

YONGE CHARLOTTE MARY

HOPES AND FEARS OR,
SCENES FROM THE LIFE
OF A SPINSTER

Charlotte Yonge

**Hopes and Fears or, scenes
from the life of a spinster**

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Содержание

PART I	5
CHAPTER I	5
CHAPTER II	18
CHAPTER III	38
CHAPTER IV	48
CHAPTER V	60
PART II	72
CHAPTER I	72
CHAPTER II	82
CHAPTER III	93
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	105

Charlotte M. Yonge

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PART I

CHAPTER I

*Who ought to go then and who ought to stay!
Where do you draw an obvious border line?*

Cecil and Mary

Among the numerous steeples counted from the waters of the Thames, in the heart of the City, and grudged by modern economy as cumberers of the soil of Mammon, may be remarked an abortive little dingy cupola, surmounting two large round eyes which have evidently stared over the adjacent roofs ever since the Fire that began at Pie-corner and ended in Pudding-lane.

Strange that the like should have been esteemed the highest walk of architecture, and yet Honora Charlecote well remembered the days when St. Wulstan's was her boast, so large, so clean, so light, so Grecian, so far surpassing damp old Hiltonbury Church. That was at an age when her enthusiasm found indiscriminate food in whatever had a hold upon her affections, the nearer her heart being of course the more admirable in itself, and it would be difficult to say which she loved the most ardently, her city home in Woolstone-lane, or Hiltonbury Holt, the old family seat, where her father was a welcome guest whenever his constitution required relaxation from the severe toils of a London rector.

Woolstone-lane was a locality that sorely tried the coachmen of Mrs. Charlecote's West End connections, situate as it was on the very banks of the Thames, and containing little save offices and warehouses, in the midst of which stood Honora's home. It was not the rectory, but had been inherited from City relations, and it antedated the Fire, so that it was one of the most perfect remnants of the glories of the merchant princes of ancient London. It had a court to itself, shut in by high walls, and paved with round-headed stones, with gangways of flags in mercy to the feet; the front was faced with hewn squares after the pattern of Somerset House, with the like ponderous sashes, and on a smaller scale, the Louis XIV. pediment, apparently designed for the nesting-place of swallows and sparrows. Within was a hall, panelled with fragrant softly-tinted cedar wood, festooned with exquisite garlands of fruit and flowers, carved by Gibbons himself, with all his peculiarities of rounded form and delicate edge. The staircase and floor were of white stone, tinted on sunny days with reflections from the windows' three medallions of yellow and white glass, where Solomon, in golden mantle and crowned turban, commanded the division of a stout lusty child hanging by one leg; superintended the erection of a Temple worthy of Haarlem; or graciously welcomed a recoiling stumpy Vrow of a Queen of Sheba, with golden hair all down her back.

The river aspect of the house had come to perfection at the Elizabethan period, and was sculptured in every available nook with the chevron and three arrows of the Fletchers' Company, and a merchant's mark, like a figure of four with a curly tail. Here were the oriel windows of the best rooms, looking out on a grassplat, small enough in country eyes, but most extensive for the situation, with straight gravelled walks, and low lilac and laburnum trees, that came into profuse blossom long

before their country cousins, but which, like the crocuses and snowdrops of the flower borders, had better be looked at than touched by such as dreaded sooty fingers. These shrubs veiled the garden from the great river thoroughfare, to which it sloped down, still showing traces of the handsome stone steps and balustrade that once had formed the access of the gold-chained alderman to his sumptuous barge.

Along those paths paced, book in hand, a tall, well-grown maiden, of good straight features, and clear, pale skin, with eyes and rich luxuriant hair of the same colour, a peculiarly bright shade of auburn, such as painters of old had loved, and Owen Sandbrook called golden, while Humfrey Charlecote would declare he was always glad to see Honor's carrots.

More than thirty years ago, personal teaching at a London parish school or personal visiting of the poor was less common than at present, but Honora had been bred up to be helpful, and she had newly come in from a diligent afternoon of looking at the needlework, and hearing Crossman's Catechism and Sellon's Abridgment from a demurely dressed race of little girls in tall white caps, bibs and tuckers, and very stout indigo-blue frocks. She had been working hard at the endeavour to make the little Cockneys, who had never seen a single ear of wheat, enter into Joseph's dreams, and was rather weary of their town sharpness coupled with their indifference and want of imagination, where any nature, save human nature, was concerned. 'I will bring an ear of Hiltonbury wheat home with me—some of the best girls shall see me sow it, and I will take them to watch it growing up—the blade, the ear, the full corn in the ear—poor dears, if they only had a Hiltonbury to give them some tastes that are not all for this hot, busy, eager world! If I could only see one with her lap full of bluebells; but though in this land of Cockaigne of ours, one does not actually pick up gold and silver, I am afraid they are our flowers, and the only ones we esteem worth the picking; and like old Mr. Sandbrook, we neither understand nor esteem those whose aims are otherwise! Oh! Owen, Owen, may you only not be withheld from your glorious career! May you show this hard, money-getting world that you do really, as well as only in word, esteem one soul to be reclaimed above all the wealth that can be laid at your feet! The nephew and heir of the great Firm voluntarily surrendering consideration, ease, riches, unbounded luxury for the sake of the heathen—choosing a wigwam instead of a West End palace; parched maize rather than the banquet; the backwoods instead of the luxurious park; the Red Indian rather than the club and the theatre; to be a despised minister rather than a magnate of this great city; nay, or to take his place among the influential men of the land. What has this worn, weary old civilization to offer like the joy of sitting beneath one of the glorious aspiring pines of America, gazing out on the blue waters of her limpid inland seas, in her fresh pure air, with the simple children of the forest round him, their princely forms in attitudes of attention, their dark soft liquid eyes fixed upon him, as he tells them "Your Great Spirit, Him whom ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you," and then, some glorious old chief bows his stately head, and throws aside his marks of superstition. "I believe," he says, and the hearts of all bend with him; and Owen leads them to the lake, and baptizes them, and it is another St. Sacrament! Oh! that is what it is to have nobleness enough truly to overcome the world, truly to turn one's back upon pleasures and honours—what are they to such as this?'

So mused Honora Charlecote, and then ran indoors, with bounding step, to her Schiller, and her hero-worship of Max Piccolomini, to write notes for her mother, and practise for her father the song that was to refresh him for the evening.

Nothing remarkable! No; there was nothing remarkable in Honor, she was neither more nor less than an average woman of the higher type. Refinement and gentleness, a strong appreciation of excellence, and a love of duty, had all been brought out by an admirable education, and by a home devoted to unselfish exertion, varied by intellectual pleasures. Other influences—decidedly traceable in her musings—had shaped her principles and enthusiasms on those of an ardent Oxonian of the early years of William IV.; and so bred up, so led by circumstances, Honora, with her abilities, high cultivation, and tolerable sense, was a fair specimen of what any young lady might be, appearing

perhaps somewhat in advance of her contemporaries, but rather from her training than from intrinsic force of character. The qualities of womanhood well developed, were so entirely the staple of her composition, that there is little to describe in her. Was not she one made to learn; to lean; to admire; to support; to enhance every joy; to soften every sorrow of the object of her devotion?

* * * * *

Another picture from Honora Charlecote's life. It is about half after six, on a bright autumnal morning; and, rising nearly due east, out of a dark pine-crowned hill, the sun casts his slanting beams over an undulating country, clothed in gray mist of tints differing with the distance, the farther hills confounded with the sky, the nearer dimly traced in purple, and the valleys between indicated by the whiter, woollier vapours that rise from their streams, a goodly land of fertile field and rich wood, cradled on the bosoms of those soft hills.

Nestled among the woods, clothing its hollows on almost every side, rises a low hill, with a species of table land on the top, scattered over with large thorns and scraggy oaks that cast their shadows over the pale buff bents of the short soft grass of the gravelly soil. Looking southward is a low, irregular, old-fashioned house, with two tall gable ends like eyebrows, and the lesser gable of a porch between them, all covered with large chequers of black timber, filled up with cream-coloured cement. A straight path leads from the porch between beds of scarlet geraniums, their luxuriant horse-shoe leaves weighed down with wet, and china asters, a drop in every quilling, to an old-fashioned sun-dial, and beside that dial stands Honora Charlecote, gazing joyously out on the bright morning, and trying for the hundredth time to make the shadow of that green old finger point to the same figure as the hand of her watch.

'Oh! down, down, there's a good dog, Fly; you'll knock me down! Vixen, poor little doggie, pray! Look at your paws,' as a blue greyhound and rough black terrier came springing joyously upon her, brushing away the silver dew from the shaven lawn.

'Down, down, lie down, dogs!' and with an obstreperous bound, Fly flew to the new-comer, a young man in the robust strength of eight-and-twenty, of stalwart frame, very broad in the chest and shoulders, careless, homely, though perfectly gentleman-like bearing, and hale, hearty, sunburnt face.

It was such a look and such an arm as would win the most timid to his side in certainty of tenderness and protection, and the fond voice gave the same sense of power and of kindness, as he called out, 'Holloa, Honor, there you are! Not given up the old fashion?'

'Not till you give me up, Humfrey,' she said, as she eagerly laid her neatly gloved fingers in the grasp of the great, broad, horny palm, 'or at least till you take your gun.'

'So you are not grown wiser?'

'Nor ever will be.'

'Every woman ought to learn to saddle a horse and fire off a gun.'

'Yes, against the civil war squires are always expecting. You shall teach me when the time comes.'

'You'll never see that time, nor any other, if you go out in those thin boots. I'll fetch Sarah's clogs; I suppose you have not a reasonable pair in the world.'

'My boots are quite thick, thank you.'

'Brown paper!' And indeed they were a contrast to his mighty nailed soles, and long, untanned buskins, nor did they greatly resemble the heavy, country-made galoshes which, with an elder brother's authority, he forced her to put on, observing that nothing so completely evinced the Londoner as her obstinacy in never having a pair of shoes that could keep anything out.

'And where are you going?'

'To Hayward's farm. Is that too far for you? He wants an abatement of his rent for some improvements, and I want to judge what they may be worth.'

‘Hayward’s—oh, not a bit too far!’ and holding up her skirts, she picked her way as daintily as her weighty *chaussure* would permit, along the narrow green footway that crossed the expanse of dewy turf in which the dogs careered, getting their noses covered with flakes of thick gossamer, cemented together by dew. Fly scraped it off with a delicate forepaw, Vixen rolled over, and doubly entangled it in her rugged coat. Humfrey Charlecote strode on before his companion with his hands in his pockets, and beginning to whistle, but pausing to observe, over his shoulder, ‘A sweet day for getting up the roots! You’re not getting wet, I hope?’

‘I couldn’t through this rhinoceros hide, thank you. How exquisitely the mist is curling up, and showing the church-spire in the valley.’

‘And I suppose you have been reading all manner of books?’

‘I think the best was a great history of France.’

‘France!’ he repeated in a contemptuous John Bull tone.

‘Ay, don’t be disdainful; France was the centre of chivalry in the old time.’

‘Better have been the centre of honesty.’

‘And so it was in the time of St. Louis and his crusade. Do you know it, Humfrey?’

‘Eh?’

That was full permission. Ever since Honora had been able to combine a narration, Humfrey had been the recipient, though she seldom knew whether he attended, and from her babyhood upwards had been quite contented with trotting in the wake of his long strides, pouring out her ardent fancies, now and then getting an answer, but more often going on like a little singing bird, through the midst of his avocations, and quite complacent under his interruptions of calls to his dogs, directions to his labourers, and warnings to her to mind her feet and not her chatter. In the full stream of crusaders, he led her down one of the multitude of by-paths cleared out in the hazel coppice for sporting; here leading up a rising ground whence the tops of the trees might be overlooked, some flecked with gold, some blushing into crimson, and beyond them the needle point of the village spire, the vane flashing back the sun; there bending into a ravine, marshy at the bottom, and nourishing the lady fern, then again crossing glades, where the rabbits darted across the path, and the battle of Damietta was broken into by stern orders to Fly to come to heel, and the eating of the nuts which Humfrey pulled down from the branches, and held up to his cousin with superior good nature.

‘A Mameluke rushed in with a scimitar streaming with blood, and—’

‘Take care; do you want help over this fence?’

‘Not I, thank you—And said he had just murdered the king—’

‘Vic! ah! take your nose out of that. Here was a crop, Nora.’

‘What was it?’

‘You don’t mean that you don’t know wheat stubble?’

‘I remember it was to be wheat.’

‘Red wheat, the finest we ever had in this land; not a bit beaten down, and the colour perfectly beautiful before harvest; it used to put me in mind of your hair. A load to the acre; a fair specimen of the effect of drainage. Do you remember what a swamp it was?’

‘I remember the beautiful loose-strifes that used to grow in that corner.’

‘Ah! we have made an end of that trumpery.’

‘You savage old Humfrey—beauties that they were.’

‘What had they to do with my cornfields? A place for everything and everything in its place—French kings and all. What was this one doing wool-gathering in Egypt?’

‘Don’t you understand, it had become the point for the blow at the Saracen power. Where was I? Oh, the Mameluke justified the murder, and wanted St. Louis to be king, but—’

‘Ha! a fine covey, I only miss two out of them. These carrots, how their leaves are turned—that ought not to be.’

Honora could not believe that anything ought not to be that was as beautiful as the varied rosy tints of the hectic beauty of the exquisitely shaped and delicately pinked foliage of the field carrots, and with her cousin's assistance she soon had a large bouquet where no two leaves were alike, their hues ranging from the deepest purple or crimson to the palest yellow, or clear scarlet, like seaweed, through every intermediate variety of purple edged with green, green picked out with red or yellow, or *vice versâ*, in never-ending brilliancy, such as Humfrey almost seemed to appreciate, as he said, 'Well, you have something as pretty as your weeds, eh, Honor?'

'I can't quite give up mourning for my dear long purples.'

'All very well by the river, but there's no beauty in things out of place, like your Louis in Egypt—well, what was the end of this predicament?'

So Humfrey had really heard and been interested! With such encouragement, Honora proceeded swimmingly, and had nearly arrived at her hero's ransom, through nearly a mile of field paths, only occasionally interrupted by grunts from her auditor at farming not like his own, when crossing a narrow foot-bridge across a clear stream, they stood before a farmhouse, timbered and chimneyed much like the Holt, but with new sashes displacing the old lattice.

'Oh! Humfrey, how could you bring me to see such havoc? I never suspected you would allow it.'

'It was without asking leave; an attention to his bride; and now they want an abatement for improvements! Whew!'

'You should fine him for the damage he has done!'

'I can't be hard on him, he is more or less of an ass, and a good sort of fellow, very good to his labourers; he drove Jem Hurd to the infirmary himself when he broke his arm. No, he is not a man to be hard upon.'

'You can't be hard on any one. Now that window really irritates my mind.'

'Now Sarah walked down to call on the bride, and came home full of admiration at the place being so lightsome and cheerful. Which of you two ladies am I to believe?'

'You ought to make it a duty to improve the general taste! Why don't you build a model farmhouse, and let me make the design?'

'Ay, when I want one that nobody can live in. Come, it will be breakfast time.'

'Are not you going to have an interview?'

'No, I only wanted to take a survey of the alterations; two windows, smart door, iron fence, pulled down old barn, talks of another. Hm!'

'So he will get his reduction?'

'If he builds the barn. I shall try to see his wife; she has not been brought up to farming, and whether they get on or not, all depends on the way she may take it up. What are you looking at?'

'That lovely wreath of Traveller's Joy.'

'Do you want it?'

'No, thank you, it is too beautiful where it is.'

'There is a piece, going from tree to tree, by the Hiltonbury Gate, as thick as my arm; I just saved it when West was going to cut it down with the copsewood.'

'Well, you really are improving at last!'

'I thought you would never let me hear the last of it; besides, there was a thrush's nest in it.'

By and by the cousins arrived at a field where Humfrey's portly shorthorns were coming forth after their milking, under the pilotage of an old white-headed man, bent nearly double, uncovering his head as the squire touched his hat in response, and shouted, 'Good morning.'

'If you please, sir,' said the old man, trying to erect himself, 'I wanted to speak to you.'

'Well.'

'If you please, sir, chimney smokes so as a body can scarce bide in the house, and the blacks come down terrible.'

‘Wants sweeping,’ roared Humfrey, into his deaf ears.

‘Have sweep it, sir; old woman’s been up with her broom.’

‘Old woman hasn’t been high enough. Send Jack up outside with a rope and a bunch o’ furze, and let her stand at bottom.’

‘That’s it, sir!’ cried the old man, with a triumphant snap of the fingers over his shoulder. ‘Thank ye!’

‘Here’s Miss Honor, John;’ and Honora came forward, her gravity somewhat shaken by the domestic offices of the old woman.

‘I’m glad to see you still able to bring out the cows, John. Here’s my favourite Daisy as tame as ever.’

‘Ay! ay!’ and he looked at his master for explanation from the stronger and more familiar voice.

‘I be deaf, you see, ma’am.’

‘Miss Honor is glad to see Daisy as tame as ever,’ shouted Humfrey.

‘Ay! ay!’ maundered on the old man; ‘she ain’t done no good of late, and Mr. West and I—us wanted to have fatted her this winter, but the squire, he wouldn’t hear on it, because Miss Honor was such a terrible one for her. Says I, when I hears ’em say so, we shall have another dinner on the la-an, and the last was when the old squire was married, thirty-five years ago come Michaelmas.’

Honora was much disposed to laugh at this freak of the old man’s fancy, but to her surprise Humfrey coloured up, and looked so much out of countenance that a question darted through her mind whether he could have any such step in contemplation, and she began to review the young ladies of the neighbourhood, and to decide on each in turn that it would be intolerable to see her as Humfrey’s wife; more at home at the Holt than herself. She had ample time for contemplation, for he had become very silent, and once or twice the presumptuous idea crossed her that he might be actually about to make her some confidence, but when he at length spoke, very near the house, it was only to say, ‘Honor, I wanted to ask you if you think your father would wish me to ask young Sandbrook here?’

