the study quieted Nuttie's excitement. The expedition took place as arranged. There was a train which stopped so that the party could go down by it, and the distance was not too great for walking back.

Mr. Dutton met them on the platform, well armed with his neat silk umbrella, and his black poodle, Monsieur, trotting solemnly after him. Gerard Godfrey bore materials for an exact transcript of the Abbot's monumental cross, his head being full of church architecture, while Nuttie carried a long green tin case, or vasculum as she chose to call it, with her three vowels, U A E, and the stars of the Little Bear conspicuously painted on it in white.

'You did not venture on that the other day,' said Mr. Dutton. 'How much of the park do you mean to carry away in it?'

'Let me take it,' said Gerard politely.

'No, thank you. You'd leave it behind, while you were pottering over the mouldings.'

'You are much more likely to leave it behind yourself.'

'What—with my soldier, my Stratiotes, in it? I think I see myself.'

'Give it to me,' said Gerard. 'Of course I can't see you carrying a great thing like that.'

'Can't you, indeed?'

'Gently, gently, my dear,' said Miss Mary, as the young people seemed very near a skirmish, and the train was sweeping up. Then there was another small scuffle, for Nuttie had set her heart on the third class; but Mr. Dutton had taken second-class tickets, and was about to hand them into a carriage whence there had just emerged a very supercilious black-moustached valet, who was pulling out a leather-covered dressing-case, while Gerard was consoling Nuttie by telling her that Monsieur never deigned to go third class.

'It is a smoking carriage,' said Miss Nugent, on the step. 'Pah! how it smells,' as she jumped back.

'Beautiful backy—a perfect nosegay,' said Gerard.

'Trust that fellow for having the best.'

'His master's, no doubt,' suggested Mr. Dutton.

'You'd better go in it, to enjoy his reversion,' said Nuttie.

'And where's my escort, then?'

'Oh, I'm sure we don't want you.'

'Nuttie, my dear,' expostulated Miss Nugent, dragging her into the next carriage.

'You may enjoy the fragrance still,' said Nuttie when seated. 'Do you see—there's the man's master; he has stood him up against that post, with his cigar, to wait while he gets out the luggage. I daresay you can get a whiff if you lean out far enough.'

'I say! that figure is a study!' said Gerard. 'What is it that he is so like?'

'Oh! I know,' said Nuttie. 'It is Lord Frederick Verisopht, and the bad gentlefolks in the pictures to the old numbers of Dickens that you have got, Miss Mary. Now, isn't he? Look! only Lord Frederick wasn't fat.'

Nuttie was in a state of excitement that made her peculiarly unmanageable, and Miss Nugent was very grateful to Mr. Dutton for his sharp though general admonition against staring, while, under pretext of disposing of the umbrella and the vasculum, he stood up, so as to block the window till they were starting.

There was no one else to observe them but a demure old lady, and in ten minutes' time they were in open space, where high spirits might work themselves off, though the battle over the botanical case was ended by Miss Nugent, who strongly held that ladies should carry their own extra encumbrances, and slung it with a scarf over Nuttie's shoulders in a knowing knapsack fashion.

The two young people had known one another all their lives, for Gerard was the son of a medical man who had lived next door to Miss Headworth when the children were young. The father was dead, and the family had left the place, but this son had remained at school, and afterwards had been put into the office at the umbrella factory under charge of Mr. Dutton, whose godson he was, and who treated him as a nephew. He was a good-hearted, steady young fellow, with his whole interest in

ecclesiastical details, wearing a tie in accordance with 'the colours,' and absorbed in church music and decorations, while his recreations were almost all in accordance therewith.

There was plenty of merriment, as he drew and measured at the very scanty ruins, which were little more than a few fragments of wall, overgrown luxuriantly with ivy and clematis, but enclosing some fine old coffin-lids with floriated crosses, interesting to those who cared for architecture and church history, as Mr. Dutton tried to make the children do, so that their ecclesiastical feelings might be less narrow, and stand on a surer foundation than present interest, a slightly aggressive feeling of contempt for all the other town churches, and a pleasing sense of being persecuted.

They fought over the floriations and mouldings with great zest, and each maintained a date with youthful vigour—both being, as Mr. Dutton by and by showed them, long before the foundation. The pond had been left to the last with a view to the wellbeing of the water-soldier on the return. Here the difficulties of the capture were great, for the nearest plant flourished too far from the bank to be reached with comfort, and besides, the sharp-pointed leaves to which it owes its name were not to be approached with casual grasps.

'Oh Monsieur, I wish you were a Beau,' sighed Nuttie. 'Why, are you too stupid to go and get it?'

'It is a proof of his superior intelligence,' said Mr. Dutton.

'But really it is too ridiculous—too provoking—to have come all this way and not get it,' cried the tantalised Nuttie. 'Oh, Gerard, are you taking off your boots and stockings? You duck!'

'Just what I wish I was,' said the youth, rolling up his trousers.

But even the paddling in did not answer. Mr. Dutton called out anxiously, 'Take care, Gerard, the bottom may be soft,' and came down to the very verge just in time to hold out his hand, and prevent an utterly disastrous fall, for Gerard, in spite of his bare feet, sank at once into mud, and on the first attempt to take a step forward, found his foot slipping away from under him, and would in another instant have tumbled backwards into the slush and weeds. He scrambled back, his hat falling off into the reeds, and splashing Mr. Dutton all over, while Monsieur began to bark 'with astonishment at seeing his master in such a plight,' declared the ladies, who stood convulsed with cruel laughter.

'Isn't it dreadful?' exclaimed Ursula.

'Well! It might have been worse,' gravely said Mr. Dutton, wiping off the more obnoxious of his splashes with his pocket handkerchief.

'Oh I didn't mean you, but the water-soldier,' said Nuttie. 'To have come five miles for it in vain!'

'I don't know what to suggest,' added Gerard. 'Even if the ladies were to retire—'

'No, no,' interposed Mr. Dutton, 'tis no swimming ground, and I forbid the expedient. You would only be entangled in the weeds.'

'Behold!' exclaimed Mary, who had been prowling about the banks, and now held up in triumph one of the poles with a bill-hook at the end used for cutting weed.

'Bravo, Miss Nugent!' cried Gerard.

'Female wit has circumvented the water-soldier,' said Mr. Dutton.

'Don't cry out too soon,' returned Mary; 'the soldier may float off and escape you yet.'

However, the capture was safely accomplished, without even a dip under water to destroy the beauty of the white flowers. With these, and a few waterlilies secured by Gerard for the morrow's altar vases, the party set out on their homeward walk, through plantations of whispering firs, the low sun tingeing the trunks with ruddy light; across heathery commons, where crimson heath abounded, and the delicate blush-coloured wax-belled species was a prize; by cornfields in ear hanging out their dainty stamens; along hedges full of exquisite plumes of feathering or nodding grass, of which Nuttie made bouquets and botanical studies, and Gerard stored for harvest decorations. They ran and danced on together with Monsieur at their heels, while the elders watched them with some sadness and anxiety. Free-masonry had soon made both Mary and Mr. Dutton aware of each other's initiation, and they had discussed the matter in all its bearings, agreed that the man was a scoundrel, and the woman an angel, even if she had once been weak, and that she ought to be very resolute with him if

he came to terms. And then they looked after their young companions, and Mr. Dutton said, 'Poor children, what is before them?'

'It is well they are both so young,' answered Mary.

CHAPTER VII THAT MAN

'It is the last time—'tis the last!'—SCOTT.

Sundays were the ever-recurring centres of work and interests to the little circle in St. Ambrose's Road. To them the church services and the various classes and schools were the great objects and excitements of the week. A certain measure of hopeful effort and varying success is what gives zest to life, and the purer and higher the aim, and the more unmixed the motives, the greater the happiness achieved by the 'something attempted, something done.'

Setting apart actual spiritual devotion, the altar vases, purchased by a contribution of careful savings, and adorned with the Monks Horton lilies, backed by ferns from the same quarter; the surplices made by the ladies themselves, the chants they had practised, the hymns they had taught, could not but be much more interesting to them than if they had been mere lookers on. Every cross on the markers, every flower on the altar cloth was the work of one or other of them; everything in the church was an achievement, and choir boys, school children, Bible classes, every member of the regular congregation, had some special interest; nay, every irregular member or visitor might be a convert in time—if not a present sympathiser, and at the very least might swell the offertory that was destined to so many needs of the struggling district.