‘Oh! thank you, I am sure he would be glad. You know poor Owen has nowhere to go, since his uncle has behaved so shamefully.’

‘It must have been a great mortification—’

‘To Owen? Of course it was, to be so cast off for his noble purpose.’

‘I was thinking of old Mr. Sandbrook—’

‘Old wretch! I’ve no patience with him!’

‘Just as he has brought this nephew up and hopes to make him useful and rest some of his cares upon him in his old age, to find him flying off upon this fresh course, and disappointing all his hopes.’

‘But it is such a high and grand course, he ought to have rejoiced in it, and Owen is not his son.’

‘A man of his age, brought up as he has been, can hardly be expected to enter into Owen’s views.’

‘Of course not. It is all sordid and mean, he cannot even understand the missionary spirit of resigning all. As Owen says, half the Scripture must be hyperbole to him, and so he is beginning Owen’s persecution already.’

It was one of Humfrey’s provoking qualities that no amount of eloquence would ever draw a word of condemnation from him; he would praise readily enough, but censure was very rare with him, and extenuation was always his first impulse, so the more Honora railed at Mr. Sandbrook’s interference with his nephew’s plans, the less satisfaction she received from him. She seemed to think that in order to admire Owen as he deserved, his uncle must be proportionably reviled, and though Humfrey did not imply a word save in commendation of the young missionary’s devotion, she went indoors feeling almost injured at his not understanding it; but Honora’s petulance was a very bright, sunny piquancy, and she only appeared the more glowing and animated for it when she presented herself at the breakfast-table, with a preposterous country appetite.

Afterwards she filled a vase very tastefully with her varieties of leaves, and enjoyed taking in her cousin Sarah, who admired the leaves greatly while she thought they came from Mrs. Mervyn's hothouse; but when she found they were the product of her own furrows, voted them coarse, ugly, withered things, such as only the simplicity of a Londoner could bring into civilized society. So Honora stood over her gorgeous feathery bouquet, not knowing whether to laugh or to be scornful, till Humfrey, taking up the vase, inquired, 'May I have it for my study?'

'Oh! yes, and welcome,' said Honora, laughing, and shaking her glowing tresses at him; 'I am thankful to any one who stands up for carrots.'

Good-natured Humfrey, thought she, it is all that I may not be mortified; but after all it is not those very good-natured people who best appreciate lofty actions. He is inviting Owen Sandbrook more because he thinks it would please papa, and because he compassionates him in his solitary lodgings, than because he feels the force of his glorious self-sacrifice.

* * * * *

The northern slope of the Holt was clothed with fir plantations, intersected with narrow paths, which gave admission to the depths of their lonely woodland palace, supported on rudely straight columns, dark save for the snowy exuding gum, roofed in by aspiring beam-like arms, bearing aloft their long tufts of dark blue green foliage, floored by the smooth, slippery, russet needle leaves as they fell, and perfumed by the peculiar fresh smell of turpentine. It was a still and lonely place, the very sounds making the silence more audible (if such an expression may be used), the wind whispering like the rippling waves of the sea in the tops of the pines, here and there the cry of a bird, or far, far away, the tinkle of the sheep-bell, or the tone of the church clock; and of movement there was almost as little, only the huge horse ants soberly wending along their highway to their tall hillock thatched with pine leaves, or the squirrel in the ruddy, russet livery of the scene, racing from tree to tree, or sitting up with his feathery tail erect to extract with his delicate paws the seed from the base of the fir-cone scale. Squirrels there lived to a good old age, till their plummy tails had turned white, for the squire's one fault in the eyes of keepers and gardeners was that he was soft-hearted towards 'the varmint.'

A Canadian forest on a small scale, an extremely miniature scale indeed, but still Canadian forests are of pine, and the Holt plantation was fir, and firs were pines, and it was a lonely musing place, and so on one of the stillest, clearest days of 'St. Luke's little summer,' the last afternoon of her visit at the Holt, there stood Honora, leaning against a tree stem, deep, very deep in a vision of the primeval woodlands of the West, their red inhabitants, and the white man who should carry the true, glad tidings westward, westward, ever from east to west. Did she know how completely her whole spirit and soul were surrendered to the worship of that devotion? Worship? Yes, the word is advisedly used; Honora had once given her spirit in homage to Schiller's self-sacrificing Max; the same heart-whole veneration was now rendered to the young missionary, multiplied tenfold by the hero being in a tangible, visible shape, and not by any means inclined to thwart or disdain the allegiance of the golden-haired girl. Nay, as family connections frequently meeting, they had acted upon each other's minds more than either knew, even when the hour of parting had come, and words had been spoken which gave Honora something more to cherish in the image of Owen Sandbrook than even the hero and saint. There then she stood and dreamt, pensive and saddened indeed, but with a melancholy trenching very nearly on happiness in the intensity of its admiration, and the vague ennobling future of devoted usefulness in which her heart already claimed to share, as her person might in some far away period on which she could not dwell.

A sound approached, a firm footstep, falling with strong elasticity and such regular cadences, that it seemed to chime in with the pine-tree music, and did not startle her till it came so near that there was distinctive character to be discerned in the tread, and then with a strange, new shyness, she would have slipped away, but she had been seen, and Humfrey, with his timber race in his hand,

appeared on the path, exclaiming, 'Ah, Honor, is it you come out to meet me, like old times? You have been so much taken up with your friend Master Owen that I have scarcely seen you of late.'

Honor did not move away, but she blushed deeply as she said, 'I am afraid I did not come to meet you, Humfrey.'

'No? What, you came for the sake of a brown study? I wish I had known you were not busy, for I have been round all the woods marking timber.'

'Ah!' said she, rousing herself with some effort, 'I wonder how many trees I should have saved from the slaughter. Did you go and condemn any of my pets?'

'Not that I know of,' said Humfrey. 'I have touched nothing near the house.'

'Not even the old beech that was scathed with lightning? You know papa says that is the touchstone of influence; Sarah and Mr. West both against me,' laughed Honora, quite restored to her natural manner and confiding ease.

'The beech is likely to stand as long as you wish it,' said Humfrey, with an unaccustomed sort of matter-of-fact gravity, which surprised and startled her, so as to make her bethink herself whether she could have behaved ill about it, been saucy to Sarah, or the like.

'Thank you,' she said; 'have I made a fuss—?'

'No, Honor,' he said, with deliberate kindness, shutting up his knife, and putting it into his pocket; 'only I believe it is time we should come to an understanding.'

More than ever did she expect one of his kind remonstrances, and she looked up at him in expectation, and ready for defence, but his broad, sunburnt countenance looked marvellously heated, and he paused ere he spoke.

'I find I can't spare you, Honora; you had better stay at the Holt for good.' Her cheeks flamed, and her heart galloped, but she could not let herself understand.



'I find I can't spare you, Honora; you had better stay at the Holt for good.'--Page 11

'Honor, you are old enough now, and I do not think you need fear. It is almost your home already, and I believe I can make you happy, with the blessing of God—' He paused, but as she could not frame an answer in her consternation, continued, 'Perhaps I should not have spoken so suddenly, but I thought you would not mind me; I should like to have had one word from my little Honor before I go to your father, but don't if you had rather not.'

'Oh, don't go to papa, please don't,' she cried, 'it would only make him sorry.'

Humfrey stood as if under an unexpected shock.

'Oh! how came you to think of it?' she said in her distress; 'I never did, and it can never be—I am so sorry!'

'Very well, my dear, do not grieve about it,' said Humfrey, only bent on soothing her; 'I dare say you are quite right, you are used to people in London much more suitable to you than a stupid

homely fellow like me, and it was a foolish fancy to think it might be otherwise. Don't cry, Honor dear, I can't bear that!

'Oh, Humfrey, only understand, please! You are the very dearest person in the world to me after papa and mamma; and as to fine London people, oh no, indeed! But—'

'It is Owen Sandbrook; I understand,' said Humfrey, gravely.

She made no denial.

'But, Honor,' he anxiously exclaimed, 'you are not going out in this wild way among the backwoods, it would break your mother's heart; and he is not fit to take care of you. I mean he cannot think of it now.'

'O no, no, I could not leave papa and mamma; but some time or other—'

'Is this arranged? Does your father know it?'

'Oh, Humfrey, of course!'

'Then it is an engagement?'

'No,' said Honora, sadly; 'papa said I was too young, and he wished I had heard nothing about it. We are to go on as if nothing had happened, and I know they think we shall forget all about it! As if we could! Not that I wish it to be different. I know it would be wicked to desert papa and mamma while she is so unwell. The truth is, Humfrey,' and her voice sank, 'that it cannot be while they live.'

'My poor little Honor!' he said, in a tone of the most unselfish compassion.

She had entirely forgotten his novel aspect, and only thought of him as the kindest friend to whom she could open her heart.

'Don't pity me,' she said in exultation; 'think what it is to be his choice. Would I have him give up his aims, and settle down in the loveliest village in England? No, indeed, for then it would not be Owen! I am happier in the thought of him than I could be with everything present to enjoy.'

'I hope you will continue to find it so,' he said, repressing a sigh.

'I should be ashamed of myself if I did not,' she continued with glistening eyes. 'Should not I have patience to wait while he is at his real glorious labour? And as to home, that's not altered, only better and brighter for the definite hope and aim that will go through everything, and make me feel all I do a preparation.'

'Yes, you know him well,' said Humfrey; 'you saw him constantly when he was at Westminster.'

'O yes, and always! Why, Humfrey, it is my great glory and pleasure to feel that he formed me! When he went to Oxford, he brought me home all the thoughts that have been my better life.'

All my dearest books we read together, and what used to look dry and cold, gained light and life after he touched it.'

'Yes, I see.'

His tone reminded her of what had passed, and she said, timidly, 'I forgot! I ought not! I have vexed you, Humfrey.'

'No,' he said, in his full tender voice; 'I see that it was vain to think of competing with one of so much higher claims. If he goes on in the course he has chosen, yours will have been a noble choice, Honor; and I believe,' he added, with a sweetness of smile that almost made her forgive the *if*, 'that you are one to be better pleased *so* than with more ordinary happiness. I have no doubt it is all right.'

'Dear Humfrey, you are so good!' she said, struck with his kind resignation, and utter absence of acerbity in his disappointment.

'Forget this, Honora,' he said, as they were coming to the end of the pine wood; 'let us be as we were before.'

Honora gladly promised, and excepting for her wonder at such a step on the part of the cousin whose plaything and pet she had hitherto been, she had no temptation to change her manner. She loved him as much as ever, but only as a kind elder brother, and she was glad that he was wise enough to see his immeasurable inferiority to the young missionary. It was a wonderful thing, and she was sorry for his disappointment; but after all, he took it so quietly that she did not think it could have

hurt him much. It was only that he wanted to keep his pet in the country. He was not capable of love like Owen Sandbrook's.

* * * * *

Years passed on. Rumour had bestowed Mr. Charlecote of Hiltonbury on every lady within twenty miles, but still in vain. His mother was dead, his sister married to an old college fellow, who had waited half a lifetime for a living, but still he kept house alone.

And open house it was, with a dinner-table ever expanding for chance guests, strawberry or syllabub feasts half the summer, and Christmas feasts extending wide on either side of the twelve days.

Every one who wanted a holiday was free of the Holt; young sportsmen tried their inexperienced guns under the squire's patient eye; and mammas disposed of their children for weeks together, to enjoy the run of the house and garden, and rides according to age, on pony, donkey, or Mr. Charlecote. No festivity in the neighbourhood was complete without his sunshiny presence; he was wanted wherever there was any family event; and was godfather, guardian, friend, and adviser of all. Every one looked on him as a sort of exclusive property, yet he had room in his heart for all. As a magistrate, he was equally indispensable in county government, and a charity must be undeserving indeed that had not Humfrey Charlecote, Esq., on the committee. In his own parish he was a beneficent monarch; on his own estate a mighty farmer, owning that his relaxation and delight were his turnips, his bullocks, and machines; and so content with them, and with his guests, that Honora never recollected that walk in the pine woods without deciding that to have monopolized him would have been an injury to the public, and perhaps less for his happiness than this free, open-hearted bachelor life. Seldom did she recall that scene to mind, for she had never been by it rendered less able to trust to him as her friend and protector, and she stood in need of his services and his comfort, when her father's death had left him the nearest relative who could advise or transact business for her and her mother. Then, indeed, she leant on him as on the kindest and most helpful of brothers.

Mrs. Charlecote was too much acclimatized to the city to be willing to give up her old residence, and Honor not only loved it fondly, but could not bear to withdraw from the local charities where her tasks had hitherto lain; and Woolstone-lane, therefore, continued their home, though the summer and autumn usually took them out of London.

Such was the change in Honora's outward life. How was it with that inmost shrine where dwelt her heart and soul? A copious letter writer, Owen Sandbrook's correspondence never failed to find its way to her, though they did not stand on such terms as to write to one another; and in those letters she lived, doing her day's work with cheerful brightness, and seldom seeming preoccupied, but imagination, heart, and soul were with his mission.

Very indignant was she when the authorities, instead of sending him to the interesting children of the forests, thought proper to waste him on mere colonists, some of them Yankee, some Presbyterian Scots. He was asked insolent, nasal questions, his goods were coolly treated as common property, and it was intimated to him on all hands that as Englishman he was little in their eyes, as clergyman less, as gentleman least of all. Was this what he had sacrificed everything for?

By dint of strong complaints and entreaties, after he had quarrelled with most of his flock, he accomplished an exchange into a district where red men formed the chief of his charge; and Honora was happy, and watched for histories of noble braves, gallant hunters, and meek-eyed squaws.

Slowly, slowly she gathered that the picturesque deer-skins had become dirty blankets, and that the diseased, filthy, sophisticated savages were among the worst of the pitiable specimens of the effect of contact with the most evil side of civilization. To them, as Owen wrote, a missionary was only a white man who gave no brandy, and the rest of his parishioners were their obdurate, greedy, trading tempters! It had been a shame to send him to such a hopeless set, when there were others on whom his toils would not be thrown away. However, he should do his best.

And Honor went on expecting the wonders his best would work, only the more struck with admiration by hearing that the locality was a swamp of luxuriant vegetation, and equally luxuriant fever and ague; and the letter he wrote thence to her mother on the news of their loss did her more good than all Humfrey's considerate kindness.

Next, he had had the ague, and had gone to Toronto for change of air. Report spoke of Mr. Sandbrook as the most popular preacher who had appeared in Toronto for years, attracting numbers to his pulpit, and sending them away enraptured by his power of language. How beautiful that a man of such talents, always so much stimulated by appreciation, should give up all this most congenial scene, and devote himself to his obscure mission!

Report said more, but Honora gave it no credit till old Mr. Sandbrook called one morning in Woolstone-lane, by his nephew's desire, to announce to his friends that he had formed an engagement with Miss Charteris, the daughter of a general officer there in command.

Honor sat out all the conversation; and Mrs. Charlecote did not betray herself; though, burning with a mother's wrath, she did nothing worse than hope they would be happy.

Yet Honor had not dethroned the monarch of her imagination. She reiterated to herself and to her mother that she had no ground of complaint, that it had been understood that the past was to be forgotten, and that Owen was far more worthily employed than in dwelling on them. No blame could attach to him, and it was wise to choose one accustomed to the country and able to carry out his plans. The personal feeling might go, but veneration survived.

Mrs. Charlecote never rested till she had learnt all the particulars. It was a dashing, fashionable family, and Miss Charteris had been the gayest of the gay, till she had been impressed by Mr. Sandbrook's ministrations. From pope to lover, Honor knew how easy was the transition; but she zealously nursed her admiration for the beauty, who was exchanging her gaieties for the forest missions; she made her mother write cordially, and send out a pretty gift, and treated as a personal affront all reports of the Charteris disapprobation, and of the self-will of the young people. They were married, and the next news that Honora heard was, that the old general had had a fit from passion; thirdly, came tidings that the eldest son, a prosperous M.P., had not only effected a reconciliation, but had obtained a capital living for Mr. Sandbrook, not far from the family seat.

Mrs. Charlecote declared that her daughter should not stay in town to meet the young couple, and Honora's resistance was not so much dignity, as a feverish spirit of opposition, which succumbed to her sense of duty, but not without such wear and tear of strained cheerfulness and suppressed misery, that when at length her mother had brought her away, the fatigue of the journey completed the work, and she was prostrated for weeks by low fever. The blow had fallen. He had put his hand to the plough and looked back. Faithlessness towards herself had been passed over unrecognized, faithlessness towards his self-consecration was quite otherwise. That which had absorbed her affections and adoration had proved an unstable, excitable being! Alas! would that long ago she had opened her eyes to the fact that it was her own lofty spirit, not his steadfastness, which had first kept it out of the question that the mission should be set aside for human love. The crash of her idolatry was the greater because it had been so highly pitched, so closely intermingled with the true worship.

She was long ill, the past series of disappointments telling when her strength was reduced; and for many a week she would lie still and dreamy, but fretted and wearied, so as to control herself with difficulty when in the slightest degree disturbed, or called upon to move or think. When her strength returned under her mother's tender nursing the sense of duty revived. She thought her youth utterly gone with the thinning of her hair and the wasting of her cheeks, but her mother must be the object of her care and solicitude, and she would exert herself for her sake, to save her grief, and hide the wound left by the rending away of the jewel of her heart. So she set herself to seem to like whatever her mother proposed, and she acted her interest so well that insensibly it became real. After all, she was but four-and-twenty, and the fever had served as an expression of the feeling that would have its way: she had had a long rest, which had relieved the sense of pent-up and restrained suffering, and

vigour and buoyancy were a part of her character; her tone and manner resumed their cheerfulness, her spirits came back, though still with the dreary feeling that the hope and aim of life were gone, when she was left to her own musings; she was little changed, and went on with daily life, contented and lively over the details, and returning to her interest in reading, in art, poetry, and in all good works, while her looks resumed their brightness, and her mother congratulated herself once more on the rounded cheek and profuse curls.

At the year's end Humfrey Charlecote renewed his proposal. It was no small shock to find herself guilty of his having thus long remained single, and she was touched by his kind forbearance, but there was no bringing herself either to love him, or to believe that he loved her, with such love as had been her vision. The image around which she had bound her heart-strings came between him and her, and again she begged his pardon, and told him she liked him too well as he was to think of him in any other light. Again he, with the most tender patience and humility, asked her to forgive him for having harassed her, and betrayed so little chagrin that she ascribed his offer to generous compassion at her desertion.

CHAPTER II

*He who lets his feelings run
In soft luxurious flow,
Shrinks when hard service must be done,
And faints at every woe.*

Seven years more, and Honora was in mourning for her mother. She was alone in the world, without any near or precious claim, those clinging tendrils of her heart rent from their oldest, surest earthly stay, and her time left vacant from her dearest, most constant occupation. Her impulse was to devote herself and her fortune at once to the good work which most engaged her imagination, but Humfrey Charlecote, her sole relation, since heart complaint had carried off his sister Sarah, interfered with the authority he had always exercised over her, and insisted on her waiting one full year before pledging herself to anything. At one-and-thirty, with her golden hair and light figure, her delicate skin and elastic step, she was still too young to keep house in solitude, and she invited to her home a friendless old governess of her own, sick at heart with standing for the Governess's Institution, promising her a daughter's care and attendance on her old age. Gentle old Miss Wells was but too happy in her new quarters, though she constantly averred that she knew she should not continue there; treated as injuries to herself all Honor's assertions of the dignity of age and old maidishness, and remained convinced that she should soon see her married.

Honora had not seen Mr. Sandbrook since his return from Canada, though his living was not thirty miles from the City. There had been exchanges of calls when he had been in London, but these had only resulted in the leaving of cards; and from various causes she had been unable to meet him at dinner. She heard of him, however, from their mutual connection, old Mrs. Sandbrook, who had made a visit at Wrapworth, and came home stored with anecdotes of the style in which he lived, the charms of Mrs. Sandbrook, and the beauty of the children. As far as Honora could gather, and very unwillingly she did so, he was leading the life of an easy-going, well-beneficed clergyman, not neglecting the parish, according to the requirements of the day, indeed slightly exceeding them, very popular, good-natured, and charitable, and in great request in a numerous, demi-suburban neighbourhood, for all sorts of not unclerical gaieties. The Rev. O. Sandbrook was often to be met with in the papers, preaching everywhere and for everything, and whispers went about of his speedy promotion to a situation of greater note. In the seventh year of his marriage, his wife died, and Honora was told of his overwhelming grief, how he utterly refused all comfort or alleviation, and threw himself with all his soul into his parish and his children. People spoke of him as going about among the poor from morning to night, with his little ones by his side, shrinking from all other society, teaching them and nursing them himself, and endeavouring to the utmost to be as both parents in one. The youngest, a delicate infant, soon followed her mother to the grave, and old Mrs. Sandbrook proved herself to have no parent's heart by being provoked with his agonizing grief for the 'poor little sickly thing,' while it was not in Honora's nature not to feel the more tenderly towards the idol of her girlish days, because he was in trouble.

It was autumn, the period when leaves fall off and grow damp, and London birds of passage fly home to their smoky nests. Honora, who had gone to Weymouth chiefly because she saw Miss Wells would be disappointed if she did otherwise; when there, had grown happily at home with the waves, and in talking to the old fishermen; but had come back because Miss Wells thought it chilly and dreary, and pined for London warmth and snugness. The noonday sun had found the way in at the oriel window of the drawing-room, and traced the reflection of the merchant's mark upon the upper pane in distorted outline on the wainscoted wall; it smiled on the glowing tints of Honora's

hair, but seemed to die away against the blackness of her dress, as she sat by the table, writing letters, while opposite, in the brightness of the fire, sat the pale, placid Miss Wells with her morning nest of sermon books and needlework around her.

Honor yawned; Miss Wells looked up with kind anxiety. She knew such a yawn was equivalent to a sigh, and that it was dreary work to settle in at home again this first time without the mother.

Then Honor smiled, and played with her pen-wiper. 'Well,' she said, 'it is comfortable to be at home again!'

'I hope you will soon be able to feel so, my dear,' said the kind old governess.

'I mean it,' said Honor cheerfully; then sighing, 'But do you know, Mr. Askew wishes his curates to visit at the asylum instead of ladies.'

Miss Wells burst out into all the indignation that was in her mild nature. Honor not to visit at the asylum founded chiefly by her own father!

'It is a parish affair now,' said Honor; 'and I believe those Miss Stones and their set have been very troublesome. Besides I think he means to change its character.'

'It is very inconsiderate of him,' said Miss Wells; 'he ought to have consulted you.'

'Every one loves his own charity the best,' said Honora; 'Humfrey says endowments are generally a mistake, each generation had better do its own work to the utmost. I wish Mr. Askew had not begun now, it was the work I specially looked to, but I let it alone while—and he cannot be expected—'

'I should have expected it of him though!' exclaimed Miss Wells, 'and he ought to know better! How have you heard it?'

'I have a note from him this morning,' said Honora; 'he asks me Humfrey Charlecote's address; you know he and Mr. Sandbrook are trustees,' and her voice grew the sadder.

'If I am not much mistaken, Mr. Charlecote will represent to him his want of consideration.'

'I think not,' said Honora; 'I should be sorry to make the clergyman's hard task here any harder for the sake of my feelings. Late incumbent's daughters are proverbially inconvenient. No, I would not stand in the way, but it makes me feel as if my work in St. Wulstan's were done,' and the tears dropped fast.

'Dear, dear Honora!' began the old lady, eagerly, but her words and Honora's tears were both checked by the sound of a bell, that bell within the court, to which none but intimates found access.

'Strange! It is the thought of old times, I suppose,' said Honor, smiling, 'but I could have said that was Owen Sandbrook's ring.'

The words were scarcely spoken, ere Mr. Sandbrook and Captain Charteris were announced; and there entered a clergyman leading a little child in each hand. How changed from the handsome, hopeful youth from whom she had parted! Thin, slightly bowed, grief-stricken, and worn, she would scarcely have known him, and as if to hide how much she felt, she bent quickly, after shaking hands with him, to kiss the two children, flaxen-curled creatures in white, with black ribbons. They both shrank closer to their father. 'Cilly, my love, Owen, my man, speak to Miss Charlecote,' he said; 'she is a very old friend of mine. This is my bonny little housekeeper,' he added, 'and here's a sturdy fellow for four years old, is not he?'

The girl, a delicate fairy of six, barely accepted an embrace, and clung the faster to her father, with a gesture as though to repel all advance. The boy took a good stare out of a pair of resolute gray eyes, with one foot in advance, and offered both hands. Honora would have taken him on her knee, but he retreated, and both leant against their father as he sat, an arm round each, after shaking hands with Miss Wells, whom he recollected at once, and presenting his brother-in-law, whose broad, open, sailor countenance, hardy and weather-stained, was a great contrast to his pale, hollow, furrowed cheeks and heavy eyes.

'Will you tell me your name, my dear?' said Honora, feeling the children the easiest to talk to; but the little girl's pretty lips pouted, and she nestled nearer to her father.

‘Her name is Lucilla,’ he answered with a sigh, recalling that it had been his wife’s name. ‘We are all somewhat of little savages,’ he added, in excuse for the child’s silence. ‘We have seen few strangers at Wrapworth of late.’

‘I did not know you were in London.’

‘It was a sudden measure—all my brother’s doing,’ he said; ‘I am quite taken out of my own guidance.’

‘I went down to Wrapworth and found him very unwell, quite out of order, and neglecting himself,’ said the captain; ‘so I have brought him up for advice, as I could not make him hear reason.’

‘I was afraid you were looking very ill,’ said Honora, hardly daring to glance at his changed face.

‘Can’t help being ill,’ returned Captain Charteris, ‘running about the village in all weathers in a coat like that, and sitting down to play with the children in his wet things. I saw what it would come to, last time.’

Mr. Sandbrook could not repress a cough, which told plainly what it was come to.

Miss Wells asked whom he intended to consult, and there was some talk on physicians, but the subject was turned off by Mr. Sandbrook bending down to point out to little Owen a beautiful carving of a brooding dove on her nest, which formed the central bracket of the fine old mantelpiece.

‘There, my man, that pretty bird has been sitting there ever since I can remember. How like it all looks to old times! I could imagine myself running in from Westminster on a saint’s day.’

‘It is little altered in some things,’ said Honor. The last great change was too fresh!

‘Yes,’ said Mr. Sandbrook, raising his eyes towards her with the look that used to go so deep of old, ‘we have both gone through what makes the unchangeableness of these impassive things the more striking.’

‘I can’t see,’ said the little girl, pulling his hand.

‘Let me lift you up, my dear,’ said Honora; but the child turned her back on her, and said, ‘Father.’

He rose, and was bending, at the little imperious voice, though evidently too weak for the exertion, but the sailor made one step forward, and pouncing on Miss Lucilla, held her up in his arms close to the carving. The two little feet made signs of kicking, and she said in anything but a grateful voice, ‘Put me down, Uncle Kit.’

Uncle Kit complied, and she retreated under her papa’s wing, pouting, but without another word of being lifted, though she had been far too much occupied with struggling to look at the dove.

Meantime her brother had followed up her request by saying ‘me,’ and he fairly put out his arms to be lifted by Miss Charlecote, and made most friendly acquaintance with all the curiosities of the carving. The rest of the visit was chiefly occupied by the children, to whom their father was eager to show all that he had admired when little older than they were, thus displaying a perfect and minute recollection and affection for the place, which much gratified Honora. The little girl began to thaw somewhat under the influence of amusement, but there was still a curious ungraciousness towards all attentions. She required those of her father as a right, but shook off all others in a manner which might be either shyness or independence; but as she was a pretty and naturally graceful child, it had a somewhat engaging air of caprice. They took leave, Mr. Sandbrook telling the children to thank Miss Charlecote for being so kind to them, which neither would do, and telling her, as he pressed her hand, that he hoped to see her again. Honora felt as if an old page in her history had been reopened, but it was not the page of her idolatry, it was that of the fall of her idol! She did not see in him the champion of the truth, but his presence palpably showed her the excitable weakness which she had taken for inspiration, while the sweetness and sympathy warmed her heart towards him, and made her feel that she had underrated his attractiveness. His implications that he knew she sympathized with him had touched her greatly, and then he looked so ill!

A note from old Mrs. Sandbrook begged her to meet him at dinner the next day, and she was glad of the opportunity of learning the doctor's verdict upon him, though all the time she knew the meeting would be but pain, bringing before her the disappointment not *of* him, but *in* him.

No one was in the drawing-room but Captain Charteris, who came and shook hands with her as if they were old friends; but she was somewhat amazed at missing Mrs. Sandbrook, whose formality would be shocked by leaving her guests in the lurch.

'Some disturbance in the nursery department, I fancy,' said the captain; 'those children have never been from home, and they are rather exacting, poor things.'

'Poor little things!' echoed Honora; then, anxious to profit by the *tête-a-tête*, 'has Mr. Sandbrook seen Dr. L.?'

'Yes, it is just as I apprehended. Lungs very much affected, right one nearly gone. Nothing for it but the Mediterranean.'

'Indeed!'

'It is no wonder. Since my poor sister died he has never taken the most moderate care of his health, perfectly revelled in dreariness and desolateness, I believe! He has had this cough about him ever since the winter, when he walked up and down whole nights with that poor child, and never would hear of any advice till I brought him up here almost by force.'

'I am sure it was time.'

'May it be in time, that's all.'

'Italy does so much! But what will become of the children?'

'They must go to my brother's of course. I have told him I will see him there, but I will not have the children! There's not the least chance of his mending, if they are to be always lugging him about—'

The captain was interrupted by the entrance of Mrs. Sandbrook, who looked a good deal worried, though she tried to put it aside, but on the captain saying, 'I'm afraid that you have troublesome guests, ma'am,' out it all came, how it had been discovered late in the day that Master Owen *must* sleep in his papa's room, in a crib to himself, and how she had been obliged to send out to hire the necessary articles, subject to his nurse's approval; and the captain's sympathy having opened her heart, she further informed them of the inconvenient rout the said nurse had made about getting new milk for them, for which Honor could have found it in her heart to justify her; 'and poor Owen is just as bad,' quoth the old lady; 'I declare those children are wearing his very life out, and yet he will not hear of leaving them behind.'

She was interrupted by his appearance at that moment, as usual, with a child in either hand, and a very sad picture it was, so mournful and spiritless was his countenance, with the hectic tint of decay evident on each thin cheek, and those two fair healthful creatures clinging to him, thoughtless of their past loss, unconscious of that which impended. Little Owen, after one good stare, evidently recognized a friend in Miss Charlecote, and let her seat him upon her knee, listening to her very complacently, but gazing very hard all the time at her, till at last, with an experimental air, he stretched one hand and stroked the broad golden ringlet that hung near him, evidently to satisfy himself whether it really was hair. Then he found his way to her watch, a pretty little one from Geneva, with enamelled flowers at the back, which so struck his fancy that he called out, 'Cilly, look!' The temptation drew the little girl nearer, but with her hands behind her back, as if bent on making no advance to the stranger.

Honora thought her the prettiest child she had ever seen. Small and lightly formed, there was more symmetry in her little fairy figure than usual at her age, and the skin was exquisitely fine and white, tinted with a soft eglantine pink, deepening into roses on the cheeks; the hair was in long flaxen curls, and the eyelashes, so long and fair that at times they caught a glossy light, shaded eyes of that deep blue upon that limpid white, which is like nothing but the clear tints of old porcelain.

The features were as yet unformed, but small and delicate, and the upright Napoleon gesture had something peculiarly quaint and pretty in such a soft-looking little creature. The boy was a handsome

fellow, with more solidity and sturdiness, and Honora could scarcely continue to amuse him, as she thought of the father's pain in parting with two such beings—his sole objects of affection. A moment's wish flashed across her, but was dismissed the next moment as a mere childish romance.

Old Mr. Sandbrook came in, and various other guests arrived, old acquaintance to whom Owen must be re-introduced, and he looked fagged and worn by the time all the greetings had been exchanged and all the remarks made on his children. When dinner was announced, he remained to the last with them, and did not appear in the dining-room till his uncle had had time to look round for him, and mutter something discontentedly about 'those brats.' The vacant chair was beside Honora, and he was soon seated in it, but at first he did not seem inclined to talk, and leant back, so white and exhausted, that she thought it kinder to leave him to himself.

When, somewhat recruited, he said in a low voice something of his hopes that his little Cilly, as he called her, would be less shy another time, and Honora responding heartily, he quickly fell into the parental strain of anecdotes of the children's sayings and doings, whence Honora collected that in his estimation Lucilla's forte was decision and Owen's was sweetness, and that he was completely devoted to them, nursing and teaching them himself, and finding his whole solace in them. Tender pity moved her strongly towards him, as she listened to the evidences of the desolateness of his home and his heavy sorrow; and yet it was pity alone, admiration would not revive, and indeed, in spite of herself, her judgment *would* now and then respond 'unwise,' or 'weak,' or 'why permit this?' at details of Lucilla's *mutinerie*. Presently she found that his intentions were quite at variance with those of his brother. His purpose was fixed to take the children with him.

'They are very young,' said Honora.

'Yes; but their nurse is a most valuable person, and can arrange perfectly for them, and they will always be under my eye.'

'That was just what Captain Charteris seemed to dread.'

'He little knows,' began Mr. Sandbrook, with a sigh. 'Yes, I know he is most averse to it, and he is one who always carries his point, but he will not do so here; he imagines that they may go to their aunt's nursery, but,' with an added air of confidence, 'that will never do!'

Honora's eyes asked more.

'In fact,' he said, as the flush of pain rose on his cheeks, 'the Charteris children are not brought up as I should wish to see mine. There are influences at work there not suited for those whose home must be a country parsonage, if— Little Cilly has come in for more admiration there already than is good for her.'

'It cannot be easy for her not to meet with that.'

'Why, no,' said the gratified father, smiling sadly; 'but Castle Blanch training might make the mischief more serious. It is a gay household, and I cannot believe with Kit Charteris that the children are too young to feel the blight of worldly influence. Do not you think with me, Nora?' he concluded in so exactly the old words and manner as to stir the very depths of her heart, but woe worth the change from the hopes of youth to this premature fading into despondency, and the implied farewell!

She did think with him completely, and felt the more for him, as she believed that these Charterises had led him and his wife into the gaities, which since her death he had forsworn and abhorred as temptations. She thought it hard that he should not have his children with him, and talked of all the various facilities for taking them that she could think of, till his face brightened under the grateful sense of sympathy.

She did not hold the same opinion all the evening. The two children made their appearance at dessert, and there began by insisting on both sitting on his knees; Owen consented to come to her, but Lucilla would not stir, though she put on some pretty little coquettish airs, and made herself extremely amiable to the gentleman who sat on her father's other hand, making smart replies, that were repeated round the table with much amusement.

But the ordinance of departure with the ladies was one of which the sprite had no idea; Honor held out her hand for her; Aunt Sandbrook called her; her father put her down; she shook her curls, and said she should not leave father; it was stupid up in the drawing-room, and she hated ladies, which confession set every one laughing, so as quite to annihilate the effect of Mr. Sandbrook's 'Yes, go, my dear.'