Thus it was with some curiosity mingled with self-reproach that Nuttie, while singing her Benedictus among the tuneful shop-girls, to whom she was bound to set an example, became aware of yesterday's first-class traveller lounging, as far as the rows of chairs would permit, in the aisle, and, as she thought, staring hard at her mother. It was well that Mrs. Egremont's invariable custom was never to lift her eyes from her book or her harmonium, or she surely must have been disconcerted, her daughter thought, by the eyes that must have found her out, under her little black net bonnet and veil, as the most beautiful woman in church,—as she certainly was,—even that fine good-for-nothing gentleman thinking so. Nuttie would add his glances to the glories of her lovely mother!

And she did so, with triumph in her tone of reprobation, as she trotted off, after the early dinner, to her share of Sunday-school work as usual under Miss Nugent's wing. It began with a children's service, and then ensued, in rooms at the factory, lent by Mr. Dutton, the teaching that was to supply the omissions of the Board School; the establishment of a voluntary one being the next ambition of St. Ambrose's.

Coming home from their labours, in the fervent discussion of their scholars, and exchanging remarks and greetings with the other teachers of various calibres, the friends reached their own road, and there, to their amazement, beheld Miss Headworth.

'Yes, it really is!' cried Nuttie. 'We can't be too late? No—there's no bell! Aunt Ursel! What has brought you out? What's the matter? Where's mother?'

'In the house. My dear,' catching hold of her, and speaking breathlessly, 'I came out to prepare you. He is come—your father—'

'Where?' cried Nuttie, rather wildly.

'He is in the drawing-room with your mother. I said I would send you.' Poor Miss Headworth gasped with agitation. 'Oh! where's Mr. Dutton—not that anything can be done—'

'Is it *that man*?' asked Nuttie, and getting no answer, 'I know it is! Oh Aunt Ursel, how could you leave her with him? I must go and protect her. Gerard—come. No, go and fetch Mr. Dutton.'

'Hush! hush, Nuttie,' cried her aunt, grasping her. 'You know nothing about it. Wait here till I can tell you.'

'Come in here, dear Miss Headworth,' said Mary, gently drawing her arm into hers, for the poor old lady could hardly stand for trembling, and bidding Gerard open the door of her own house with the latch-key.

She took them into the dining-room, so as not to disturb her mother, sent Gerard off after Mr. Dutton in the very uttermost astonishment and bewilderment, and set Miss Headworth down in an easy-chair, where she recovered herself, under Mary's soothing care, enough to tell her story in spite of Nuttie's exclamations. 'Wait! wait, Nuttie! You mustn't burst in on them so! No, you need not be afraid. Don't be a silly child! He won't hurt her! Oh no! They are quite delighted to meet.'

'Delighted to meet?' said Nuttie, as if transfixed.

'Yes,' said her aunt. 'Oh yes, I always knew the poor child cared for him and tried to believe in him all along. He only had to say the word.'

'I wouldn't,' cried the girl, her eyes flashing. 'Why didn't you ask him how he could desert her and leave her?'

'My dear! how can one come between husband and wife? Oh, my poor Alice!'

'How was it, how did they meet, dear Miss Headworth?' asked Mary, administering the wine she had been pouring out.

'You hadn't been gone half an hour, Alice was reading to me, and I was just dozing, when in came Louisa. "A gentleman to see Mrs. Egremont," she said, and there he was just behind. We rose up—she did not know him at once, but he just said "Edda, my little Edda, sweeter than ever, I knew you at once," or something of that sort, and she gave one little cry of "I knew you would come," and sprang right into his arms. I—well, I meant to make him understand how he had treated her, but just as I began "Sir"—he came at me with his hand outstretched—'

'You didn't take it, aunt, I hope?' cried Nuttie.

'My dear, when you see him, you will know how impossible it is. He *has* that high-bred manner it is as if he were conferring a favour. "Miss Headworth, I conclude," said he, "a lady to whom I owe more than I can express." Just as if I had done it for his sake.' Miss Nugent felt this open expression dangerous on account of the daughter, and she looked her consternation at Mr. Dutton, who had quietly entered, ruthlessly shutting Gerard Godfrey out with only such a word of explanation as could be given on the way.

'Then he comes with—with favourable intentions,' said Mary, putting as much admonition as she could into her voice.

'Oh! no doubt of that,' said Miss Headworth, drawing herself together. 'He spoke of the long separation,—said he had never been able to find her, till the strange chance of his nephew stumbling on her at Abbots Norton.'

'That is—possib—probably true,' said Mr. Dutton.

'It can't be,' broke in Nuttie. 'He never troubled himself about it till his nephew found the papers. You said so, Aunt Ursel! He is a dreadful traitor of a man, just like Marmion, or Theseus, or Lancelot, and now he is telling lies about it! Don't look at me. Aunt Ursel, they are lies, and I *will* say it, and he took in poor dear mother once, and now he is taking her in again, and I can't bear that he should be my father!'

It was so entirely true, yet so shocking to hear from her mouth, that all three stood aghast, as she stood with heaving chest, crimson cheeks, and big tears in her eyes. Miss Headworth only muttered, 'Oh, my poor child, you mustn't!'

Mr. Dutton prevented another passionate outburst by his tone of grave, gentle authority. 'Listen a moment, Ursula,' he said. 'It is unhappily true that this man has acted in an unjustifiable way towards your mother and yourself. But there are, no doubt, many more excuses for him than you know of, and as I found a few years ago that the people at Dieppe had lost the address that had been left with them, he must have found no traces of your mother there. You cannot understand the difficulties that may have been in his way. And there is no use, quite the contrary, in making the worst of him. He has

found your mother out, and it seems that he claims her affectionately, and she forgives and welcomes him—out of the sweet tenderness of her heart.'

'She may—but I can't,' murmured Nuttie.

'That is not a fit thing for a daughter, nor a Christian, to say,' Mr. Dutton sternly said.

'Tis not for myself—'tis for her,—'objected Nuttie.

'That's nonsense; a mere excuse,' he returned. 'You have nothing at all to forgive, since he did not know you were in existence. And as to your mother, whom you say you put first, what greater grief or pain can you give her than by showing enmity and resentment against her husband, when she, the really injured person, loves and forgives?'

'He's a bad man. If she goes back to him, I know he will make her unhappy—'

'You don't know any such thing, but you do know that your opposition will make her unhappy. Remember, there's no choice in the matter. He has legal rights over you both, and since he shows himself ready (as I understand from Miss Headworth that he is) to give her and you your proper position, you have nothing to do but to be thankful. I think myself that it is a great subject of thankfulness that your mother can return so freely without any bitterness. It is the blessing of such as she—'

Nuttie stood pouting, but more thoughtful and less violent, as she said, 'How can I be thankful? I don't want position or anything. I only want him to let my—my own mother, and aunt, and me alone.'

'Child, you are talking of what you do not understand. You must not waste any more time in argument. Your mother has sent for you, and it is your duty to go and let her introduce you to your father. I have little doubt that you will find him very unlike all your imagination represents him, but let that be as it may, the fifth Commandment does not say, "Honour only thy good father," but, "Honour thy father." Come now, put on your gloves—get her hat right, if you please, Miss Mary. There—now, come along, be a reasonable creature, and a good girl, and do not give unnecessary pain and vexation to your mother.' He gave her his arm, and led her away.

'Well done, Mr. Dutton!' exclaimed Miss Nugent.

'Poor Mr. Dutton!' All Aunt Ursel's discretion could not suppress that sigh, but Mary prudently let it pass unnoticed, only honouring in her heart the unselfishness and self-restraint of the man whose long, patient, unspoken hopes had just received a death-blow.

'Oh, Mary! I never thought it would have been like this!' cried the poor old lady. 'I ought not to have spoken as I did before the child, but I was so taken by surprise! Alice turned to him just as if he had been the most faithful, loving husband in the world. She is believing every word he says.'

'It is very happy for her that she can,' pleaded Mary.

'So it is, yes, but—when one knows what he is, and what she is! Oh, Mr. Dutton, is the poor child gone in?'

'Yes, I saw her safe into the room. She was very near running off up the stairs,' said Mr. Dutton. 'But I daresay she is fascinated by this time. That sort of man has great power over women.'

'Nuttie is hardly a woman yet,' said Miss Nugent.

'No, but there must be a strong reaction, when she sees something unlike her compound of Marmion and Theseus.'

'I suppose there is no question but that they must go with him!' said Miss Headworth wistfully.

'Assuredly. You say he—this Egremont—was affectionate,' said Mr. Dutton quietly, but Mary saw his fingers white with his tight clenching of the bar of the chair.

'Oh yes, warmly affectionate, delighted to find her prettier than ever, poor dear; I suppose he meant it. Heaven forgive me, if I am judging him too hardly, but I verily believe he went to church to reconnoitre, and see whether she pleased his fancy—'

'And do you understand,' added Mr. Dutton, 'that he is prepared to do her full justice, and introduce her to his family and friends as his wife, on equal terms? Otherwise, even if she were unwilling to stand up for herself, it would be the duty of her friends to make some stipulations.'

'I am pretty sure that he does,' said the aunt; 'I did not stay long when I saw that I was not wanted, but I heard him say something about his having a home for her now, and her cutting out the Redcastle ladies.'

'Besides, there is the nephew, Mr. Mark Egremont,' said Mary. 'He will take care of her.'

'Yes,' said Mr. Dutton. 'It appears to be all right. At any rate, there can be no grounds for interference on our part.'

Mr. Dutton took his leave with these words, wringing Miss Headworth's hand in mute sympathy, and she, poor old lady, when he was gone, fairly collapsed into bitter weeping over the uncertain future of those whom she had loved as her own children, and who now must leave her desolate. Mary did her best with comfort and sympathy, and presently took her to share her griefs and fears with gentle old Mrs. Nugent.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FATHER

*'I do think this lady
To be my child.'*—*King Lear.*

Nuttie, in her fresh holland Sunday dress, worked in crewels with wild strawberries by her mother's hands, and with a white-trimmed straw hat, was almost shoved into the little drawing-room by Mr. Dutton, though he was himself invisible.

Her eyes were in such a daze of tears that she hardly saw more at first than that some one was there with her mother on the sofa. 'Ah, there she is!' she heard her mother cry, and both rose. Her mother's arm was round her waist, her hand was put into another, Mrs. Egremont's voice, tremulous with exceeding delight, said, 'Our child, our Ursula, our Nuttie! Oh, this is what I have longed for all these years! Oh, thanks, thanks!' and her hands left her daughter to be clasped and uplifted for a moment in fervent thanksgiving, while Nuttie's hand was held, and a strange hairy kiss, redolent of tobacco-smoking, was on her forehead—a masculine one, such as she had never known, except her cousin Mark's, since the old rector died, and she had grown too big for Mr. Dutton's embraces. It was more strange than delightful, and yet she felt the polish of the tone that said, 'We make acquaintance somewhat late, Ursula, but better late than never.'

She looked up at this new father, and understood instantly what she had heard of his being a grand gentleman. There was a high-bred look about him, an entire ease and perfect manner that made everything he did or said seem like gracious condescension, and took away the power of questioning it at the moment. He was not above the middle size, and was becoming unwieldy; but there was something imposing and even graceful in his deportment, and his bald narrow forehead looked aristocratic, set off between side tufts of white hair, white whiskers, and moustaches waxed into sharp points, Victor Emmanuel fashion, and a round white curly beard. His eyes were dark, and looked dull, with yellow unwholesome corners, and his skin was not of a pleasant colour, but still, with all Nuttie's intentions of regarding him with horror, she was subdued, partly by the grand breeding and air of distinction, and partly by the current of sympathy from her mother's look of perfect happiness and exultation. She could not help feeling it a favour, almost an undeserved favour, that so great a personage should say, 'A complete Egremont, I see. She has altogether the family face.'

'I am so glad you think so,' returned her mother.

'On the whole it is well, but she might have done better to resemble you, Edda,' he said caressingly; 'but perhaps that would have been too much for the Earlsforth natives. William's girls will have enough to endure without a double eclipse!' and he laughed.

'I—I don't want—' faltered the mother.

'You don't want, no, but you can't help it,' he said, evidently with a proud delight in her beauty. 'Now that I have seen the child,' he added, 'I will make my way back to the hotel.'

'Will you—won't you stay to tea or dinner?' said his wife, beginning with an imploring tone which hesitated as she reviewed possible chops and her aunt's dismay.

'Thank you, I have ordered dinner at the hotel,' he answered, 'and Gregorio is waiting for me with a cab. No doubt you will wish to make arrangements with Madame—the old lady—and I will not trouble her further to-night. I will send down Gregorio to-morrow morning, to tell you what I arrange. An afternoon train, probably, as we shall go no farther than London. You say Lady Kirkaldy called on you. We might return her visit before starting, but I will let you know when I have looked at the trains. My compliments to Miss Headworth. Good evening, sweetest.' He held his wife in a fond

embrace, kissing her brow and cheeks and letting her cling to him, then added, 'Good evening, little one,' with a good-natured careless gesture with which Nuttie was quite content, for she had a certain loathing of the caresses that so charmed her mother. And yet the command to make ready had been given with such easy authority that the idea of resisting it had never even entered her mind, though she stood still while her mother went out to the door with him and watched him to the last.

Coming back, she threw her arms round her daughter, kissed her again and again, and, with showers of the glad tears long repressed, cried, 'Oh, my Nuttie, my child, what joy! How shall I be thankful enough! Your father, your dear father! Now it is all right.' Little sentences of ecstasy such as these, interspersed with caresses, all in the incoherence of overpowering delight, full of an absolute faith that the lost husband had loved her and been pining for her all these years, but that he had been unable to trace her, and was as happy as she was in the reunion.

The girl was somewhat bewildered, but she was carried along by this flood of exceeding joy and gladness. The Marmion and Theseus images had been dispelled by the reality, and, with Mr. Dutton's sharp reproof fresh upon her, she felt herself to have been doing a great injustice to her father; believed all that her mother did, and found herself the object of a romantic recognition—if not the beggar girl become a princess, at any rate, the little school-teacher a county lady! And she had never seen her mother so wildly, overpoweringly happy with joy. That made her, too, feel that something grand and glorious had happened.

'What are we going to do?' she asked, as the vehemence of Mrs. Egremont's emotion began to work itself off.

'Home! He takes us to his home! *His* home!' repeated her mother, in a trance of joy, as the yearnings of her widowed heart now were fulfilled.

'Oh, but Aunt Ursel!'

'Poor Aunt Ursel! Oh, Nuttie, Nuttie, I had almost forgotten! How could I?' and there was a shower of tears of compunction. 'But he said he owed everything to her! She will come with us! Or if she doesn't live with us, we will make her live close by in a dear little cottage. Where is she? When did she go? I never saw her go.'

The sound of the front door was heard, for the visitor had been watched away and Miss Headworth was returning to her own house to be there received with another fervent gush of happiness, much more trying to her, poor thing, than to Nuttie.

There was evensong imminent, and the most needful act at the moment was to compose the harmonium-player sufficiently for her to take her part. Miss Headworth was really glad of the necessity, since it put off the discussion, and made a reason for silencing Nuttie until all should be more recovered from the first agitation. Alice Egremont herself was glad to carry her gratitude and thankfulness to the Throne of Grace, and in her voluntary, and all her psalms, there was an exulting strain that no one had thought the instrument capable of producing, and that went to the heart of more than one of her hearers. No one who knew her could doubt that hers was simply innocent exultation in the recovery of him whom she so entirely loved and confided in. But there could not but be terrible doubts whether he were worthy of that trust, and what the new page in her life would be.

Miss Headworth had said they would not talk till after church, but there was no deferring the matter then. She was prepared, however, when her niece came up to her in a tender deprecating manner, saying, 'Aunt Ursel, dear Aunt Ursel, it does seem very ungrateful, but—'

'He is going to take you away? Yes, I saw that. And it ought to be, my dear. You know where?'

'Yes; to London first, to be fitted out, and then to his own home. To Bridgfield Egremont. I shall have to see Mr. Egremont,' and her voice sank with shame. 'But Mark will be good to me, and why should I care when I have him.'

'It is quite right. I am glad it should be so,' firmly said the old lady.