Finally, he took the two up-stairs himself—the stairs which, as he had told Honora that evening, were his greatest enemies, and he remained a long time in their nursery, not coming down till tea was in progress. Mrs. Sandbrook always made it herself at the great silver urn, which had been a testimonial to her husband, and it was not at first that she had a cup ready for him. He looked even worse than at dinner, and Honora was anxious to see him resting comfortably; but he had hardly sat down on the sofa, and taken the cup in his hand, before a dismal childish wail was heard from above, and at once he started up, so hastily as to cough violently. Captain Charteris, breaking off a conversation, came rapidly across the room just as he was moving to the door. 'You're not going to those imps—'

Owen moved his head, and stepped forward.

'I'll settle them.'

Renewed cries met his ears. 'No—a strange place—' he said. 'I must—'

He put his brother-in-law back with his hand, and was gone. The captain could not contain his vexation, 'That's the way those brats serve him every night!' he exclaimed; 'they will not attempt to go to sleep without him! Why, I've found him writing his sermon with the boy wrapped up in blankets in his lap; there's no sense in it.'

After about ten minutes, during which Mr. Sandbrook did not reappear, Captain Charteris muttered something about going to see about him, and stayed away a good while. When he came down, he came and sat down by Honora, and said, 'He is going to bed, quite done for.'

'That must be better for him than talking here.'

'Why, what do you think I found? Those intolerable brats would not stop crying unless he told them a story, and there was he with his voice quite gone, coughing every two minutes, and romancing on with some allegory about children marching on their little paths, and playing on their little fiddles.'

So I told Miss Cilly that if she cared a farthing for her father, she would hold her tongue, and I packed her up, and put her into her nursery. She'll mind me when she sees I will be minded; and as for little Owen, nothing would satisfy him but his promising not to go away. I saw that chap asleep before I came down, so there's no fear of the yarn beginning again; but you see what chance there is of his mending while those children are at him day and night.'

'Poor things! they little know.'

'One does not expect them to know, but one does expect them to show a little rationality. It puts one out of all patience to see him so weak. If he is encouraged to take them abroad, he may do so, but I wash my hands of him. I won't be responsible for him—let them go alone!'

Honora saw this was a reproach to her for the favour with which she had regarded the project.

She saw that the father's weakness quite altered the case, and her former vision flashed across her again, but she resolutely put it aside for consideration, and only made the unmeaning answer, 'It is very sad and perplexing.'

'A perplexity of his own making. As for their not going to Castle Blanch, they were always there in my poor sister's time a great deal more than was good for any of them, or his parish either, as I told him then; and now, if he finds out that it is a worldly household, as he calls it, why, what harm is that to do to a couple of babies like those? If Mrs. Charteris does not trouble herself much about the children, there are governesses and nurses enough for a score!'

'I must own,' said Honora, 'that I think he is right. Children are never too young for impressions.'

'I'll tell you what, Miss Charlecote, the way he is going on is enough to ruin the best children in the world. That little Cilly is the most arrant little flirt I ever came across; it is like a comedy to see

the absurd little puss going on with the curate, ay, and with every parson that comes to Wrapworth; and she sees nothing else. Impressions! All she wants is to be safe shut up with a good governess, and other children. It would do her a dozen times more good than all his stories of good children and their rocky paths, and boats that never sailed on any reasonable principle.'

'Poor child,' said Honora, smiling, 'she is a little witch.'

'And,' continued the uncle, 'if he thinks it so bad for them, he had better take the only way of saving them from it for the future, or they will be there for life. If he gets through this winter, it will only be by the utmost care.'

Honora kept her project back with the less difficulty, because she doubted how it would be received by the rough captain; but it won more and more upon her, as she rattled home through the gas-lights, and though she knew she should learn to love the children only to have the pang of losing them, she gladly cast this foreboding aside as selfish, and applied herself impartially as she hoped to weigh the duty, but trembling were the hands that adjusted the balance. Alone as she stood, without a tie, was not she marked out to take such an office of mere pity and charity? Could she see the friend of her childhood forced either to peril his life by his care of his motherless children, or else to leave them to the influences he so justly dreaded? Did not the case cry out to her to follow the promptings of her heart? Ay, but might not, said caution, her assumption of the charge lead their father to look on her as willing to become their mother? Oh, fie on such selfish prudery imputing such a thought to yonder broken-hearted, sinking widower! He had as little room for such folly as she had inclination to find herself on the old terms. The hero of her imagination he could never be again, but it would be weak consciousness to scruple at offering so obvious an act of compassion. She would not trust herself, she would go by what Miss Wells said. Nevertheless she composed her letter to Owen Sandbrook between waking and sleeping all night, and dreamed of little creatures nestling in her lap, and small hands playing with her hair. How coolly she strove to speak as she described the dilemma to the old lady, and how her heart leapt when Miss Wells, her mind moving in the grooves traced out by sympathy with her pupil, exclaimed, 'Poor little dears, what a pity they should not be with you, my dear, they would be a nice interest for you!'

Perhaps Miss Wells thought chiefly of the brightening in her child's manner, and the alert vivacity of eye and voice such as she had not seen in her since she had lost her mother; but be that as it might, her words were the very sanction so much longed for, and ere long Honora had her writing-case before her, cogitating over the opening address, as if her whole meaning were implied in them.

'My dear Owen' came so naturally that it was too like an attempt to recur to the old familiarity.

'My dear Mr. Sandbrook?' So formal as to be conscious! 'Dear Owen?' Yes that was the cousinly medium, and in diffident phrases of restrained eagerness, now seeming too affectionate, now too cold she offered to devote herself to his little ones, to take a house on the coast, and endeavour to follow out his wishes with regard to them, her good old friend supplying her lack of experience.

With a beating heart she awaited the reply. It was but few lines, but all Owen was in them.

'My dear Nora—You always were an angel of goodness. I feel your kindness more than I can express. If my darlings were to be left at all, it should be with you, but I cannot contemplate it. Bless you for the thought!

'Yours ever, O. Sandbrook.'

She heard no more for a week, during which a dread of pressing herself on him prevented her from calling on old Mrs. Sandbrook. At last, to her surprise, she received a visit from Captain Charteris, the person whom she looked on as least propitious, and most inclined to regard her as an enthusiastic silly young lady. He was very gruff, and gave a bad account of his patient. The little boy had been unwell, and the exertion of nursing him had been very injurious; the captain was very angry with illness, child, and father.

‘However,’ he said, ‘there’s one good thing, L. has forbidden the children’s perpetually hanging on him, sleeping in his room, and so forth. With the constitutions to which they have every right, poor things, he could not find a better way of giving them the seeds of consumption. That settles it. Poor fellow, he has not the heart to hinder their always pawing him, so there’s nothing for it but to separate them from him.’

‘And may I have them?’ asked Honor, too anxious to pick her words.

‘Why, I told him I would come and see whether you were in earnest in your kind offer. You would find them no sinecure.’

‘It would be a great happiness,’ said she, struggling with tears that might prevent the captain from depending on her good sense, and speaking calmly and sadly; ‘I have no other claims, nothing to tie me to any place. I am a good deal older than I look, and my friend, Miss Wells, has been a governess. *She* is really a very wise, judicious person, to whom he may quite trust. Owen and I were children together, and I know nothing that I should like better than to be useful to him.’

‘Humph!’ said the captain, more touched than he liked to betray; ‘well, it seems the only thing to which he can bear to turn!’

‘Oh!’ she said, breaking off, but emotion and earnestness looked glistening and trembling through every feature.

‘Very well,’ said Captain Charteris, ‘I’m glad, at least, that there is some one to have pity on the poor things! There’s my brother’s wife, she doesn’t say no, but she talks of convenience and spoilt children—Sandbrook was quite right after all; I would not tell him how she answered me! Spoilt children to be sure they are, poor things, but she might recollect they have no mother—such a fuss as she used to make with poor Lucilla too. Poor Lucilla, she would never have believed that “dear Caroline” would have no better welcome for her little ones! Spoilt indeed! A precious deal pleasanter children they are than any of the lot at Castle Blanch, and better brought up too.’

The good captain’s indignation had made away with his consistency, but Honora did not owe him a grudge for revealing that she was his *pis aller*, she was prone to respect a man who showed that he despised her, and she only cared to arrange the details. He was anxious to carry away his charge at once, since every day of this wear and tear of feeling was doing incalculable harm, and she undertook to receive the children and nurse at any time. She would write at once for a house at some warm watering-place, and take them there as soon as possible, and she offered to call that afternoon to settle all with Owen.

‘Why,’ said Captain Charteris, ‘I hardly know. One reason I came alone was, that I believe that little elf of a Cilly has some notion of what is plotting against her. You can’t speak a word but that child catches up, and she will not let her father out of her sight for a moment.’

‘Then what is to be done? I would propose his coming here; but the poor child would not let him go.’

‘That is the only chance. He has been forbidden the walking with them in his arms to put them to sleep, and we’ve got the boy into the nursery, and he’d better be out of the house than hear them roaring for him. So if you have no objection, and he is tolerable this evening, I would bring him as soon as they are gone to bed.’

Poor Owen was evidently falling under the management of stronger hands than his own, and it could only be hoped that it was not too late. His keeper brought him at a little after eight that evening. There was a look about him as if, after the last stroke that had befallen him, he could feel no more, the bitterness of death was past, his very hands looked woe-begone and astray, without the little fingers pressing them. He could not talk at first; he shook Honor’s hand as if he could not bear to be grateful to her, and only the hardest hearts could have endured to enter on the intended discussion. The captain was very gentle towards him, and talk was made on other topics but gradually something of the influence of the familiar scene where his brightest days had been passed, began to prevail. All was like old times—the quaint old silver kettle and lamp, the pattern of the china cups,

the ruddy play of the fire on the polished panels of the room—and he began to revive and join the conversation. They spoke of Delaroche's beautiful Madonnas, one of which was at the time to be seen at a print-shop—'Yes,' said Mr. Sandbrook, 'and little Owen cried out as soon as he saw it, "That lady, the lady with the flowery watch."'

Honora smiled. It was an allusion to the old jests upon her auburn locks, 'a greater compliment to her than to Delaroche,' she said; 'I saw that he was extremely curious to ascertain what my carrots were made of.'

'Do you know, Nora, I never saw more than one person with such hair as yours,' said Owen, with more animation, 'and oddly enough her name turned out to be Charlecote.'

'Impossible! Humfrey and I are the only Charlecotes left that I know of! Where could it have been?'

'It was at Toronto. I must confess that I was struck by the brilliant hair in chapel. Afterwards I met her once or twice. She was a Canadian born, and had just married a settler, whose name I can't remember, but her maiden name had certainly been Charlecote; I remembered it because of the coincidence.'

'Very curious; I did not know there had been any Charlecotes but ourselves.'

'And Humfrey Charlecote has never married?'

'Never.'

What made Owen raise his eyes at that moment, just so that she met them? and why did that dreadful uncontrollable crimson heat come mounting up over cheeks and temples, tingling and spreading into her very neck, just because it was the most hateful thing that could happen? And he saw it. She knew he did so, for he dropped his eyes at once, and there was an absolute silence, which she broke in desperation, by an incoherent attempt to say something, and that ended by blundering into the tender subject—the children; she found she had been talking about the place to which she thought of taking them, a quiet spot on the northern coast of Somersetshire.

He could bear the pang a little better now, and assented, and the ice once broken, there were so many details and injunctions that lay near his heart that the conversation never flagged. He had great reliance on their nurse, and they were healthy children, so that there was not much instruction as regarded the care of their little persons; but he had a great deal to say about the books they were to be taught from, the hymns they were to learn, and the exact management required by Lucilla's peculiar temper and decided will. The theory was so perfect and so beautifully wise that Honora sat by in reverence, fearing her power of carrying it out; and Captain Charteris listened with a shade of satire on his face, and at last broke out with a very odd grunt, as if he did not think this quite what he had seen at Wrapworth parsonage.

Mr. Sandbrook coloured, and checked himself. Then after a pause, he said in a very different tone, 'Perhaps so, Kit. It is only too easy to talk. Nora knows that there is a long way between my intentions and my practice.'

The humble dejection of that tone touched her more than she had been touched since he had wrung her hand, long, long ago.

'Well,' said the captain, perceiving only that he had given pain, 'I will say this for your monkeys, they do *know* what is right at least; they have heard the articles of war, which I don't fancy the other lot ever did. As to the discipline, humph! It is much of a muchness, and I'm not sure but it is not the best at the castle.'

'The children are different at home,' said Owen, quietly; 'but,' he added, with the same sad humility, 'I dare say they will be much the better for the change; I know—'

But he broke off, and put his hand before his eyes.

Honora hoped she should not be left alone with him, but somehow it did happen. The captain went to bring the carriage into the court, and get all imaginable wraps before trusting him out in the air, and Miss Wells disappeared, probably intending kindness. Of course neither spoke, till the

captain was almost come back. Then Owen rose from where he had been sitting listlessly, leaning back, and slowly said, 'Nora, we did not think it would end thus when I put my hand to the plough.

I am glad to have been here again. I had not remembered what I used to be. I do not ask you to forgive me. You are doing so, returning me good for—shall I say evil?'

Honor could not speak or look, she drooped her head, and her hair veiled her; she held out her hand as the captain came in, and felt it pressed with a feverish, eager grasp, and a murmured blessing.

Honora did not see Mr. Sandbrook again, but Captain Charteris made an incursion on her the next day to ask if she could receive the children on the ensuing morning. He had arranged to set off before daybreak, embarking for Ostend before the children were up, so as to spare the actual parting, and Honora undertook to fetch them home in the course of the day. He had hoped to avoid their knowing of the impending separation but he could only prevail so far as to extract a promise that they should not know when it was to take place. Their father had told them of their destination and his own as they sat on his bed in the morning before he rose, and apparently it had gone off better than could have been expected; little Owen did not seem to understand, and his sister was a child who never shed tears.

The day came, and Honora awoke to some awe at the responsibility, but with a yearning supplied, a vacancy filled up. For at least six months she should be as a mother, and a parent's prayers could hardly have been more earnest.

She had not long been dressed, when a hasty peal was heard at the bell, and no sooner was the door opened than in hurried Captain Charteris, breathless, and bearing a large plaid bundle with tangled flaxen locks drooping at one end, and at the other rigid white legs, socks trodden down, one shoe wanting.

He deposited it, and there stood the eldest child, her chin buried in her neck, her fingers digging fast into their own palms, her eyes gleaming fiercely at him under the pent-house she had made of her brows.

'There's an introduction!' he said, panting for breath. 'Found her in time—the Strand—laid flat on back seat, under all the plaids and bags—her father put up his feet and found her—we drove to the lane—I ran down with her—not a moment—can't stay, good-bye, little Cilly goose, to think she could go that figure!'

He advanced to kiss her, but she lifted up her shoulder between him and her face, much as a pugnacious pigeon flap its wings, and he retreated.

'Wiser not, maybe! Look here,' as Honora hurried after him into the hall to ask after the patient; 'if you have a bit of sticking-plaster, he had better not see this.'

Lucilla had made her little pearls of teeth meet in the fleshy part of his palm.

Honora recoiled, shocked, producing the plaster from her pocket in an instant.

'Little vixen,' he said, half laughing; 'but I was thankful to her for neither kicking nor struggling!'

'Poor child!' said Honora, 'perhaps it was as much agony as passion!'

He shrugged his shoulders as he held out his hand for her operations, then hastily thanking her and wishing her good-bye, rushed off again, as the astonished Miss Wells appeared on the stairs.

Honor shrank from telling her what wounds had been received, she thought the gentle lady would never get over such a proceeding, and, in fact, she herself felt somewhat as if she had undertaken the charge of a little wild cat, and quite uncertain what the young lady might do next. On entering the breakfast-room, they found her sunk down all in a heap, where her uncle had set her down, her elbows on a low footstool, and her head leaning on them, the eyes still gazing askance from under the brows, but all the energy and life gone from the little dejected figure.

'Poor child! Dear little thing—won't you come to me?' She stirred not.

Miss Wells advanced, but the child's only motion was to shake her frock at her, as if to keep her off; Honora, really afraid of the consequences of touching her, whispered that they would leave her to herself a little. The silver kettle came in, and tea was made.

‘Lucilla, my dear, the servants are coming in to prayers.’

She did not offer to move, and still Honora let her alone, and she remained in the same attitude while the psalm was read, but afterwards there was a little approximation to kneeling in her position.

‘Lucilla, dear child, you had better come to breakfast—’ Only another defying glance.

Miss Wells, with what Honora thought defective judgment, made pointed commendations of the tea, the butter and honey, but they had no effect; Honora, though her heart ached for the wretch the poor child had undergone, thought it best to affect indifference, gave a hint of the kind, and scrupulously avoided looking round at her, till breakfast was finished. When she did so, she no longer met the wary defiant gleam of the blue eyes, they were fast shut, the head had sunk on the arms, and the long breathings of sleep heaved the little frame. ‘Poor little dear!’ as Miss Wells might well exclaim, she had kept herself wakeful the whole night that her father might not go without her knowledge. And how pretty she looked in that little black frock, so ill and hastily put on, one round white shoulder quite out of it, and the long flaxen locks showing their silky fineness as they hung dispersed and tangled, the pinky flush of sleep upon the little face pillowed on the rosy pair of arms, and with a white unstockinged leg doubled under her. Poor child, there was more of the angel than the tiger-cat in her aspect now, and they had tears in their eyes, and moved softly lest they should startle her from her rest.

But wakened she must be. Honora was afraid of displeasing her domestic vizier, and rendering him for ever unpropitious to her little guests if she deferred his removal of the breakfast things beyond a reasonable hour. How was the awaking to be managed? Fright, tears, passion, what change would come when the poor little maid must awake to her grief! Honora would never have expected so poetical a flight from her good old governess as the suggestion, ‘Play to her;’ but she took it eagerly, and going to the disused piano which stood in the room began a low, soft air. The little sleeper stirred, presently raised her head, shook her hair off her ears, and after a moment, to their surprise, her first word was ‘Mamma!’ Honora was pausing, but the child said, ‘Go on,’ and sat for a few moments as though recovering herself, then rose and came forward slowly standing at last close to Honora. There was a pause, and she said, ‘Mamma did that.’