'And yet to leave you so suddenly.'

'That can't be helped.'

'And it will only be for a little while,' she added, 'till you can make arrangements to come to us. My dear husband says he owes you everything. So you must be with us, or close to us.'

'My dear, it's very dear and good of you to think of it, but I must be independent.' She put it in those words, unwilling again to speak unguardedly before Nuttie.

'Oh, dear auntie, indeed you must! Think what you are to us, and what you have done for us. We can't go away to be happy and prosperous and leave you behind. Can we, Nuttie? Come and help me to get her to promise. Do—do dearest auntie,' and she began the coaxing and caressing natural to her, but Nuttie did not join in it, and Miss Headworth shook her head and said gravely—

'Don't, Alice. It is of no use. I tell you once for all that my mind is made up.'

Alice, knowing by long experience that, when her aunt spoke in that tone, persuasion was useless, desisted, but looked at her in consternation, with eyes swimming in tears. Nuttie understood her a little better, and felt the prickings of distrust again.

'But, aunt, dear aunt, how can we leave you? What will you do with all the boarders,' went on Mrs. Egremont.

'I shall see my way, my dear. Do not think about that. It is a great thing to see you and this child receive justice.'

'And only think, after all the hard things that have been said of him, that we should meet first at church! He would not wait and send letters and messages by Mark. You see he came down himself the first moment. I always knew he would. Only I am so sorry for him, that he should have lost all those sweet years when Nuttie was a tiny child. She must do all she can to make up to him.'

'Oh dear!' broke out Nuttie. 'It is so strange! It will be all so strange!'

'It will be a very new life,' said her aunt, rather didactically; 'but you must do your best to be a good daughter, and to fill your new position, and I have no doubt you will enjoy it.'

'If I could but take all with me!' said Nuttie. 'Oh dear! whatever will you do, Aunt Ursel? Oh mother, the choir! Who will play the harmonium? and who will lead the girls? and whatever will Mr. Spyers do? and who will take my class? Mother, couldn't we stay a little longer to set things going here?'

'It is nice of you to have thought of it, my dear,' said Mrs. Egremont, 'but your father would not like to stay on here.'

'But mightn't I stay, just a few days, mother, to wish everybody good-bye? Mr. Dutton, and Miss Mary, and Gerard, and all the girls?'

There was some consolation in this plan, and the three women rested on it that night, Mrs. Egremont recovering composure enough to write three or four needful notes, explaining her sudden departure. The aunt could not talk of a future she so much dreaded for her nieces, losing in it the thought of her own loneliness; Alice kept back her own loving, tender, undoubting joy with a curious sense that it was hard and ungrateful towards the aunt; but it was impossible to think of that, and Nuttie was in many moods.

Eager anticipation of the new unseen world beyond, exultation in finding herself somebody, sympathy with her mother's happiness, all had their share, but they made her all the wilder, because they were far from unmixed. The instinctive dislike of Mr. Egremont's countenance, and doubt of his plausible story, which had vanished before his presence, and her mother's faith, returned upon her from time to time, caught perhaps from her aunt's tone and looks. Then her aunt had been like a mother to her—her own mother much more like a sister, and the quitting her was a wrench not compensated for as in Mrs. Egremont's case by a more absorbing affection. Moreover, Nuttie felt sure that poor Gerard Godfrey would break his heart. As the mother and daughter for the last time lay down together in the room that had been theirs through the seventeen years of the girl's life, Alice fell asleep with a look of exquisite peace and content on her face, feeling her long term of trial crowned by unlooked-for joy, while Ursula, though respecting her slumbers too much to move, lay with wide-open eyes, now speculating on the strange future, now grieving over those she left—Aunt

Ursel, Gerard, Mary, and all such; the schemes from which she was snatched, and then again consoling herself with the hope that, since she was going to be rich, she could at once give all that was wanted—the white altar cloth, the brass pitcher—nay, perhaps finish the church and build the school! For had not some one said something about her position? Oh yes, she had not thought of it before, but, since she was the elder brother's daughter, she must be the heiress! There was no doubt a grand beautiful story before her; she would withstand all sorts of fascinations, wicked baronets and earls innumerable, and come back and take Gerard by the hand, and say, 'Pride was quelled and love was free.' Not that Gerard had ever uttered a word tending in that direction since he had been seven years old, but that would make it all the prettier; they would both be silently constant, till the time came, perhaps when she was of age. Mother would like it, though *that* father would certainly be horrid. And how nice it would be to give Gerard everything, and they would go all over the Continent, and see pictures, and buy them, and see all the cathedrals and all the mountains. But perhaps, since Mark Egremont had really been so generous in hunting up the cousin who was displacing him, she was bound in duty to marry him; perhaps he reckoned on her doing so. She would be generous in her turn, give up all the wealth to him, and return to do and be everything to Micklethwayte. How they would admire and bless her. And oh! she was going to London to-morrow—London, which she so much wished to see—Westminster Abbey, British Museum, All Saints, National Gallery, no end of new dresses.

Half-waking, half-dreaming, she spent the night which seemed long enough, and the light hours of the summer morning seemed still longer, before she could call it a reasonable time for getting up. Her splashings awoke her mother, who lay smiling for a few moments, realising and giving thanks for her great joy, then bestirred herself with the recollection of all that had to be done on this busy morning before any summons from her husband could arrive.

Combining packing and dressing, like the essentially unmethodical little woman she was, Mrs. Egremont still had all her beautiful silky brown hair about her shoulders when the bell of St. Ambrose's was heard giving its thin tinkling summons to matins at half-past seven. She was disappointed; she meant to have gone for this last time, but there was no help for it, and Nuttie set off by herself.

Gerard Godfrey was at his own door. He was not one of the regular attendants at the short service, being of that modern species that holds itself superior to 'Cranmer's prayers,' but on this morning he hastened up to her with outstretched hand.

'And you are going away!' he said.

'I hope to get leave to stay a few days after mother,' she said.

'To prolong the torment?' he said.

'To wish everybody good-bye. It is a great piece of my life that is come to an end, and I can't bear to break it off so short.'

'And if you feel so, who are going to wealth and pleasure, what must it be to those who are left behind?'

'Oh!' said Nuttie, 'some one will be raised up. That's what they always say.'

'I shall go into a brotherhood,' observed Gerard desperately.

'Oh, don't,' began Nuttie, much gratified, but at that moment Miss Nugent came out at her door, and Mr. Spyers, who was some way in advance, looked round and waited for them to come up. He held out his hands to her and said, 'Well, Nuttie, my child, you are going to begin a new life.'

'Oh dear! I wish I could have both!' cried Nuttie, not very relevantly as far as the words went.

'Scheiden und weiden thut weh!' quoted Mary.

'If his place was only Monks Horton. What will Aunt Ursel do?'

'I think perhaps she may be induced to join us,' said Mary. 'We mean to do our best to persuade her.'

'And there's the choir! And my class, and the harmonium,' went on Nuttie, while Gerard walked on disconsolately.

'Micklethwayte has existed without you, Nuttie,' said Mr. Spyers, taking her on with him alone. 'Perhaps it will be able to do so again. My dear, you had better look on. There will be plenty for you to learn and to do where you are going, and you will be sure to find much to enjoy, and also something to bear. I should like to remind you that the best means of going on well in this new world will be to keep self down and to have the strong desire that only love can give to be submissive, and to do what is right both to God and your father and mother. May I give you a text to take with you? "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right."'"

They were at the door and there was no time for an answer, but Nuttie, as she took her place, was partly touched and partly fretted at the admonition.

The question as to her remaining a day or two after her mother was soon disposed of. Mrs. Egremont sent a pretty little note to make the request, but the elegant valet who appeared at ten o'clock brought a verbal message that his master wished Mrs. and Miss Egremont to be ready by two o'clock to join him in calling on Lady Kirkaldy at Monks Horton, and that if their luggage was ready by four o'clock, he (Gregorio) would take charge of it, as they were all to go up to town by the 4.40 train.

'Did he have my note?' faltered Alice, stimulated by the imploring glances of aunt and daughter, but anticipating the answer.

'Yes, madame, but he wishes that Miss Egremont should accompany you immediately.'

'Of course,' was Alice's comment, 'now that he has found his child, he cannot bear to part with her.'