Never was a sound more welcome! Honora dared to do what she had longed for so much, put an arm round the little creature and draw her nearer, nor did Lucilla resist, she only said, ‘Won’t you go on?’

‘I can make prettier music in the other room, my dear; we will go there, only you’ve had no breakfast. You must be very hungry.’

Lucilla turned round, saw a nice little roll cut into slices, and remembered that she *was* hungry; and presently she was consuming it so prosperously under Miss Wells’s superintendence that Honora ventured out to endeavour to retard Jones’s desire to ‘take away,’ by giving him orders about the carriage, and then to attend to her other household affairs. By the time they were ended she found that Miss Wells had brought the child into the drawing-room, where she had at once detected the piano, and looking up at Honora said eagerly ‘Now then!’ And Honora fulfilled her promise, while the child stood by softened and gratified, until it was time to propose fetching little Owen, ‘your little brother—you will like to have him here.’

‘I want my father,’ said Lucilla in a determined voice, as if nothing else were to satisfy her.

‘Poor child, I know you do; I am so sorry for you, my dear little woman, but you see the doctors think papa is more likely to get better if he has not you to take care of!’

‘I did not want my father to take care of *me*,’ said the little lady, proudly; ‘I take care of father, I always make his tea and warm his slippers, and bring him his coffee in the morning. And Uncle Kit never *will* put his gloves for him and warm his handkerchief! Oh! what will he do? I can’t bear it.’

The violent grief so long kept back was coming now, but not freely; the little girl threw herself on the floor, and in a tumult of despair and passion went on, hurrying out her words, ‘It’s very hard! It’s all Uncle Kit’s doing! I hate him! Yes, I do.’ And she rolled over and over in her frenzy of feeling.

‘My dear! my dear!’ cried Honora, kneeling by her, ‘this will never do! Papa would be very much grieved to see his little girl so naughty. Don’t you know how your uncle only wants to do him good, and to make him get well?’

‘Then why didn’t he take me?’ said Lucilla, gathering herself up, and speaking sullenly.

‘Perhaps he thought you gave papa trouble, and tired him.’

‘Yes, that’s it, and it’s not fair,’ cried the poor child again; ‘why couldn’t he tell me? I didn’t know papa was ill! he never told me so, nor Mr. Pendy either; or, how I would have nursed him! I wanted to do so much for him; I wouldn’t have asked him to tell me stories, nor nothing! No! And now they won’t let me take care of him;’ and she cried bitterly.

‘Yes,’ said good, gentle Miss Wells, thinking more of present comfort than of the too possible future; ‘but you will go back to take care of him some day, my dear. When the spring comes papa will come back to his little girl.’

Spring! It was a long way off to a mind of six years old, but it made Lucilla look more amiably at Miss Wells.

‘And suppose,’ proceeded that good lady, ‘you were to learn to be as good and helpful a little girl as can be while he is gone, and then nobody will wish to keep you from him. How surprised he would be!’

‘And then shall we go home?’ said Lucilla.

Miss Wells uttered a somewhat rash assurance to that effect, and the child came near her, pacified and satisfied by the scheme of delightful goodness and progress to be made in order to please her father—as she always called him. Honora looked on, thankful for the management that was subduing and consoling the poor little maid, and yet unable to participate in it, for though the kind old lady spoke in all sincerity, it was impossible to Honora to stifle a lurking fear that the hopes built on the prospect of his return had but a hollow foundation.

However it attracted Lucilla to Miss Wells, so that Honora did not fear leaving her on going to bring home little Owen. The carriage which had conveyed the travellers, had brought back news of his sister’s discovery and capture, and Honora found Mrs. Sandbrook much shocked at the enormity of the proceeding, and inclined to pity Honora for having charge of the most outrageous children she had ever seen. A very long letter had been left for her by their father, rehearsing all he had before given of directions, and dwelling still more on some others, but then apparently repenting of laying down the law, he ended by entreating her to use her own judgment, believe in his perfect confidence, and gratitude beyond expression for most unmerited kindness.

Little Owen, she heard, had made the house resound with cries when his father was nowhere to be found, but his nurse had quieted him, and he came running to Honora with an open, confiding face. ‘Are you the lady? And will you take me to Cilly and the sea? And may I have a whale?’

Though Honora did not venture on promising him a tame whale in the Bristol Channel, she had him clinging to her in a moment, eager to set off, to go to Cilly, and the dove he had seen at her house.

‘It’s a nasty house here—I want to come away,’ he said, running backwards and forwards between her and the window to look at the horses, while nurse’s interminable boxes were being carried down.

The troubles really seemed quite forgotten; the boy sat on her knee and chattered all the way to Woolstone-lane, and there he and Lucilla flew upon each other with very pretty childish joy; the sister doing the honours of the house in right of having been a little longer an inmate. Nurse caught her and dressed and combed her, shoed her and sashed her, so that she came down to dinner less picturesque, but more respectable than at her first appearance that morning, and except for the wonderful daintiness of both children, dinner went off very well.

All did go well till night, and then Owen’s woes began. Oh what a piteous sobbing lamentation was it! ‘Daddy, daddy!’ not to be consoled, not to be soothed, awakening his sister to the same sad cry, stilled only by exhaustion and sleepiness.

Poor little fellow! Night after night it was the same. Morning found him a happy, bright child, full of engaging ways and innocent sayings, and quite satisfied with 'Cousin Honor,' but bed-time always brought back the same wailing. Nurse, a tidy, brisk personage, with a sensible, deferential tone to her superiors, and a caressing one to the children, tried in vain assurances of papa's soon coming back; nay, it might be feared that she held out that going to sleep would bring the morrow when he was to come; but even this delusive promise failed; the present was all; and Cousin Honor herself was only not daddy, though she nursed him, and rocked him in her arms, and fondled him, and told stories or sung his lullaby with nightly tenderness, till the last sobs had quivered into the smooth heavings of sleep.

Might only sea air and exercise act as a soporific! That was a better chance than the new promise which Honora was vexed to find nurse holding out to poor little Owen, that if he would be a good boy, he was going to papa. She was puzzled how to act towards a person not exactly under her authority, but she took courage to speak about these false promises, and found the remonstrance received in good part; indeed nurse used to talk at much length of the children in a manner that implied great affection for them, coupled with a sense that it would be an excellent thing for them to be in such judicious hands. Honor always came away from nurse in good humour with herself.

The locality she had chosen was a sheltered village on the north coast of Somerset, just where Exmoor began to give grandeur to the outline in the rear, and in front the Welsh hills wore different tints of purple or gray, according to the promise of weather, Lundy Isle and the two lesser ones serving as the most prominent objects, as they rose from—Well, well! Honor counted herself as a Somersetshire woman, and could not brook hearing much about the hue of the Bristol Channel. At any rate, just here it had been so kind as to wash up a small strip of pure white sand, fit for any amount of digging for her children; and though Sandbeach was watering-place enough to have the lodging-houses, butchers and bakers, so indispensable to the London mind, it was not so much in vogue as to be overrun by fine ladies, spoiling the children by admiring their beauty. So said Miss Charlecote in her prudence—but was not she just as jealous as nurse that people should turn round a second time to look at those lovely little faces?

That was a very happy charge to her and her good old governess, with some drawbacks, indeed, but not such as to distress her over much. The chief was at first Owen's nightly sorrows, his daily idleness over lessons, Lucilla's pride, and the exceeding daintiness of both children, which made their meals a constant vexation and trouble. But what was this compared with the charm of their dependence on her, and of hearing that newly-invented pet name, 'Sweet Honey,' invoked in every little concern that touched them?

It was little Owen's name for her. He was her special favourite—there was no concealing it.

Lucilla did not need her as much, and was of a vigorous, independent nature, that would stand alone to the utmost. Owen gave his affection spontaneously; if Lucilla's was won, it must be at unawares.

She was living in and for her absent father now, and had nothing to spare for any one else, or if she had, Miss Wells, who had the less claim on her was preferred to Cousin Honor. 'Father' was almost her religion; though well taught, and unusually forward in religious knowledge, as far as Honora dared to augur, no motive save her love for him had a substantive existence, as touching her feelings or ruling her actions. For him she said her prayers and learnt her hymns; for him she consented to learn to hem handkerchiefs; for him were those crooked letters for ever being written; nay, at the thought of his displeasure alone could her tears be made to flow when she was naughty; and for him she endeavoured to be less fanciful at dinner, as soon as her mind had grasped the perception that her not eating what was set before her might really hinder him from always having her with him. She was fairly manageable, with very high spirits, and not at all a silly or helpless child; but though she obeyed Miss Charlecote, it was only as obeying her father through her, and his constant letters kept up the strong influence. In her most gracious moods, she was always telling her little brother histories of what they should do when they got home to father and Mr. Prendergast; but to Owen, absence made

a much greater difference. Though he still cried at night, his 'Sweet Honey' was what he wanted, and with her caressing him, he only dreaded her leaving him. He lavished his pretty endearments upon her, and missed no one when he held her hand or sat in her lap, stroking her curls, and exchanging a good deal of fondling. He liked his hymns, and enjoyed Scripture stories, making remarks that caused her to reverence him; and though backward, idle, and sometimes very passionate, his was exactly the legitimate character for a child, such as she could deal with and love. She was as complete a slave to the two little ones as their father could have been; all her habits were made to conform to their welfare and pleasure, and very happy she was, but the discipline was more decided than they had been used to; there were habits to be formed, and others to be broken, and she was not weak enough not to act up to her duty in this respect, even though her heart was winding round that sunny-faced boy as fast as it had ever clung to his father. The new Owen Sandbrook, with his innocent earnestness, and the spiritual light in his eyes, should fulfil all her dreams!

Christmas had passed; Mr. Sandbrook had begun to write to his children about seeing them soon; Lucilla's slow hemming was stimulated by the hope of soon making her present; and Honora was marvelling at her own selfishness in dreading the moment when the little ones would be no longer hers; when a hurried note of preparation came from Captain Charteris. A slight imprudence had renewed all the mischief, and his patient was lying speechless under a violent attack of inflammation.

Another letter, and all was over.

A shock indeed! but in Honora's eyes, Owen Sandbrook had become chiefly the children's father, and their future was what concerned her most. How should she bear to part with his darlings for ever, and to know them brought up in the way that was not good, and which their father dreaded, and when their orphanhood made her doubly tender over them?

To little Owen it was chiefly that papa was gone 'up there' whither all his hymns and allegories pointed, and at his age, all that he did not actually see was much on a par; the hope of meeting had been too distant for the extinction of it to affect him very nearly, and he only understood enough to prompt the prettiest and most touching sayings, wondering about the doings of papa, mamma, and little baby among the angels, with as much reality as he had formerly talked of papa among the French.

Lucilla heard with more comprehension, but her gay temper seemed to revolt against having sorrow forced on her. She would not listen and would not think; her spirits seemed higher than ever, and Honora almost concluded that either she did not feel at all, or that the moment of separation had exhausted all. Her character made Honora especially regret her destiny; it was one only too congenial to the weeds that were more likely to be implanted, than plucked up, at Castle Blanch.

Captain Charteris had written to say that he, and probably his brother, should come to Sandbeach to relieve Miss Charlecote from the care of the children, and she prized each day while she still had those dear little voices about the house.

'Sweet Honey,' said Lucilla, who had been standing by the window, apparently watching the rain, 'do Uncle Charteris and Uncle Kit want us to go away from you?'

'I am very much afraid they do, my dear.'

'Nurse said, if you would ask them, we might stay,' said Lucilla, tracing the course of a drop with her finger.

'If asking would do any good, my dear,' sighed Honor; 'but I don't think nurse knows. You see, you belong to your uncles now.'

'I won't belong to Uncle Charteris!' cried Lucilla, passionately. 'I won't go to Castle Blanch!'

They were all cross to me; Ratia teased me, and father said it was all their fault I was naughty, and he would never take me there again! Don't let Uncle Kit go and take me there!' and she clung to her friend, as if the recollection of Uncle Kit's victory by main force hung about her still.

'I won't, I won't, my child, if I can help it; but it will all be as your dear father may have fixed it, and whatever he wishes I know that his little girl will do.'

Many a dim hope did Honora revolve, and more than ever did she feel as if a piece of her heart would be taken away, for the orphans fastened themselves upon her, and little Owen stroked her face, and said naughty Uncle Kit should not take them away. She found from the children and nurse that about a year ago, just after the loss of the baby, there had been a most unsuccessful visit at Castle Blanch; father and little ones had been equally miserable there in the separation of the large establishment, and Lucilla had been domineeringly petted by her youngest cousin, Horatia, who chose to regard her as a baby, and coerced her by bodily force, such as was intolerable to so high-spirited a child, who was a little woman at home. She had resisted, and fallen into dire disgrace, and it was almost with horror that she regarded the place and the cousinhood. Nurse appeared to have some private disgust of her own, as well as to have much resented her children's being convicted of naughtiness, and she spoke strongly in confidence to Honora of the ungodly ways of the whole household, declaring that after the advantages she had enjoyed with her dear master, she could not bear to live there, though she might—yes, she *must* be with the dear children just at first, and she ventured to express strong wishes for their remaining in their present home, where they had been so much improved.

The captain came alone. He walked in from the inn just before luncheon, with a wearied, sad look about him, as if he had suffered a good deal; he spoke quietly and slowly, and when the children came in, he took them up in his arms and kissed them very tenderly. Lucilla submitted more placably than Honor expected, but the moment they were set down they sprang to their friend, and held by her dress. Then came the meal, which passed off with small efforts at making talk, but with nothing memorable except the captain's exclamation at the end—'Well, that's the first time I ever dined with you children without a fuss about the meat. Why, Cilly, I hardly know you.'

'I think the appetites are better for the sea air,' said Honor, not that she did not think it a great achievement.

'I'm afraid it has been a troublesome charge,' said the captain, laying his hand on his niece's shoulder, which she at once removed, as disavowing his right in her.

'Oh! it has made me so happy,' said Honor, hardly trusting her voice; 'I don't know how to yield it up.'

Those understanding eyes of Lucilla's were drinking in each word, but Uncle Kit ruthlessly said—'There, it's your walking time, children; you go out now.'

Honora followed up his words with her orders, and Lucille obeyed, only casting another wistful look, as if she knew her fate hung in the scales. It was showing tact such as could hardly have been expected from the little impetuous termagant, and was the best pleading for her cause, for her uncle's first observation was—'A wonder! Six months back, there would have been an explosion!'

'I am glad you think them improved.'

'Civilized beings, not plagues. You have been very good to them;' and as she intimated her own pleasure in them, he continued—'It will be better for them at Castle Blanch to have been a little broken in; the change from his indulgence would have been terrible.'

'If it were possible to leave them with me, I should be so happy,' at length gasped Honora, meeting an inquiring dart from the captain's eyes, as he only made an interrogative sound as though to give himself time to think, and she proceeded in broken sentences—'If their uncle and aunt did not so very much wish for them—perhaps—I could—'

'Well,' said Captain Charteris, apparently so little aided by his thoughts as to see no hope of overcoming his perplexity without expressing it, 'the truth is that, though I had not meant to say anything of it, for I think relations should come first, I believe poor Sandbrook would have preferred it.' And while her colour deepened, and she locked her trembling fingers together to keep them still, he went on. 'Yes! you can't think how often I called myself a dozen fools for having parted him from his children! Never held up his head again! I could get him to take interest in nothing—every child he saw he was only comparing to one or other of them. After the year turned, and he talked

of coming home, he was more cheerful; but strangely enough, for those last days at Hyères, though he seemed better, his spirits sank unaccountably, and he *would* talk more of the poor little thing that he lost than of these! Then he had a letter from you which set him sighing, and wishing they could always have such care! Altogether, I thought to divert him by taking him on that expedition, but—

Well, I've been provoked with him many a time, but there was more of the *real thing* in him than in the rest of us, and I feel as if the best part of our family were gone.'

'And this was all? He was too ill to say much afterwards?'

'Couldn't speak when he rang in the morning! Was gone by that time next day. Now,' added the captain, after a silence, 'I tell you candidly that my feeling is that the ordinary course is right. I think Charles ought to take the children, and the children ought to be with Charles.'

'If you think so,' began Honor, with failing hopes.

'At the same time,' continued he, 'I don't think they'll be so happy or so well cared for as by you, and knowing poor Owen's wishes, I should not feel justified in taking them away, since you are so good as to offer to keep them.'

Honor eagerly declared herself much obliged, then thought it sounded ironical.

'Unless,' he proceeded, 'Charles should strongly feel it his duty to take them home, in which case—'

'Oh, of course I could say nothing.'

'Very well, then we'll leave it to his decision.'

So it remained, and in trembling Honora awaited the answer.

It was in her favour that he was appointed to a ship, since he was thus excluded from exercising any supervision over them at Castle Blanch, and shortly after, letters arrived gratefully acceding to her request. Family arrangements and an intended journey made her proposal doubly welcome, for the present at least, and Mrs. Charteris was full of polite thanks.

Poor little waifs and strays! No one else wanted them, but with her at least they had a haven of refuge, and she loved them the more ardently for their forlorn condition. Her own as they had never before been! and if the tenure were uncertain, she prized it doubly, even though, by a strange fatality, she had never had so much trouble and vexation with them as arose at once on their being made over to her! When all was settled, doubt over, and the routine life begun, Lucilla evidently felt the blank of her vanished hopes, and became fretful and captious, weary of things in general, and without sufficient motive to control her natural taste for the variety of naughtiness! Honor had not undertaken the easiest of tasks, but she neither shrank from her enterprise nor ceased to love the fiery little flighty sprite, the pleasing torment of her life—she loved her only less than that model of childish sweetness, her little Owen.

* * * * *

'Lucy, dear child, don't take your brother there. Owen dear, come back, don't you see the mud? you'll sink in.'

'I'm only getting a dear little crab, Sweet Honey,' and the four little feet went deeper and deeper into the black mud.

'I can't have it done! come back, children, I desire, directly.'

The boy would have turned, but his sister had hold of his hand. 'Owen, there he is! I'll have him,' and as the crab scuttled sidelong after the retreating tide, on plunged the children.

'Lucy, come here!' cried the unfortunate old hen, as her ducklings took to the black amphibious mass, but not a whit did Lucilla heed. In the ardour of the chase, on she went, unheeding, leaving her brother sticking half way, where having once stopped, he began to find it difficult to withdraw his feet, and fairly screamed to 'Sweet Honey' for help. His progress was not beyond what a few long vigorous steps of hers could come up with, but deeply and blackly did she sink, and when she had lifted her truant out of his two holes, the increased weight made her go ankle deep at the first tread, and just at the same moment a loud shriek proclaimed that Lucilla, in her final assault on the crab,

had fallen flat on a yielding surface, where each effort to rise sank her deeper, and Honora almost was expecting in her distress to see her disappear altogether, ere the treacherous mud would allow her to come to the rescue. But in that instant of utmost need, ere she could set down the little boy, a gentleman, with long-legged strides, had crossed the intervening space, and was bearing back the young lady from her mud bath. She raised her eyes to thank him. 'Humfrey!' she exclaimed.

'Honor! so it was you, was it? I'd no notion of it!' as he placed on her feet the little maiden, encrusted with mud from head to foot, while the rest of the party were all apparently cased in dark buskins of the same.

'Come to see me and my children?' she said. 'I am ashamed you should find us under such circumstances! though I don't know what would have become of us otherwise. No, Lucy, you are too disobedient for any one to take notice of you yet—you must go straight home, and be cleaned, and not speak to Mr. Charlecote till you are quite good. Little Owen, here he is—he was quite led into it. But how good of you to come, Humfrey: where are you?'

'At the hotel—I had a mind to come and see how you were getting on, and I'd had rather more than usual to do of late, so I thought I would take a holiday.'

They walked on talking for some seconds, when presently as the squire's hand hung down, a little soft one stole into it, and made him exclaim with a start, 'I thought it was Ponto's nose!'

But though very fond of children, he took up his hand, and did not make the slightest response to the sly overture of the small coquette, the effect as Honor well knew of opposition quite as much as of her strong turn for gentlemen. She pouted a little, and then marched on with 'don't care' determination, while Humfrey and Honora began to talk over Hiltonbury affairs, but were soon interrupted by Owen, who, accustomed to all her attention, did not understand her being occupied by any one else. 'Honey, Honeypots,' and a pull at her hand when she did not immediately attend, 'why don't the little crabs get black legs like mine?'

'Because they only go where they ought,' was the extremely moral reply of the squire. 'Little boys aren't meant to walk in black mud.'

'The shrimp boys do go in the mud,' shrewdly pleaded Owen, setting Honor off laughing at Humfrey's discomfited look of diversion.

'It won't do to generalize,' she said, merrily. 'Owen must be content to regard crabs and shrimp boys as privileged individuals.'

Owen demanded whether when he was big he might be a shrimp boy, and a good deal of fraternization had taken place between him and Mr. Charlecote before the cottage was reached.

It was a very happy day to Honora; there was a repose and trust to be felt in Humfrey's company, such as she had not experienced since she had lost her parents, and the home sense of kindred was very precious. Only women whose chief prop is gone, can tell the value of one who is still near enough to disapprove without ceremony.

The anxiety that Honor felt to prove to her cousin that it was not a bit of romantic folly to have assumed her present charge, was worth more than all the freedom of action in the world. How much she wanted the children to show off to advantage! how desirous she was that he should not think her injudicious! yes, and how eager to see him pleased with their pretty looks!

Lucilla came down cleaned, curled, and pardoned, and certainly a heart must have been much less tender than Humfrey Charlecote's not to be touched by the aspect of those two little fair waxen-looking beings in the deepest mourning of orphanhood. He was not slow in making advances towards them, but the maiden had been affronted, and chose to be slyly shy and retiring, retreating to the other side of Miss Wells, and there becoming intent upon her story-book, though many a gleam through her eyelashes betrayed furtive glances at the stranger whom Owen was monopolizing. And then she let herself be drawn out, with the drollest mixture of arch demureness and gracious caprice. Honora had never before seen her with a gentleman, and to be courted was evidently as congenial an element

to her as to a reigning beauty. She was perfectly irresistible to manhood, and there was no doubt, ere the evening was over, that Humfrey thought her one of the prettiest little girls he had ever seen.

He remained a week at Sandbeach, lodging at the inn, but spending most of his time with Honor.

He owned that he had been unwell, and there certainly was a degree of lassitude about him, though Honor suspected that his real motive in coming was brotherly kindness and desire to see whether she were suffering much from the death of Owen Sandbrook. Having come, he seemed not to know how to go away. He was too fond of children to become weary of their petty exactions, and they both had a sort of passion for him; he built castles for them on the beach, presided over their rides, took them out boating, and made them fabulously happy. Lucilla had not been so good for weeks, and the least symptom of an outbreak was at once put down by his good-natured 'No, no!' The evenings at the cottage with Honora and Miss Wells, music and bright talk, were evidently very refreshing to him, and he put off his departure from day to day, till an inexorable matter of county business forced him off.

Not till the day was imminent, did the cousins quit the easy surface of holiday leisure talk. They had been together to the late evening service, and were walking home, when Honora began abruptly, 'Humfrey, I wish you would not object to the children giving me pet names.'

'I did not know that I had shown any objection.'

'As if you did not impressively say Miss Charlecote on every occasion when you mention me to them.'

'Well, and is not it more respectful?'

'That's not what I want. Where the natural tie is wanting, one should do everything to make up for it.'

'And you hope to do so by letting yourself be called Honey-pots!'

'More likely than by sitting up distant and awful to be *Miss Charlecoted*!'

'Whatever you might be called must become an endearment,' said Humfrey, uttering unawares one of the highest compliments she had ever received, 'and I own I do not like to hear those little chits make so free with your name.'

'For my sake, or theirs?'

'For both. There is an old saying about familiarity, and I think you should recollect that, for the children's own good, it is quite as needful to strengthen respect as affection.'

'And you think I can do that by fortifying myself with Miss Charlecote? Perhaps I had better make it Mrs. Honora Charlecote at once, and get a high cap, a rod, and a pair of spectacles, eh? No! if they won't respect me out of a buckram suit, depend upon it they would find out it was a hollow one.'

Humfrey smiled. From her youth up, Honor could generally come off in apparent triumph from an argument with him, but the victory was not always where the triumph was.

'Well, Humfrey,' she said, after some pause, 'do you think I am fit to be trusted with my two poor children?'

There was a huskiness in his tone as he said, 'I am sincerely glad you have the pleasure and comfort of them.'

'I suspect there's a reservation there. But really, Humfrey, I don't think I went out searching for the responsibility in the way that makes it dangerous. One uncle did not want them, and the other could not have them, and it would have been mere barbarity in me not to offer. Besides, their father wished—' and her voice faltered with tears.

'No, indeed,' said Humfrey, eagerly, 'I did not in the least mean that it is not the kindest, most generous requital,' and there he broke off, embarrassed by the sincere word that he had uttered, but before she had spoken an eager negative—to what she knew not—he went on. 'And of course I don't mean that you are not one to manage them very well, and all that—only I hope there may not be pain in store—I should not like those people to use you for their nursery governess, and then take the children away just as you had set your heart upon them. Don't do that, Honor,' he added, with an almost sad earnestness.

‘Do what? Set my heart on them? Do you think I can help loving the creatures?’ she said, with mournful playfulness, ‘or that my uncertain tenure does not make them the greater darlings?’

‘There are ways of loving without setting one’s heart,’ was the somewhat grave reply.

He seemed to be taking these words as equivalent to transgressing the command that requires all our heart, and she began quickly, ‘Oh! but I didn’t mean—’ then a sudden thrill crossed her whether there might not be some truth in the accusation. Where had erst the image of Owen Sandbrook stood? First or second? Where was now the image of the boy? She turned her words into ‘Do you think I am doing so—in a wrong way?’

‘Honor dear, I could not think of wrong where you are concerned,’ he said. ‘I was only afraid of your kindness bringing you pain, if you rest your happiness very much upon those children.’

‘I see,’ said Honor, smiling, relieved. ‘Thank you, Humfrey; but you see I can’t weigh out my affection in that fashion. They will get it, the rogues!’

‘I’m not afraid, as far as the girl is concerned,’ said Humfrey. ‘You are strict enough with her.’

‘But how am I to be strict when poor little Owen never does anything wrong?’

‘Yes, he is a particularly sweet child.’

‘And not at all wanting in manliness,’ cried Honor, eagerly. ‘So full of spirit, and yet so gentle. Oh! he is a child whom it is a privilege to train, and I don’t think I have spoilt him yet, do you?’

‘No, I don’t think you have. He is very obedient in general.’

‘Oh! if he could be only brought up as I wish. And I do think his innocence is too perfect a thing not to be guarded. What a perfect clergyman he would make! Just fancy him devoting himself to some parish like poor dear old St. Wulstan’s—carrying his bright sweetness into the midst of all that black Babel, and spreading light round him! he always says he will be a clergyman like his papa, and I am sure he must be marked out for it. He likes to look at the sheep on the moors, and talk about the shepherd leading them, and I am sure the meaning goes very deep with him.’

She was not going quite the way to show Humfrey that her heart was not set on the boy, and she was checked by hearing him sigh. Perhaps it was for the disappointment he foresaw, so she said, ‘Whether I bring him up or not, don’t you believe there will be a special care over such a child?’

‘There is a special care over every Christian child, I suppose,’ he said; ‘and I hope it may all turn out so as to make you happy. Here is your door; good night, and good-bye.’

‘Why, are not you coming in?’

‘I think not; I have my things to put up; I must go early to-morrow. Thank you for a very happy week. Good-bye, Honor.’ There was a shade of disappointment about his tone that she could not quite account for. Dear old Humfrey! Could he be ageing? Could he be unwell? Did he feel himself lonely? Could she have mortified him, or displeased him? Honor was not a woman of personal vanity, or a solution would sooner have occurred to her. She knew, upon reflection, that it must have been for her sake that Humfrey had continued single, but it was so inconvenient to think of him in the light of an admirer, when she so much needed him as a brother, that it had hardly ever occurred to her to do so; but at last it did strike her whether, having patiently waited so long, this might not have been a visit of experiment, and whether he might not be disappointed to find her wrapped up in new interests—slightly jealous, in fact, of little Owen. How good he had been! Where was the heart that could fail of being touched by so long a course of forbearance and consideration? Besides Honor had been a solitary woman long enough to know what it was to stand alone. And then how well he would stand in a father’s place towards the orphans. He would never decree her parting with them, and Captain Charteris himself must trust him. Yet what a shame it would be to give such a devoted heart nothing better than one worn out, with the power of love such as he deserved, exhausted for ever. And yet—and yet—something very odd bounded up within her, and told her between shame and exultation, that faithful old Humfrey would not be discontented even with what she had to give.

Another time—a little, a very little encouragement, and the pine wood scene would come back

again, and then—her heart fainted a little—there should be no concealment—but if she could only have been six months married all at once!

Time went on, and Honora more than once blushed at finding how strong a hold this possibility had taken of her heart, when once she had begun to think of resting upon one so kind, so good, so strong. Every perplexity, every care, every transaction that made her feel her position as a single woman, brought round the yearning to lay them all down upon him, who would only be grateful to her for them. Every time she wanted some one to consult, hope showed her his face beaming sweetly on her, and home seemed to be again opening to her, that home which might have been hers at any time these twelve years. She quite longed to see how glad the dear, kind fellow would be.

Perhaps maidenly shame would have belied her feelings in his actual presence, perhaps she would not have shrunk from him, and been more cold than in her unconsciousness, but he came not; and his absence fanned the spark so tardily kindled. What if she had delayed till too late? He was a man whose duty it was to marry! he had waited till he was some years past forty—perhaps this had been his last attempt, and he was carrying his addresses elsewhere.

Well! Honora believed she had tried to act rightly, and that must be her comfort—and extremely ashamed of herself she was, to find herself applying such a word to her own sensations in such a case—and very much disliking the notion of any possible lady at Hiltonbury Holt.

CHAPTER III

*There is a reaper, his name is Death,
And with his sickle keen,
He reaps the bearded grain at a breath,
And the flowers that grow between.*

—Longfellow

A letter from Humfrey! how Honor's heart fluttered. Would it announce an engagement, or would it promise a visit on which her fate would turn, or would it be only a business letter on her money matters?

Angry at her own trepidation, she opened it. It was none of all these. It told her that Mr. Saville, his brother-in-law, was staying at the Holt with his second wife, and that he begged her to take advantage of this opportunity to come to visit the old place, adding, that he had not been well, and he wished much to see her, if she could spare a few days to him from her children.

Little doubt had she as to the acceptance. The mere words 'going to Hiltonbury,' had power by force of association to make her heart bound. She was a little disappointed that he had not included the children; she feared that it looked as if he were really ill; but it might be on account of the Savilles, or maybe he had that to say to her which—oh, nonsense! Were that the case, Humfrey would not reverse the order of things, and make her come to him. At any rate, the children should be her first condition. And then she concentrated her anxieties on his most unusual confession of having been unwell.

Humfrey's substantial person was ready to meet her at the station, and the first glance dispelled her nervous tremors, and calmed the tossings of her mind in the habitual sense of trust and reliance.

He thanked her for coming, handed her into the carriage, looked after her goods, and seated himself beside her in so completely his ordinary fashion of taking care of her, that she forgot all her intentions of rendering their meeting momentous. Her first inquiry was for his health, but he put it aside with something about feeling very well now, and he looked so healthy, only perhaps a little more hearty and burly, that she did not think any more of the matter, and only talked in happy desultory scraps, now dwelling on her little Owen's charms, now joyfully recognizing familiar objects, or commenting upon the slight changes that had taken place. One thing, however, she observed; Humfrey did not stop the horse at the foot of the steep hill where walking had been a matter of course, when he had been a less solid weight than now. 'Yes, Honor,' he said, smiling, 'one grows less merciful as one grows old and short-breathed.'

'You growing old! you whom I've never left off thinking of as a promising lad, as poor old Mrs. Mervyn used to call you.'

He turned his face towards her as if about to say something very seriously, but apparently changing his intention, he said, 'Poor old Mrs. Mervyn, I wonder how she would like the changes at Beauchamp.'

'Are the Fulmorts doing a great deal?'

'They have quite modernized the house, and laid out the garden—what I should call very prettily, if it were not for my love of the old Dutch one. They see a great deal of company, and go on in grand style.'

'How do you get on with them?'

'Oh! very well; I have dined there two or three times. He is a good-natured fellow enough, and there are some nice children, whom I like to meet with their nurses in the woods. I stood proxy for the last one's sponsor; I could not undertake the office myself.'

‘Good-natured!’ exclaimed Nora. ‘Why, you know how he behaved at St. Wulstan’s. No more than £5 a year would he ever give to any charity, though he was making thousands by those gin-shops.’

‘Probably he thought he was doing very liberally.’

‘Ay, there is no hope for St. Wulstan’s till people have left off thinking a guinea their duty, and five very handsome! and that Augusta Mervyn should have gone and married our *bête noire*—our lord of gin-palaces—I do think it must be on purpose for you to melt him. I shall set you at him, Humfrey, next time Mr. Askew writes to me in despair, that something won’t go on for lack of means.

Only I must be quite sure that you won’t give the money yourself, to spare the trouble of dunning.’

‘It is not fair to take other people’s duties on oneself; besides, as you’ll find, Honor, the Holt purse is not bottomless.’

As she would find! This was a very odd way of making sure of her beforehand, but she was not certain that she did not like it. It was comfortable, and would save much preliminary.

The woods were bursting into spring: delicate, deeply creased leaves were joyously emerging to the light on the birches, not yet devoid of the silvery wool where they had been packed, the hazels were fluttering their goslings, the palms were honey sweet with yellow tufts, the primroses peeped out in the banks of moss.

‘Oh! Humfrey, this is the great desire of my life fulfilled, to see the Holt in the flush of spring!’

‘I have always said you cared for the place more than any one,’ said Humfrey, evidently gratified, but with an expression which she did not understand.

‘As if I did not! But how strangely differently from my vision my wish has been fulfilled.’

‘How strangely!’ he repeated, with even greater seriousness than had been in her voice.

The meadow was bright with spring grass, the cattle grazing serenely as in old times, the garden—ah! not quite so gay—either it was better in autumn than in spring, or it wanted poor Sarah’s hand; the dogs, not the same individuals, but with much the same manners, dancing round their master—all like, all home. Nothing wanting, but, alas! the good-natured, narrow-minded old mistress of the house to fret her, and notable Sarah to make her comfortable, and wonder at her eccentric tastes.

Ah! and how much more was wanting the gentle mother who did all the civility and listening, and the father, so happy to look at green woods, read poetry, and unbend his weary brow! How much more precious was the sight of the one living remnant of those days!

They had a cheerful evening. Mr. Saville had a great deal of old-fashioned Oxford agreeableness; he was very courtly, but a sensible man, with some native fun and many college stories.

After many years of donship, his remote parish was somewhat of a solitude to him, and intercourse with a cultivated mind was as pleasant to him now as the sight of a lady had been in his college days.

Honor liked conversation too; and Miss Wells, Lucilla, and Owen had been rather barren in that respect, so there was a great deal of liveliness, in which Humfrey took his full share; while good Mrs. Saville looked like what she was, her husband’s admiring housekeeper.

‘Do you take early walks still, Humfrey?’ asked Honor, as she bade him good night. ‘If you do, I shall be quite ready to confront the dew;’ and therewith came a revulsion of the consciousness within. Was this courting him? and to her great provocation there arose an uncomfortable blush.