And all through the farewells that almost rent the gentle Alice's heart in two, she was haunted by the terror that she or her daughter should have red eyes to vex her husband. As to Mr. Dutton, he had only come in with Gerard in a great hurry just after breakfast, said there was much to do to-day at the office, as they were going to take stock, and they should neither of them have time to come home to luncheon. He shook the hands of mother and daughter heartily, promised to 'look after' Miss Headworth, and bore off in his train young Gerard, looking the picture of woe, and muttering 'I believe he has got it up on purpose;' while mother and daughter thought it very odd, and rather unkind.

CHAPTER IX

NEW PLUMES

*'And ye sall walk in silk attire,
And siller hae to spare.'*—*Old Ballad.*

The very best open fly and pair of horses, being the equipage most like a private carriage possessed by the Royal Hotel, came to the door with Mr. Egremont seated in it, at a few minutes after two o'clock, and found Alice in her only black silk, with a rose in her bonnet, and a tie to match on her neck, hastily procured as signs of her wifehood.

She had swallowed her tears, and Nuttie was not a crying person, but was perfectly scarlet on her usually brown cheeks. Her father muttered some civility about back seats, but it was plain that it was only in words, and she never thought of anything but looking back, with her last wave to her aunt and the two maids, one crying at the gate, the other at the door.

'There,' said Mr. Egremont, as they drove away, 'that is over!'

'My dear aunt,' said his wife. 'Who can express her goodness to me?'

'Cela va sans dire,' was the reply. 'But these are connections that happily Ursula is young enough to forget and leave behind.'

'I shall never forget!' began Nuttie, but she saw her father composing himself in his corner without paying the slightest heed to what she was saying, and she encountered a warning and alarmed glance from her mother, so she was forced to content herself with uttering silent vows of perpetual recollection as she passed each well-known object,—the unfinished church, with Mr. Spyers at the door talking to old Bellman; the Town Hall, whose concerts, lectures, and S. P. G. meetings had been her chief gaiety and excitement; the School of Art, where Lady Kirkaldy's appearance now seemed to her to have been like that of a bird of omen; past the shops in the High Street, with a little exultation at the thought of past desires which they had excited. Long could she have rattled away, her hopes contradicting her regrets, and her regrets qualifying her anticipations, but she saw that her mother was nervous about every word and gesture, and fairly looked dismayed when she exclaimed, 'Oh, mother, there's Etta Smith; how surprised she will be!' bowing and smiling with all her might.

There was a look of bare toleration on Mr. Egremont's face, as if he endured because it would soon be over, as Nuttie bowed several times, and his wife, though less quick to catch people's eyes, sometimes also made her recognition. When the streets were past and Nuttie had aimed her last nods at the nursery parties out walking on the road, she became aware that those cold, lack-lustre, and yet sharply critical eyes of her father were scanning her all over.

'She has been educated?' he presently said to his wife.

'Oh yes,' was the eager answer. 'She is in the highest form at the High School, and has to go up for the Senior Local Examination. Miss Belper makes sure that she will get a first class.'

Mr. Egremont gave a little wave of the hand, as dismissing something superfluous, and said, 'I hope she has some accomplishments.'

'She has done very fairly in French and German—'

'And Latin,' put in Ursula.

'And she has had several prizes at the School of Art.'

'And music? That's the only thing of any value in society,' he said impatiently, and Mrs. Egremont said more timidly, 'She has learnt music regularly.'

'But I don't care about it,' broke in Nuttie. 'I haven't mother's ear nor her voice. I learnt the science in case I should have to teach, and they make me practise. I don't mind classical music, but I can't stand rubbish, and I think it is waste of time.'

Mr. Egremont looked fairly amused, as at the outspoken folly of an enfant terrible, but he only said, either to his wife or to himself, 'A little polish, and then she may be fairly presentable.'

'We have taken great pains with her,' answered the gentle mother, evidently taking this as a great compliment, while the daughter was tingling with indignation. She, bred up by mother, and aunt, and Mary Nugent, to be barely presentable. Was not their society at Micklethwayte equal in good manners to any, and superior, far superior, in goodness and intelligence to these stupid fashionable people, who undervalued all her real useful acquirements, and cared for nothing but trumpery music.

The carriage entered the park, and Nuttie saw lake and woods from a fresh point of view. The owners were both at home, and Nuttie found herself walking behind her parents into a cheerful apartment, half library, half morning-room. Mrs. Egremont was by far the most shy and shrinking of the party, but it was an occasion that showed her husband's complete tact and savoir faire. He knew perfectly well that the Kirkaldys knew all about it, and he therefore took the initiative. 'You are surprised to see us,' he said, as he gave his hand, 'but we could not leave the country without coming to thank Lady Kirkaldy for her kindness in assisting in following up the clue to Mrs. Egremont's residence.'

'I am very happy,' said Lady Kirkaldy, while all were being seated.

'I think it was here that my nephew Mark first met one whom, child as he was, he could not but remember.'

'I don't think you met him here,' said Lady Kirkaldy to Mrs. Egremont; 'but he heard the name and was struck by it.'

'Dear Mark!' was the response. 'He was so kind.'

'He is a dear good boy,' chimed in my lady.

'Yes,' said her lord, 'an excellent good fellow with plenty of brains.'

'As he well knows,' said Mr. Egremont. 'Oh yes; I quite agree with all you say of him! One ought to be thankful for the possession of a rare specimen.'

It was in the tone in which Falstaff discussed that sober boy, Lord John of Lancaster. Lord Kirkaldy asked if the visitors were going to remain long in the neighbourhood.

'We are due in London to-night,' replied Mr. Egremont. 'We shall spend a day or two there, and then go home. Alice,' he added, though his wife had never heard him call her so before, 'Lady Kirkaldy knows your inexperience. Perhaps she would be good enough to give you some addresses that might be useful.'

'I shall be delighted,' said the lady, cordially looking at the blushing Mrs. Egremont.

'Dressmaker, and all the rest of it,' said Mr. Egremont. 'You know better than she does what she will require, and a little advice will be invaluable. Above all, if you could tell her how to pick up a maid.'

Lady Kirkaldy proposed to take the mother and daughter up to her dressing-room, where she kept her book of addresses to London tradesmen; and Mr. Egremont only begged that they would remember the 4.40 train. Then Lord Kirkaldy was left to entertain him, while the ladies went up the broad staircase to the pleasant room, which had a mingled look of refinement and usefulness which struck Nuttie at once. Lady Kirkaldy, as soon as the door was shut, took her visitor by the hand, kissed her forehead, and said, 'You must let me tell you how glad I am.'

The crystal veil at once spread over Alice's eyes.

'Oh, thank you. Lady Kirkaldy! I am *so* happy, and yet I am so afraid. Please tell me what we shall *do* so that we may not vex him, so high bred and fastidious as he is?'

'Be yourself! That's all, my dear,' said Lady Kirkaldy tenderly. 'Don't be afraid. You are quite incapable of doing anything that could distress the most fastidious taste.'

It was perfectly true of the mother, perhaps less so of the daughter; but Lady Kirkaldy only thought of her as a mere girl, who could easily be modelled by her surroundings. The kind hostess applied herself to giving the addresses of the people she thought likely to be most useful in the complete outfit which she saw would be necessary, explaining to which establishments she applied with confidence if she needed to complete her wardrobe in haste, feeling certain that nothing would be sent her that she disliked, and giving leave to use her name. She soon saw that the mother was a little dazed, while Ursula's eyes grew rounder at the unlimited vista of fine clothes, and she assented, and asked questions as to the details. As to a maid, Lady Kirkaldy would write to a person who would call on Mrs. Egremont at the hotel in London, and who might be what was wanted; and in conclusion, Lady Kirkaldy, with some diffidence, begged to be written to—'if—if,' she said, 'there happened to be any difficulty about which you might not like to consult Mrs. William Egremont.' Nuttie hardly knew whether to be grateful or not, for she did not believe in any standard above that of Micklethwayte, and she was almost angry at her mother's grateful answer—'Oh, thank you! I should be so grateful! I am so afraid of annoying him by what he may think small, ignorant, country-town ways! You will understand—'

Lady Kirkaldy did understand, and she dreaded what might be before the sweet little yielding woman, not from want of breeding so much as from the long-indulged selfishness of her husband; but she encouraged her as much as possible, and promised all possible counsel, bringing her downstairs again just in time.

'Pretty little soul!' said Lord Kirkaldy, as the fly clattered away. 'I wonder whether Mark has done her a kindness!'

'It is just what she is, a pretty, nay, a beautiful soul, full of tenderness and forgiveness and affection and humility, only I doubt whether there is any force or resolution to hold her own. You smile! Well, perhaps the less of that she has the better she may get on with him. Did he say anything about her?'

'No; I think he wants to ignore that they have not spent the last twenty years together.'

'That may be the best way for all parties. Do you think he will behave well to her?'

'No man could well do otherwise to such a sweet little thing,' said Lord Kirkaldy; 'especially as she will be his most obedient slave, and will make herself necessary to him. It is much better luck than he deserves; but I pity her when she comes to make her way with yon ladies!'

'I wish I was there! I know she will let herself be trodden on! However, there's Mark to stand up for her, and William Egremont will do whatever he thinks right and just. I wish I knew how his wife will take it!'

CHAPTER X

BRIDGEFIELD EGREMONT

*'Let us see these handsome houses
Where the wealthy nobles dwell.'*—TENNYSON.

'Mother, mother!' cried two young people, bursting open the door of the pretty dining-room of Bridgefield Rectory, where the grown-up part of the family were lingering over a late breakfast.

'Gently, gently, children,' said the dignified lady at the head of the table. 'Don't disturb papa.'

'But we really have something to say, mother!' said the elder girl, 'and Fraulein said you ought to know. Uncle Alwyn is come home, and Mrs. Egremont. And please, are we to call her Aunt Egremont, or Aunt Alwyn, or what?'

The desired sensation was produced. Canon Egremont put down his newspaper. The two elder sisters looked from one to the other in unmitigated astonishment. Mark briefly made answer to the final question, 'Aunt Alice,' and Mrs. Egremont said gravely, 'How did you hear this, Rosalind? You know I always forbid you to gossip.'

'We didn't gossip, mother. We went up to the gardens to get some mulberries for our half-holiday feast; and Ronaldson came out and told us we must ask leave first, for the ladies were come. The Squire came home at nine o'clock last night, and Mrs. Egremont and all, and only sent a telegram two hours before to have the rooms got ready.'

'Has Uncle Alwyn gone and got himself married?' exclaimed one of the young ladies, in utter amazement.

'Not just now, Blanche,' said her father. 'It is an old story now. Your uncle married this lady, who had been governess to May and Mark, many years ago, and from—circumstances in which she was not at all to blame, he lost sight of her while he was abroad with old General Egremont. Mark met her about a fortnight ago, and this has led to your uncle's going in quest of her, though he has certainly been more sudden in his proceedings than I expected.'

The mother here succeeded in sending Rosalind and Adela, with their wondering eyes, off the scene, and she would much have liked to send her two stepdaughters after them, but one-and-twenty and eighteen could not so readily be ordered off as twelve and ten; and Mark, who had been prohibited from uttering a word to his sisters, was eagerly examining Margaret whether she remembered their Edda; but she had been only three years old at the time of the adventures in the Isle of Wight, and remembered nothing distinctly but the aspect of one of the sailors in the yacht.

'Well,' said Mrs. Egremont, 'this has come very suddenly upon us. It would have been more for her own dignity if she had held out a little before coming so easily to terms, after the way in which she has been treated.'

'When you see her, mother, you will understand,' said Mark.

'Shall we have to be intimate with her?' asked May.

'I desire that she should be treated as a relation,' said the Canon decidedly. 'There is nothing against her character,' and, as his wife was about to interrupt,—'nothing but an indiscretion to which she was almost driven many years ago. She was cruelly treated, and I for one am heartily sorry for having let myself be guided by others.'

Mrs. William Egremont felt somewhat complacent, for she knew he meant Lady de Lyonnais, and there certainly had been no love lost between her and her step-children's grandmother; but she was a sensible woman, and forbore to speak, though there was a mental reservation that intimacy

would a good deal depend upon circumstances. Blanche cried out that it was a perfect romance, and May gravely said, 'But is she a lady?'

'A perfect lady,' said Mark. 'Aunt Margaret says so.'

'One knows what a perfect lady means,' returned May.

'Come, May,' said Mrs. Egremont, 'do not let us begin with a prejudice. By all accounts the poor thing has conducted herself with perfect respectability all this time. What did you tell me, Mark? She has been living with an aunt, keeping a school at Micklethwayte.'

'Not quite,' said Mark. 'She has been acting as a daily governess. She seemed to be on friendly terms with the clerical folk. I came across the name at a school feast, or something of the kind, which came off in the Kirkaldys' park.'

'Oh, then, I know exactly the sort of person!' returned May, pursing up her lips.

Mark laughed and said, 'I wonder whether it is too soon to go up and see them. I wonder what my uncle thinks of his daughter.'

'What! You don't mean to say there is a daughter?' cried May.

'Even so. And exactly like you too, Miss May.'

'Then you are cut out, Mark!'

'You are cut out, I think, May. You'll have to give her all your Miss Egremont cards.'

'No,' said the young lady; 'mother made me have my Christian name printed. She said all but the daughters of the head of the family ought to have it so. I'm glad of it.'

'How old is she?' asked Blanche.

'About a year younger than you.'

'I think it is very interesting,' said Blanche. 'How wonderful it must all be to her! I will go up with you, Mark, as soon as I can get ready.'

'You had better wait till later in the day, Blanche,' said the mother. She knew the meeting was inevitable, but she preferred having it under her own eye, if she could not reconnoitre.

She was a just and sensible woman, who felt reparation due to the newly-discovered sister-in-law, and that harmony, or at least the appearance of it, must be preserved; but she was also exclusive and fastidious by nature, and did not look forward to the needful intercourse with much satisfaction either on her own account or that of her family.

She told Mark to say that she should come to see Mrs. Egremont after luncheon, since he was determined to go at once, and moreover to drag his father with him. Canon Egremont was a good and upright man, according to his lights, which were rather those of a well-beneficed clergyman of the first than of the last half of the century, intensified perhaps that the passive voice was the strongest in him. All the country knew that Canon Egremont could be relied on to give a prudent, scholarly judgment, and to be kind and liberal, when once induced to stir mind or body—but how to do that was the problem. He had not been a young man at the time of his first marriage, and was only a few years' junior to his brother, though he had the fresh, wholesome look of a man who kept regular hours and lived much in the air.

Alice knew him at once, and thought eighteen years had made little change, as, at Nuttie's call to her, she looked from the window and saw the handsome, dignified, gray-haired, close-shaven rosy face, and the clerical garb unchanged in favour of long coats and high waistcoats.

The mother and daughter were exploring the house together. Mr. Egremont had made it known that he preferred having his breakfast alone, and not being disturbed in the forenoon. So the two ladies had breakfasted together at nine, the earliest hour at which they could prevail on the household to give them a meal. Indeed Nuttie had slept till nearly that time, for between excitement and noise, her London slumbers had been broken; and her endeavour to keep Micklethwayte hours had resulted in a long, weary, hungry time in the sitting-room of the hotel, with nothing to do, when the gaze from the window palled on her, but to write to her aunt and Mary Nugent. The rest of the day had been spent in driving about in a brougham with her mother shopping, and this she could not but enjoy exceedingly,

more than did the timid Mrs. Egremont, who could not but feel herself weighted with responsibility; and never having had to spend at the utmost more than ten pounds at a time, felt bewildered at the cheques put into her hands, and then was alarmed to find them melting away faster than she expected.

There was a very late dinner, after which Mr. Egremont, on the first day, made his wife play bezique with him. She enjoyed it, as a tender reminiscence of the yachting days; but Nuttie found herself *de trop*, and was reduced to the book she had contrived to purchase on her travels. The second night Mr. Egremont had picked up two friends, not yet gone out of town, whose talk was of horses and of yachts, quite incomprehensible to the ladies. They were very attentive to Mrs. Egremont, whom they evidently admired, one so visibly as to call up a blush; but they disregarded the daughter as a schoolgirl. Happily they appeared no more after the dinner; but Nuttie's first exclamation of astonished disgust was silenced at once by her mother with unusual determination, 'You must not speak so of your father's friends.'