‘Thank you,’ he said, with something of a mournful tone, ‘I’m afraid I’m past that, Honor. To-morrow, after breakfast—good night.’

Honor was a little alarmed by all this, and designed a conference with the old housekeeper, Mrs. Stubbs, to inquire into her master’s health, but this was not attainable that night, and she could only go to bed in the friendly old wainscoted room, whose white and gold carved monsters on the mantelpiece were well-nigh as familiar as the dove in Woolstone-lane; but, oh! how it made her long for the mother whom she used to kiss there.

Humfrey was brisk and cheerful as ever at breakfast, devising what his guests would like to do for the day, and talking of some friends whom he had asked to meet Mr. Saville, so that all the anxieties with which Honora had risen were dissipated, and she took her part gaily in the talk. There

was something therefore freshly startling to her, when, on rising, Humfrey gravely said, 'Honor, will you come into my study for a little while?'

The study had always been more of a place for guns and fishing-tackle than for books. It was Humfrey's usual living room when alone, and was of course full besides of justice books, agricultural reports, acts of parliament, piles of papers, little bags of samples of wheat, all in the orderly disorder congenial to the male kind. All this was as usual, but the change that struck her was, that the large red leather lounging chair, hitherto a receptacle for the overflowings of the table, was now wheeled beside the fire, and near it stood a little table with a large print Bible on it, which she well remembered as his mother's. Humfrey set a chair for her by the fire, and seated himself in the easy one, leaning back a little. She had not spoken. Something in his grave preparation somewhat awed her, and she sat upright, watching him.

'It was very kind of you to come, Honor,' he began; 'more kind than you know.'

'I am sure it could be no other than a treat—'

He continued, before she could go farther, 'I wished particularly to speak to you. I thought it might perhaps spare you a shock.'

She looked at him with a terrified eye.

'Don't be frightened, my dear,' he said, leaning forward, 'there is no occasion. Such things must come sooner or later, and it is only that I wished to tell you that I have been having advice for a good many uncomfortable feelings that have troubled me lately.'

'Well?' she asked, breathlessly.

'And Dixon tells me that it is aneurism.'

Quick and fast came Honora's breath; her hands were clasped together; her eyes cast about with such a piteous, despairing expression, that he started to his feet in a moment, exclaiming—'Honor! Honor dear! don't! there's no need. I did not think you would feel it in this way!'

'Feel! what should I feel if not for you? Oh! Humfrey! don't say it! you are all that is left me—you cannot be spared!' and as he came towards her, she grasped his hand and clung to him, needing the support which he gave in fear of her fainting.

'Dear Honor, do not take it thus. I am very well now—I dare say I shall be so to the last, and there is nothing terrible to the imagination. I am very thankful for both the preparation and the absence of suffering. Will not you be the same?'

'Yes, you,' said Honora, sitting up again, and looking up into his sincere, serene face; 'I cannot doubt that even this is well for you, but it is all selfishness—just as I was beginning to feel what you are to me.'

Humfrey's face lighted up suddenly. 'Then, Honor,' he said, evidently putting strong restraint upon his voice, 'you could have listened to me now!'

She bowed her head—the tears were dropping very fast.

'Thank God!' he said, as again he leant back in his chair; and when she raised her eyes again, he sat with his hands clasped, and a look of heavenly felicity on his face, raised upwards.

'Oh! Humfrey! how thoughtlessly I have trifled away all that might have been the happiness of your life!'

'You never trifled with me,' he said; 'you have always dealt honestly and straightforwardly, and it is best as it is. Had we been together all this time, the parting might have been much harder. I am glad there are so few near ties to break.'

'Don't say so! you, loved by every one, the tower of strength to all that is good!'

'Hush, hush! nonsense, Honor!' said he, kindly. 'I think I have tried,' he went on, gravely, 'not to fall behind the duties of my station; but that would be a bad dependence, were there not something else to look to. As to missing me, the world did very well without me before I was born; it will do as well when I am gone; and as to you, my poor Honor, we have been very little together of late.'

'I had you to lean on.'

‘Lean on something stronger,’ he said; and as she could not govern her bitter weeping, he went on—‘Ah! I am the selfish one now, to be glad of what must make it the worse for you; but if one thing were wanting to make me happy, it was to know that at last you cared for me.’

‘I should be a wretch not to do so. So many years of patience and forbearance!—Nobody could be like you.’

‘I don’t see that,’ said Humfrey, simply. ‘While you continued the same, I could not well turn my mind to any one else, and I always knew I was much too loutish for you.’

‘Now, Humfrey!—’

‘Yes, there is no use in dwelling on this,’ he said, quietly. ‘The reason I asked you to be kind enough to come here, is that I do not think it well to be far from home under the circumstances.

There, don’t look frightened—they say it may very possibly not come for several months or a year.

I hope to have time to put things a little in order for you, and that is one reason I wished to see you; I thought I could make the beginning easier to you.’

But Honora was far too much shaken for such a turn to the conversation; she would not mortify him, but she could neither listen nor understand. He, who was so full of stalwart force, a doomed man, yet calm and happy under his sentence; he, only discovered to be so fondly loved in time to give poignancy to the parting, and yet rejoicing himself in the poor, tardy affection that had answered his manly constancy too late! His very calmness and stillness cut her to the heart, and after some ineffectual attempts to recover herself, she was forced to take refuge in her own room. Weeping, praying, walking restlessly about, she remained there till luncheon time, when Humfrey himself came up to knock at her door.

‘Honor dear!’ he said, ‘come down—try to throw it off—Saville does not wish his wife to be made aware of it while she is here, lest she should be nervous. You must not betray me—and indeed there is no reason for being overcome. Nothing vexes me but seeing you so. Let us enjoy your visit, pray.’

To be commanded to bear up by a strong, manly character so much loved and trusted was perhaps the chief support she could receive; she felt that she must act composure, and coming down in obedience to her cousin, she found the power of doing so. Nay, as she saw him so completely the bright, hospitable host, talking to Mrs. Saville about her poultry, and carrying on quiet jokes with Mr. Saville, she found herself drawn away from the morning’s conversation, or remembering it like a dream that had passed away.

Then all went out together, and he was apparently as much interested in his young wheat as ever, and even more anxious to make her look at and appreciate crops and cattle, speaking about them in his hearty, simple way, as if his pleasure in them was not flagging, perhaps because it had never been excessive. He had always sat loose to them, and thus they could please and occupy him even when the touch of the iron hand had made itself felt.

And again she saw him engrossed in arranging some petty matter of business for one of the poor people; and when they had wandered down to the gate, pelting the turn-out of the boys’ school with a pocket full of apples that he said he had taken up while in conference with the housekeeper, laughing and speaking merrily as the varlets touched their caps to him, and always turning to her for sympathy in his pleasures of success or of good nature, as though her visit were thorough enjoyment to him. And so it almost was to her. The influence of the dear old scenes was something, and his cheeriness was a great deal more; the peaceful present was not harassed or disturbed, and the foreboding, on which she might not dwell, made it the more precious. That slow wandering about the farm and village, and the desultory remarks, the old pleasant reminiscences, the inquiries and replies about the villagers and neighbours had a quiet charm about them, as free and happy as when, youth and child, they had frisked through the same paths; nay, the old scenes so brought back the old habits that she found herself discoursing to him in her former eager fashion upon the last historical character who had bitten her fancy.

‘My old way,’ she said, catching herself up; ‘dinning all this into your ears as usual, when you don’t care.’

‘Don’t I?’ said Humfrey, with his sincere face turned on her in all its sweetness. ‘Perhaps I never showed you how much, Honor; and I beg your pardon, but I would not have been without it!’

The Savilles came up, while Honor’s heart was brimful at this compliment, and then it was all commonplace again, except for that sunset light, that rich radiance of the declining day, that seemed unconsciously to pervade all Humfrey’s cheerfulness, and to give his mirth and playfulness a solid happiness.

Some mutual friends of long standing came to dinner, and the evening was not unlike the last, quite as free from gloom, and Mr. Charlecote as bright as ever, evidently taking his full share in county business, and giving his mind to it. Only Honor noted that he quietly avoided an invitation to a very gay party which was proposed; and his great ally, Sir John Raymond, seemed rather vexed with him for not taking part in some new and expensive experiment in farming, and asked incredulously whether it were true that he wished to let a farm that he had kept for several years in his own hands.

Humfrey agreed that it was so, and said something farther of wishing to come to terms quickly. She guessed that this was for her sake, when she thought all this over in her bedroom.

Such was the effect of his calmness that it had not been a day of agitation. There was more peace than tumult in her mind as she lay down to rest, sad, but not analyzing her sadness, and lulled by the present into putting aside the future. So she slept quietly, and awoke with a weight at her heart, but softened and sustained by reverent awe and obedience towards her cousin.

When they met, he scanned her looks with a bright, tender glance, and smiled commendation when he detected no air of sleeplessness. He talked and moved as though his secret were one of untold bliss, and this was not far from the truth; for when, after breakfast, he asked her for another interview in the study, they were no sooner alone than he rubbed his hands together with satisfaction, saying—‘So, Honor, you could have had me after all!’ looking at her with a broad, undisguised, exulting smile.

‘Oh! Humfrey!’

‘Don’t say it if you don’t like it; but you can’t guess the pleasure it gives me. I could hardly tell at first what was making me so happy when I awoke this morning.’

‘I can’t see how it should,’ said Honor, her eyes swimming with tears, ‘never to have met with any gratitude for—I have used you too ill—never valued, scarcely even believed in what you lavished on poor silly me—and now, when all is too late, you are glad—’

‘Glad! of course I am,’ returned Humfrey; ‘I never wished to obtrude my feelings on you after I knew how it stood with you. It would have been a shame. Your choice went far above me. For the rest, if to find you disposed towards me at the last makes me so happy,’ and he looked at her again with beaming affection, ‘how could I have borne to leave you if all had been as I wished? No, no, it is best as it is. You lose nothing in position, and you are free to begin the world again, not knocked down or crushed.’

‘Don’t talk so, Humfrey! It is breaking my heart to think that I might have been making you happy all this time.’

‘Heaven did not will it so,’ said Humfrey, reverently, ‘and it might not have proved what we fancy. You might not have found such a clodhopper all you wanted, and my stupidity might have vexed you, though now you fancy otherwise. And I have had a very happy life—indeed I have, Honor; I never knew the time when I could not say with all my heart, “The lot is fallen unto me in a fair ground, yea, I have a goodly heritage.” Everybody and everything, you and all the rest, have been very kind and friendly, and I have never wanted for happiness. It has been all right. You could fulfil your duty as a daughter undividedly, and now I trust those children will be your object and comfort—only, Honor, not your idols. Perhaps it was jealousy, but I have sometimes fancied that your tendency with their father—’

‘Oh! how often I must have given you pain.’

‘I did not mean *that*, but, as I say, perhaps I was no fair judge. One thing is well, the relations will be much less likely to take them from you when you are living here.’

She held up her hands in deprecation.

‘Honor dear,’ he said pleadingly, yet with authority, ‘pray let me talk to you. There are things which I wish very much to say; indeed, without which I could hardly have asked for this indulgence. It is for your own sake, and that of the place and people.’

‘Poor place, poor people.’

He sighed, but then turned his smiling countenance towards her again. ‘No one else can care for it or them as you do, Honor. Our “goodly heritage”—it was so when I had it from my father, and I don’t think it has got worse under my charge, and I want you to do your duty by it, Honor, and hand it on the same, whoever may come after.’

‘For your sake, Humfrey—even if I did not love it. But—’

‘Yes, it is a duty,’ proceeded Humfrey, gravely. ‘It may seem but a bit of earth after all, but the owner of a property has a duty to let it do its share in producing food, or maybe in not lessening the number of pleasant things here below. I mean it is as much my office to keep my trees and woods fair to look at, as it is not to let my land lie waste.’

She had recovered a good deal while he was moralizing, and became interested. ‘I did not suspect you of the poetical view, Humfrey,’ she said.

‘It is plain sense, I think,’ he said, ‘that to grub up a fine tree, or a pretty bit of copse without fair reason, only out of eagerness for gain, is a bit of selfishness. But mind, Honor, you must not go and be romantic. You *must* have the timber marked when the trees are injuring each other.’

‘Ah! I’ve often done it with you.’

‘I wish you would come out with me to-day. I’m going to the out-wood, I could show you.’

She agreed readily, almost forgetting the wherefore.

‘And above all, Honor, you must not be romantic about wages! It is not right by other proprietors, nor by the people themselves. No one is ever the better for a fancy price for his labour.’

She could almost have smiled; he was at once so well pleased that she and his ‘goodly heritage’ should belong to each other, so confident in her love and good intentions towards it, and so doubtful of her discretion and management. She promised with all her heart to do her utmost to fulfil his wishes.

‘After all,’ he said, thoughtfully, ‘the best thing for the place—ay, and for you and every one, would be for you to marry; but there’s little chance of that, I suppose, and it is of no use to distress you by mentioning it. I’ve been trying to put out of my hands things that I don’t think you will be able to manage, but I should like you to keep up the home farm, and you may pretty well trust to Brooks. I dare say he will take his own way, but if you keep a reasonable check on him, he will do very well by you. He is as honest as the day, and very intelligent. I don’t know that any one could do better for you.’

‘Oh, yes; I will mind all he tells me.’

‘Don’t show that you mind him. That is the way to spoil him. Poor fellow, he has been a good servant to me, and so have they all. It is a thing to be very thankful for to have had such a set of good servants.’

Honora thought, but did not say, that they could not help being good with such a master.

He went on to tell her that he had made Mr. Saville his executor. Mr. Saville had been for many years before leaving Oxford bursar of his college, and was a thorough man of business whom Humfrey had fixed upon as the person best qualified to be an adviser and assistant to Honora, and he only wished to know whether she wished for any other selection, but this was nearly overpowering her again, for since her father’s death she had leant on no one but Humfrey himself.

One thing more he had to say. ‘You know, Honor, this place will be entirely your own. You and I seem to be the last of the Charlecotes, and even if we were not, there is no entail. You may found orphan asylums with it, or leave it to poor Sandbrook’s children, just as you please.’

‘Oh, I could not do that,’ cried Honor, with a sudden revulsion. Love them as she might, Owen Sandbrook’s children must not step into Humfrey Charlecote’s place. ‘And, besides,’ she added, ‘I want my little Owen to be a clergyman; I think he can be what his father missed.’

‘Well, you can do exactly as you think fit. Only what I wanted to tell you is, that there may be another branch, elder than our own. Not that this need make the least difference, for the Holt is legally ours. It seems that our great grandfather had an elder son—a wild sort of fellow—the old people used to tell stories of him. He went on, in short, till he was disinherited, and went off to America. What became of him afterwards I never could make out; but I have sometimes questioned how I should receive any of his heirs if they should turn up some day. Mind you, you need not have the slightest scruple in holding your own. It was made over to my grandfather by will, as I have made it sure for you; but I do think that when you come to think how to dispose of it, the possibility of the existence of these Charlecotes might be taken into consideration.’

‘Yankee Charlecotes!’ she said.

‘Never mind; most likely nothing of the kind will ever come in your way, and they have not the slightest claim on you. I only threw it out, because I thought it right just to speak of it.’

After this commencement, Humfrey, on this and the ensuing days, made it his business to make his cousin acquainted with the details of the management of the estate. He took such pleasure in doing so, and was so anxious she should comprehend, that she was forced to give her whole attention; and, putting all else aside, was tranquilly happy in thus gratifying him. Those orderly ranges of conscientious accounts were no small testimony to the steady, earnest manner in which Humfrey had set himself to his duty from his early youth, and to a degree they were his honest pride too—he liked to show how good years had made up for bad years, and there was a tenderness in the way he patted their red leather backs to make them even on their shelves, as if they had been good friends to him.

No, they must not run into confusion.

The farms and the cottages—the friendly terms of his intercourse, and his large-handed but well-judging almsgiving—all revealed to her more of his solid worth; and the simplicity that regarded all as the merest duty touched her more than all. Many a time did she think of the royal Norwegian brothers, one of whom went to tie a knot in the willows on the banks of the Jordan, while the other remained at home to be the blessing of his people, and from her broken idol wanderer she turned to worship her steadfast worker at home, as far as his humility and homeliness made it possible, and valued each hour with him as if each moment were of diamond price. And he was so calmly happy, that there was no grieving in his presence. It had been a serene life of simple fulfilment of duty, going ever higher, and branching wider, as a good man’s standard gradually rises the longer he lives; the one great disappointment had been borne without sourness or repining, and the affections, deprived of the home channel, had spread in a beneficent flood, and blessed all around. So, though, like every sinful son of man, sensible of many an error, many an infirmity, still the open loving spirit was childlike enough for that blessed sense; for that feeling which St. John expresses as ‘if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God;’ confidence in the infinite Merits that atone for the errors of weakness, and occasional wanderings of will; confidence that made the hope a sure and steadfast one, and these sentenced weeks a land of Beulah, where Honora’s tardy response to his constant love could be greeted and valued as the precious fulfilment of long-cherished wishes, not dashed aside as giving bitterness to his departure.

The parting was broken by a promise that Honora should again meet the Savilles at the Holt in the autumn. She assured herself that there was no danger before that time, and Humfrey spoke cheerfully of looking forward to it, and seemed to have so much to do, and to be so well equal to doing it, that he would not let them be concerned at leaving him alone.

To worship Humfrey was an easier thing at a distance than when beside him. Honora came back to Sandbeach thoroughly restless and wretched, reproaching herself with having wasted such constant, priceless affection, haunted by the constant dread of each morning’s post, and longing fervently to be

on the spot. She had self-command enough not to visit her dejection on the children, but they missed both her spirits and her vigilance, and were more left to their nurse; and her chief solace was in long solitary walks, or in evening talks with Miss Wells. Kind Miss Wells perhaps guessed how matters stood between the two last Charlecotes, but she hinted not her suspicions, and was the unwearied recipient of all Honora's histories, of his symptoms, of his cheerfulness, and his solicitude for her.