'Not when—'

'Not at all,' interrupted Mrs. Egremont.

The only sense of promotion to greatness that Ursula had yet enjoyed was in these fine clothes, and the maid whom Lady Kirkaldy had recommended, a grave and severe-looking person, of whom both stood somewhat in awe. The arrival at Bridgefield had been too late for anything to be taken in but a general impression of space and dreariness, and the inevitable dinner of many courses, after which Nuttie was so tired out that her mother sent her to bed.

Since the waking she had made some acquaintance with the house. There was no show of domestics, no curtsying housekeeper to parade the new mistress over the house; Mr. Egremont had told his wife that she must fill up the establishment as she pleased, but that there was an admirable cook downstairs, and he would not have her interfered with—she suited his tastes as no one else did, and she must be left to deal with the provisions and her own underlings. There was a stable establishment, and a footman had been hired in town, but there was besides only one untidy-looking housemaid, who began by giving warning; and Alice and Nuttie had roamed about without meeting any one from the big wainscotted dining-room with faded crimson curtains and family portraits, the older grimy, the younger chalky, to the two drawing-rooms, whose gilding and pale blue damask had been preserved by pinafores of brown holland; the library, which looked and smelt as if Mr. Egremont was in the habit of sitting there, and a big billiard-room, all opening into a shivery-feeling hall, with Scagliola columns and a few dirty statues between them; then upstairs to a possible morning-room, looking out over a garden lawn, where mowing was going on in haste, and suites of dreary shut-up fusty bedrooms. Nuttie, who had notions of choosing her own bower, could not make up her mind which looked the least inviting. It did not seem as if girls could ever have laughed together, or children clattered up and down the stairs. Mrs. Egremont begged her to keep possession for the present at least of the chamber where the grim housemaid had chosen to put her, and which had the advantage of being aired.

The two windows looked out over the park, and thence it was that while Morris, the maid, was unpacking and putting away the new purchases, and Nuttie was standing, scarcely realising that such pretty hats and bonnets could be her very own, when her mother beheld the Canon and Mark advancing up the drive. It was with a great start that she called Ursula to come down directly with her, as no one would know where to find them, hastily washing the hands that had picked up a sense of dustiness during the exploration, and taking a comprehensive glance in the cheval glass, which showed her some one she felt entirely unfamiliar to her in a dainty summer costume of pale gray silk picked out with a mysterious shade of pink. Ursula too thought Miss Egremont's outer woman more like a Chelsea shepherdess than Nuttie's true self, as she tripped along in her buckled shoes and the sea green stockings that had been sent home with her skirt. With crimson cheeks and a throbbing heart, Alice was only just at the foot of the stairs when the newcomers had made their way in, and the kind Canon, ignoring all that was past, held out his hands saying, 'Well, my dear, I am glad to see you

here,' kissing Mrs. Egremont on each cheek. 'And so this is your daughter. How do you do, my dear—Ursula? Isn't that your name?' And Ursula had again to submit to a kiss, much more savoury and kindly than her father's, though very stubbly. And oh! her uncle's dress was like that of no one she had ever seen except the rector of the old church, the object of unlimited contempt to the adherents of St. Ambrose's.

As to Mark, he only kissed his aunt, and shook hands with her, while his father ran on with an unusual loquacity that was a proof of nervousness in him.

'Mrs. Egremont—Jane, I mean—will be here after luncheon. She thought you would like to get settled in first. How is Alwyn? Is he down yet?'

'I will see,' in a trembling voice.

'Oh no, never mind, Alwyn hates to be disturbed till he has made himself up in the morning. My call is on you, you know. Where are you sitting?'

'I don't quite know. In the drawing-room, I suppose.'

The Canon, knowing the house much better than she did, opened a door into a third drawing-room she had not yet seen, a pretty little room, fitted up with fluted silk, like a tent, somewhat faded but not much the worse for that, and opening into a conservatory, which seemed to have little in it but some veteran orange trees. Nuttie, however, exclaimed with pleasure at the nicest room she had seen, and Mark began unfastening the glass door that led into it. Meantime Alice, with burning cheeks and liquid eyes, nerved her voice to say, 'Oh, sir—Mr. Egremont—please forgive me! I know now how wrong I was.'

'Nonsense, my dear. Bygones are bygones. You were far more sinned against than sinning, and have much to forgive me. There, my dear, we will say no more about it, nor think of it either. I am only too thankful that poor Alwyn should have some one to look after him.'

Alice, who had dreaded nothing more than the meeting with her former master, was infinitely relieved and grateful for this kindness. She had ejaculated, 'Oh, you are so good!' in the midst, and now at the mention of her husband, she exclaimed, 'Oh! do you think he is ill? I can't help being afraid he is, but he will not tell me, and does not like to be asked.'

'Poor fellow, he has damaged his health a good deal,' was the answer. 'He had a sharp attack in the spring, but he has pretty well got over it, and Raikes told me there was no reason for uneasiness, provided he would be careful; and that will be a much easier matter now. I should not wonder if we saw him with quite a renewed youth.'

So the Canon and Mrs. Egremont were getting on pretty well together, but there was much more stiffness and less cordiality between the two cousins, although Mark got the window open into the conservatory, and showed Nuttie the way into the garden, advising her to ask Ronaldson, the gardener, to fill the conservatory with flowers. The pavilion, as this little room was called, always seemed to have more capacities for being lived in than any other room in the house. It had been fitted up when such things were the fashion for the shortlived bride of 'our great uncle.'

'The colour must have been awful then,' said Mark, looking up at it, 'enough to set one's teeth on edge; but it has faded into something quite orthodox—much better than could be manufactured for you.'

Mark had evidently some ideas of art, and was besides inclined to do the honours to the stranger; but Nuttie was not going to encourage him or anybody else to make up to her, while she had that look of Gerard Godfrey's in her mind's eye. So she made small answer, and he felt rebuffed, but supposed her shy, and wondered when he could go back to her mother, who was so much more attractive.

Presently his father went off to storm the den of the master of the house, and there was a pleasant quarter of an hour, during which the three went out through the conservatory, and Mark showed the ins-and-outs of the garden, found out Ronaldson, and congratulated him on having some one at last to appreciate his flowers, begging him to make the conservatory beautiful. And Mrs.

Egremont's smile was so effective that the Scot forthwith took out his knife and presented her with the most precious of the roses within his reach.

Moreover Mark told the names and ages of all his sisters, whole and half. He was the only son, except a little fellow in the nursery. And he exhorted his aunt not to be afraid of his step-mother, who was a most excellent person, he declared, but who never liked to see any one afraid of her.

There was something a little alarming in this, but on the whole the visit was very pleasant and encouraging to Mrs. Egremont; and she began rejoicing over the kindness as soon as the Canon had summoned his son, and they had gone away together.

'I am sure you must be delighted with your uncle and cousin, my dear,' she said.

'He's not a bit my notion of a priest,' returned Nuttie. 'And I don't believe he has any daily prayers!'

'He is old-fashioned, my dear.'

'One of the stodgy old clergymen in books,' observed Nuttie. 'I didn't think there were any of that sort left.'

'Oh, my dear, pray don't take fancies into your head! He is a very, very good man, and has been most kind to me, far more than I deserve, and he is your uncle, Nuttie. I do so hope you will get on well with your cousins.'

Here a gong, a perfectly unknown sound to Nuttie, made itself heard, and rather astonished her by the concluding roar. The two ladies came out into the hall as Mr. Egremont was crossing it. He made an inclination of the head, and uttered a sort of good morning to his daughter, but she was perfectly content to have no closer salutation. Having a healthy noonday appetite, her chief wish was at the moment that those beautiful little cutlets, arranged in a crown form, were not so very tiny; or that, with two men-servants looking on, it were possible to attain to a second help, but she had already learnt that Gregorio would not hear her, and that any attempt to obtain more food frightened her mother.

'So his reverence has been to see you,' observed Mr. Egremont. 'William, if you like it better.'

'Oh yes, and he was kindness itself!'

'And how did Master Mark look at finding I could dispense with his assistance?'

'I think he is very glad.'

Mr. Egremont laughed. 'You are a simple woman, Edda! The pose of virtuous hero was to have been full compensation for all that it might cost him! And no doubt he looks for the reward of virtue likewise.'

Wherewith he looked full at Ursula, who, to her extreme vexation, felt herself blushing up to the ears. She fidgeted on her chair, and began a most untrue 'I'm sure—' for, indeed, the poor girl was sure of nothing, but that her father's manner was most uncomfortable to her. His laugh choked whatever she might have said, which perhaps was well, and her mother's cheeks glowed as much as hers did.

'Did the Canoness—Jane, I mean—come up?' Mr. Egremont went on.

'Mrs. Egremont? No; she sent word that she is coming after luncheon.'

'Hm! Then I shall ride out and leave you to her majesty. Now look you, Alice, you are to be very careful with William's wife. She is a Condamine, you know, and thinks no end of herself, and your position among the women-folk of the county depends more on how she takes you up than anything else. But that doesn't mean that you are to let her give herself airs and domineer over you. Remember you are the elder brother's wife—Mrs. Egremont of Bridgefield Egremont—and she is nothing but a parson's wife, and I won't have her meddling in my house. Only don't you be absurd and offend her, for she can do more for or against you in society than any one else—more's the pity!'

'Oh! won't you stay and help me receive her?' exclaimed the poor lady, utterly confused by these contrary directions.

'Not I! I can't abide the woman! nor she me!' He added, after a moment, 'You will do better without me.'

So he went out for his ride, and Ursula asked, 'Oh, mother! what will you do?'

'The best I can, my dear. They are good people, and are sure to be kinder than I deserve.'

Nuttie was learning that her mother would never so much as hear, far less answer, a remark on her husband. It was beginning to make a sore in the young heart that a barrier was thus rising, where there once had been as perfect oneness and confidence as could exist between two natures so dissimilar, though hitherto the unlikeness had never made itself felt.

Mrs. Egremont turned the conversation to the establishing themselves in the pavilion, whither she proceeded to import some fancy-work that she had bought in London, and sent Nuttie to Ronaldson, who was arranging calceolarias, begonias, and geraniums in the conservatory, to beg for some cut-flowers for a great dusty-looking vase in the centre of the table.

These were being arranged when Mrs. William Egremont and Miss Blanche Egremont were ushered in, and there were the regular kindred embraces, after which Alice and Nuttie were aware of a very handsome, dignified-looking lady, well though simply dressed in what was evidently her home costume, with a large shady hat and feather, her whole air curiously fitting the imposing nickname of the Canoness. Blanche was a slight, delicate-looking, rather pretty girl in a lawn-tennis dress. The visitor took the part of treating the newcomers as well-established relations.

'We would not inundate you all at once,' she said, 'but the children are all very eager to see their cousin. I wish you would come down to the Rectory with me. My ponies are at the door. I would drive you, and Ursula might walk with Blanche.' And, as Alice hesitated for a moment, considering how this might agree with the complicated instructions that she had received, she added, 'Never mind Alwyn. I saw him going off just before I came up, and he told William he was going to look at some horses at Hale's, so he is disposed of for a good many hours.'

Alice decided that her husband would probably wish her to comply, and she rejoiced to turn her daughter in among the cousins, so hats, gloves, and parasols were fetched, and the two mothers drove away with the two sleek little toy ponies. By which it may be perceived that Mrs. William Egremont's first impressions were favourable.

'It is the shortest way through the gardens,' said Blanche. 'Have you been through them yet?'

'Mark walked about with us a little.'

'You'll improve them ever so much. There are great capabilities. Look, you could have four tennis courts on this one lawn. We wanted to have a garden-party up here last year, and father said we might, but mother thought Uncle Alwyn might think it a liberty; but now you'll have some delicious ones? Of course you play lawn-tennis?'

'I have seen it a very few times,' said Nuttie.

'Oh, we must teach you! Fancy living without lawn-tennis!' said Blanche. 'I always wonder what people did without it. Only'—with an effort at antiquarianism—'I believe they had croquet.'

'Aunt Ursula says there weren't garden-parties before croquet came in.'

'How dreadful, Ursula! Your name's Ursula, isn't it? Haven't you some jolly little name to go by?'

'Nuttie.'

'Nuttie! That's scrumptious! I'll call you Nuttie, and you may call me Pussycat.'

'That's not so nice as Blanche.'

'Mother won't have me called so when strangers are there, but you aren't a stranger, you know. You must tell me all about yourself, and how you came never to learn tennis!'

'I had something else to do,' said Nuttie, with dignity.

'Oh, you were in the schoolroom! I forgot. Poor little Nuts!'

'At school,' said Ursula.

'Ah, I remember! But you're out now, aren't you? I've been out since this spring. Mother won't let us come out till we are eighteen, isn't it horrid? And we were so worked there! I can tell you a

finishing governess is an awful institution! Poor little Rosie and Adey will be in for one by and by. At present they've only got a jolly little Fraulein that they can do anything they please with.'

'Oh, I wonder if she would tell me of some German books!'

'You don't mean that you want to read German!' and Blanche stood still, and looked at her cousin in astonishment.

'Why, what else is the use of learning it?'

'Oh, I don't know. Every one does. If one went abroad or to court, you know,' said Blanche vaguely; but Ursula had now a fresh subject of interest; for, on emerging from the shrubbery, they came in sight of a picturesque but not very architectural church, which had the smallest proportion of wall and the largest of roof, and a pretty oriel-windowed schoolhouse covered with clematis. Nuttie rushed into inquiries about services and schools, and was aghast at hearing of mere Sundays and saints' days.

'Oh no! father isn't a bit Ritualistic. I wish he was, it would be so much prettier; and then he always advertises for curates of moderate views, and they are so stupid. You never saw such a stick as we have got now, Mr. Edwards; and his wife isn't a lady, I'm sure.'

Then as to schools, it was an absolute amazement to Nuttie to find that the same plans were in force as had prevailed when her uncle had come to the living and built that pretty house—nay, were kept up at his sole expense, because he liked old-fashioned simplicity, and did not choose to be worried with Government inspection.

'And,' said Blanche, 'every one says our girls work ever so much better, and make nicer servants than those that are crammed with all sorts of nonsense not fit for them.'

As to the Sunday school. Mother and the curate take care of that. I'm sure, if you like it, you can have my class, for I always have a headache there, and very often I can't go. Only May pegs away at it, and she won't let me have the boys, who are the only jolly ones, because she says I spoil them. But you must be my friend—mind, Nuttie, not May's, for we are nearer the same age. When is your birthday? You must put it down in my book!'

Nuttie, who had tolerable experience of making acquaintance with new girls, was divided between a sense of Blanche's emptiness, and the warmth excited by her friendliness, as well as of astonishment at all she heard and saw.

Crossing the straggling, meandering village street, the cousins entered the grounds of the Rectory, an irregular but well-kept building of the soft stone of the country, all the garden front of it a deep verandah that was kept open in summer, but closed with glass frames in the winter—flower-beds lying before it, and beyond a lawn where the young folk were playing at the inevitable lawn-tennis.

Margaret was not so pretty as Blanche, but had a more sensible face, and her welcome to Ursula was civil but reserved. Rosalind and Adela were bright little things, in quite a different style from their half-sisters, much lighter in complexion and promising to be handsomer women. They looked full of eagerness and curiosity at the new cousin, whom Blanche set down on a bank, and proceeded to instruct in the mysteries of the all-important game by comments and criticisms on the players.

As soon as Mark and Adela had come out conquerors, Ursula was called on to take her first lesson. May resigned her racket, saying she had something to do, and walked off the field, and carrying off with her Adela, who, as Blanche said, 'had a spine,' and was ordered to lie down for an hour every afternoon. The cheerfulness with which she went spoke well for the training of the family.

Nuttie was light-footed and dexterous handed, and accustomed to active amusements, so that, under the tuition of her cousins, she became a promising pupil, and thawed rapidly, even towards Mark.

She was in the midst of her game when the two mothers came out, for the drive had been extended all round the park, under pretext of showing it to its new mistress, but really to give the Canoness an opportunity of judging of her in a *tete-a-tete*. Yet that sensible woman had asked no alarming questions on the past, still less had offered any advice that could seem like interference. She

had only named localities, mentioned neighbours, and made little communications about the ways of the place such as might elicit remarks; and, as Alice's voice betrayed less and less constraint, she ventured on speaking of their daughters, so as to draw forth some account of how Ursula might have been educated.

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