Those talks did her good, they set the real Humfrey before her, and braced her to strive against weakness and despondence.

And then the thought grew on her, why, since they were so thoroughly each other's, why should they not marry, and be together to the last? Why should he be left to his solitude for this final year? why should their meetings be so prudentially chaperoned? Suppose the disease should be lingering, how hard it was that she should be absent, and he left to servants! She could well imagine why he had not proposed it; he was too unselfish to think of exposing her to the shock, or making her a widow, but how came she never to have thought of it? She stood beyond all ordinary rules—she had nothing worldly to gain nor to lose by being his wife for these few remaining months—it surely was her part, after the way she had treated him, to meet him more than half way—she alone could make the proposal—she would—she must. And oh! if the doctors should be mistaken! So spoke the midnight dream—oh! how many times. But what said cool morning? Propriety had risen up, grave decorum objecting to what would shock Humfrey, ay, and was making Honor's cheeks tingle.

Yes, and there came the question whether he would not be more distressed than gratified—he who wished to detach himself from all earthly ties—whether he might not be pained and displeased at her thus clinging to him—nay, were he even gratified, might not emotion and agitation be fatal?

Many, many times was all this tossed over in Honor's mind. Often the desperate resolution was definitely taken, and she had seen herself quietly meeting him at dear old Hiltonbury Church, with his grave sweet eyes resting satisfied upon her as his darling. As often had the fear of offending him, and the instinct of woman's dignity turned her away when her heart was beating high. That autumn visit—then she would decide. One look as if he wished to retain her, the least air of feebleness or depression, and she would be determined, even if she had to waive all feminine reserves, and set the matter in hand herself. She thought Mr. Saville would highly approve and assist; and having settled into this period for her project, she set herself in some degree at rest, and moved and spoke with so much more of her natural ease, that Miss Wells was consoled about her, and knew not how entirely heart and soul were at Hiltonbury, with such devotion as had never even gone to the backwoods.

To meet the Savilles at Hiltonbury in the autumn! Yes—Honor met Mr. Saville, but not as she had intended. By that time the stroke had fallen, just as she had become habituated to the expectation, just as her promised visit had assumed a degree of proximity, and her heart was beating at the prospect of the results.

Humfrey had been scarcely ailing all the summer, he had gone about his occupations with his usual cheerfulness, and had taken part in all the village festivals as genially as ever. Only close observers could have noticed a slackness towards new undertakings, a gradual putting off of old ones, a training of those, dependent on his counsel, to go alone, a preference for being alone in the evening, a greater habit of stillness and contemplation.

September had come, and he had merrily sent off two happy boy-sportsmen with the keeper, seeing them over the first field himself, and leaning against the gate, as he sent them away in convulsions of laughing at his droll auguries. The second was a Sunday, a lovely day of clear deep blue sky, and rich sunshine laughing upon the full wealth of harvest fields—part fallen before the hand of the reaper, part waving in their ripe glowing beauty, to which he loved to liken Honora's hair—part in noble redundant shocks of corn in full season. Brooks used afterwards to tell how he overtook the squire slowly strolling to church on that beauteous autumnal morning, and how he paused to remark on the glory of the harvest, and to add, 'Keep the big barn clear, Brooks—let us have all the women and children in for the supper this time—and I say—send the spotted heifer down to-morrow to old

Boycotts, instead of his cow that died. With such a crop as this, one can stand something. And,' said Brooks, 'Thank God for it! was as plain written on his face as ever I saw!'

It was the first Sunday in the month, and there was full service. Hiltonbury Church had one of those old-fashioned altar-rails which form three sides of a square, and where it was the custom that at the words 'Draw near with faith,' the earliest communicants should advance to the rail and remain till their place was wanted by others, and that the last should not return to their seats till the service was concluded. Mr. Charlecote had for many years been always the first parishioner to walk slowly up the matted aisle, and kneel beside the wall, under the cumbrous old tables of Commandments. There, on this day, he knelt as usual, and harvest labours tending to thin the number of communicants, the same who came up first remained to the end, joined their voices in the Eucharistic Lord's Prayer and Angelic Hymn, and bowed their heads at the blessing of the peace that passeth all understanding.

It was not till the rest were moving away, that the vicar and his clerk remarked that the squire had not risen. Another look, and it was plain that he had sunk somewhat forward on his folded arms, and was only supported by the rail and the wall. The vicar hastily summoned the village doctor, who had not yet left the church. They lifted him, and laid him along on the cushioned step where he had been kneeling, but motion and breath were gone, the strong arms were helpless, and the colour had left the open face. Taken at once from the heavenly Feast on earth to the glory above, could this be called sudden death?

There he lay on the altar step, with hands crossed on his breast, and perfectly blessed repose on his manly countenance, sweetened and ennobled in its stillness, and in every lineament bearing the impress of that Holy Spirit of love who had made it a meet temple.

What an unpremeditated lying in state was that! as by ones and twos, beneath the clergyman's eye, the villagers stole in with slowly, heavily falling tread to gaze in silent awe on their best friend, some sobbing and weeping beyond control, others with grave, almost stolid tranquillity, or the murmured 'He *was* a gentleman,' which, in a poor man's mouth, means 'he was a just man and patient, the friend of the weak and poor.' His farmers and his own labourers put their shoulders to bear him once more to his own house, through his half-gathered crops—

The hand of the reaper
Takes the ears that are hoary,
But the voice of the weeper
Wails manhood in glory.

No, bewail him not. It was glory, indeed, but the glory of early autumn, the garnering of the shock of corn in full season. It was well done of the vicar that a few long, full-grained ears of wheat were all that was laid upon his breast in his coffin.

There Honora saw them. The vicar, Mr. Henderson, had written to her at once, as Humfrey had long ago charged him to do, enclosing a letter that he had left with him for the purpose, a tender, soothing farewell, and an avowal such as he could never have spoken of the blessing that his attachment to her had been, in drawing his mind from the narrowness to which he might have been liable, and in elevating the tone of his views and opinions.

She knew what he meant—it was what he had caught from her youthful enthusiasm, second-hand from Owen Sandbrook. Oh! what vivid, vigorous truth not to have been weakened in the transit through two such natures, but to have done its work in the strong, practical mind able and candid enough to adopt it even thus filtered!

There were a few words of affectionate commendation of his people and his land into her keeping, and a parting blessing, and, lastly, written as a postscript—with a blot as if it had been written with hesitation—'Little children, keep yourselves from idols!'

It was not bitter weeping. It was rather the sense of utter vacancy and hopelessness, with but one fixed purpose—that she would see his face again, and be the nearest to him when he was laid in the grave. She hastily wrote to the housekeeper and to the clergyman that she was coming, and Miss Wells's kind opposition only gave her just wilfulness and determination enough to keep her spirit from sinking.

So she travelled alone, and came to Hiltonbury in the sunset, as the 'last long wains' were slowly bearing their loads of wheat into the farmyard, the waggoners walking dejectedly beside them. Mr. Saville had come before her, and was at the door to receive her. She could not very well bear the presence of any one, nor the talk of cold-blooded arrangements. It seemed to keep away the dreamy living with Humfrey, and was far more dreary than the feeling of desolateness, and when they treated her as mistress of the house that was too intolerable. And yet it was worth something, too, to be the one to authorize that harvest supper in the big barn, in the confidence that it would be anything but revelry. Every one felt that the day was indeed a Harvest Home.

The funeral, according to his expressed wishes, was like those of the farmers of the parish; the coffin borne by his own labourers in their white round frocks; and the labourers were the expected guests for whom provision was made; but far and wide from all the country round, though harvest was at the height, came farmers and squires, poor men and rich, from the peer and county member down to the poor travelling hawker—all had met the sunny sympathy of that smile, all had been aided and befriended, all felt as if a prop, a castle of strength were gone.

Charlecotes innumerable rested in the chancel, and the last heir of the line was laid beneath the same flag where he had been placed on that last Sunday, the spot where Honor might kneel for many more, meeting him in spirit at the feast, and looking to the time when the cry should be, 'Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is come.'

But ere she could look in thorough hope for that time, another page of Honor's life must be turned, and an alloy, as yet unknown to herself, must be purged from her heart. The last gleam of her youthful sunshine had faded with Humfrey; but youth is but a fraction of human existence, and there were further phases to be gone through and lessons to be learnt; although she was feeling as if all were over with her in this world, and neither hope, love, nor protection were left her, nor any interest save cherishing Humfrey Charlecote's memory, as she sat designing the brass tablet which was to record his name and age in old English illuminated letters, surrounded by a border of ears of corn and grapes.

CHAPTER IV

*The glittering grass, with dewstars bright,
Is all astir with twinkling light;
What pity that such fair array
In one brief hour should melt away.*

—Rev. T. Whytehead

‘This is a stroke of good luck!’ said Mr. Charteris. ‘We must not, on any account, remove the Sandbrook children from Miss Charlecote; she has no relations, and will certainly make the boy her heir.’

‘She will marry!’ said his wife. ‘Some fashionable preacher will swallow her red hair. She is just at the age for it!’

‘Less likely when she has the children to occupy her.’

‘Well, you’ll have them thrown on your hands yet!’

‘The chance is worth trying for, though! I would not interfere with her on any account.’

‘Oh, no, nor I! but I pity the children.’

* * * * *

‘There, Master Owen, be a good boy, and don’t worry. Don’t you see, I’m putting up your things to go home.’

‘Home!’ the light glittered in Lucilla’s eyes. ‘Is it Wrapworth, nurse?’

‘Dear me, miss, not Wrapworth. That’s given away, you know; but it’s to Hiltonbury you are going—such a grand place, which if Master Owen is only a dear good boy, will all belong to him one of these days.’

‘Will there be a pony to ride on?’ asked Owen.

‘Oh, yes—if you’ll only let those stockings alone—there’ll be ponies, and carriages, and horses, and everything a gentleman can have, and all for my own dear little Master Owen!’

‘I don’t want to go to Hiltonbury,’ said Lucilla; ‘I want to go home to the river and the boat, and see Mr. Prendergast and the black cow.’

‘I’ll give you a black cow, Cilly,’ said Owen, strutting about. ‘Is Hiltonbury bigger than the castle?’

‘Oh, ever so big, Master Owen; such acres of wood, Mr. Jones says, and all your dear cousin’s, and sure to be your own in time. What a great gentleman you will be, to be sure, dining thirty gentlefolks twice a week, as they say poor Mr. Charlecote did, and driving four fine horses to your carriage like a gentleman. And then you won’t forget poor old nurse-purse.’

‘Oh, no, nurse; I’ll give you a ride in my carriage!’

Honora in her listless state had let Mr. Saville think for her, and passively obeyed him when he sent her back to Sandbeach to wind up her affairs there, while he finished off the valuations and other painful business at the Holt, in which she could be of little use, since all she desired was to keep everything as it was. She was anxious to return as soon as possible, so as to take up the reins before there had been time for the relaxation to be felt, the only chance she felt of her being able to fulfil his charge. The removal, the bustle, the talking things over with Miss Wells, and the sight of the children did much to restore her, and her old friend rejoiced to see that necessary occupation was tending to make her time pass more cheerfully than she perhaps knew.

As to the dear old City dwelling, it might have fetched an immense price, but only to become a warehouse, a measure that would have seemed to Honora little short of sacrilege. To let it, in such a locality, was impossible, so it must remain unavailable capital, and Honora decided on leaving her old housekeeper therein, with a respectable married niece, who would inhabit the lower regions, and keep the other rooms in order, for an occasional stay in London. She would have been sorry to cut herself off from a month of London in the spring, and the house might farther be useful to friends who did not object to the situation; or could be lent now and then to a curate; and she could well afford to keep it up, so she thought herself justified in following her inclination, and went up for three mournful days of settling matters there, and packing books and ornaments till the rooms looked so dismantled that she could not think how to face them again.

It was the beginning of October when she met Miss Wells, children, and luggage at the station, and fairly was on her way to her home. She tried to call it so, as a duty to Humfrey, but it gave her a pang every time, and in effect she felt far less at home than when he and Sarah had stood in the doorway to greet the arrivals. She had purposely fixed an hour when it would be dark, so that she might receive no painful welcome; she wished no one to greet her, she had rather they were mourning for their master. She had more than once shocked Miss Wells by declaring heiresses to be a mistake; and yet, as she always owned, she could not have borne for any one else to have had the Holt.

Fortunately for her, the children were sleepy, and were rather in a mazy state when lifted out and set on their legs in the wainscoted hall, and she sent them at once with nurse to the cheerful room that Humfrey's little visitors had saved from becoming disused. Miss Wells's fond vigilance was a little oppressive, but she gently freed herself from it, and opened the study door. She had begged that as little change as possible might be made; and there stood, as she had last seen them, the large leathern chair, the little table, the big Bible, and in it the little faded marker she had herself constructed for his twenty-first birthday, when her powers of making presents had not equalled her will. Yet what costly gift could have fulfilled its mission like that one? She opened the heavy book at the place. It was at the first lesson for the last day of his life, the end of the prophet Hosea, and the first words her eyes fell upon were the glorious prophecy—'I will redeem them from death, I will ransom them from the power of the grave.' Her heart beat high, and she stood half musing, half reading: 'They that dwell under His shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine.' How gentle and refreshing the cadence! A longing rose up in her to apply those latter words more closely, by placing them on his tablet; she did not think they would shock his humility, a consideration which had withheld her from choosing other passages of which she always thought in connection with him.

Another verse, and she read: 'Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols?'

It brought back the postscript. Kind Humfrey must have seen strong cause before he gave any reproof, least of all to her, and she could take his word that the fault had been there. She felt certain of it when she thought of her early devotion to Owen Sandbrook, and the utter blank caused by his defection. Nay, she believed she had begun to idolize Humfrey himself, but now, at her age, chastened, desponding, with nothing before her save the lonely life of an heiress old maid, counting no tie of blood with any being, what had she to engross her affections from the true Object? Alas! Honora's heart was not feeling that Object sufficient! Conscientious, earnest, truly loving goodness, and all connected with it; striving as a faithful, dutiful woman to walk rightly, still the personal love and trust were not yet come. Spent as they had been upon props of earth, when these were taken away the tendrils hung down drearily, unemployed, not fastening on the true support.

Not that she did not kneel beside that little table, as in a shrine, and entreat earnestly for strength and judgment to do her duty faithfully in her new station, so that Humfrey's charge might be fulfilled, and his people might not suffer; and this done, and her homage paid to his empty throne, she was better able to satisfy her motherly friend by her deportment for the remainder of the evening, and to reply to the welcome of the weeping Mrs. Stubbs. By one of Humfrey's wise acts of foresight, his faithful servant, Reeves, had been provided for as the master of the Union, whither it was certain he

would carry the same milk of human kindness as had been so plentiful at Hiltonbury, and the Holt was thus left free for Honora's Mr. Jones, without fear of clashing, though he was divided between pride in his young lady's ownership of a 'landed estate,' and his own dislike to a country residence.

Honora did not sleep soundly. The place was too new, and yet too familiar, and the rattling of the windows, the roaring of the wind in the chimney, and the creaking of the vane, without absolutely wakening her, kept her hearing alive continually, weaving the noises into some harassing dream that Humfrey's voice was calling to her, and hindrances always keeping her from him; and then of Lucilla and Owen in some imminent peril, whence she shrieked to him to save them, and then remembered he would stretch out his hand no more.

Sounder sleep came at last, towards morning, and far later than her usual hour she was wakened by a drumming upon her door, and the boy and girl dashed in, radiant with excitement at the novelty of the place. 'Sweet Honey! Sweet Honey dear, do get up and see. There's a rocking-horse at the end of the passage.' 'And there's a real pony out in the field.' 'There are cows.' 'There's a goat and a little kid, and I want to play with it, and I may, for it is all mine and yours.'

'All yours! Owen, boy,' repeated Honora, sitting up in surprise.

'Nurse said it was all to be Owen's,' said Lucilla.

'And she said I should be as grand a gentleman as poor Mr. Charlecote or Uncle Charteris,' proceeded Owen, 'and that I should go out hunting in a red coat, on a beautiful horse; but I want to have the kid now, please, Sweet Honey.'

'Nurse does not know anything about it,' said Honora, much annoyed that such an idea should have been suggested in such a manner. 'I thought my little Owen wished for better things—I thought he was to be like his papa, and try to be a good shepherd, praising God and helping people to do right.'

'But can't I wear a red coat too?' said Owen, wistfully.

'No, my dear; clergymen don't go out hunting; or how could they teach the poor little children?'

'Then I won't be a clergyman.'

This was an inconvenient and most undesirable turn; but Honor's first object must be to put the right of heirship out of the little head, and she at once began—'Nurse must have made a mistake, my dear; this place is your home, and will be always so, I hope, while it is mine, but it must not be your own, and you must not think it will. My little boy must work for himself and other people, and that's better than having houses and lands given to him.'

Those words touched the pride in Lucilla's composition, and she exclaimed—'I'll work too;' but the self-consequence of proprietorship had affected her brother more strongly, and he repeated, meditatively, 'Jones said, not mine while she was alive. Jones was cross.'

There might not be much in the words, child as he was, but there was something in his manner of eyeing her which gave her acute unbearable pain—a look as if she stood in his way and crossed his importance. It was but a baby fit of temper, but she was in no frame to regard it calmly, and with an alteration of countenance that went to his heart, she exclaimed—'Can that be my little Owen, talking as if he wanted his Cousin Honor dead and out of the way? We had better never have come here if you are to leave off loving me.'

Quick to be infected by emotion, the child's arms were at once round her neck, and he was sobbing out that he loved his Sweet Honey better than anything; nurse was naughty; Jones was naughty; he wouldn't hunt, he wouldn't wear a red coat, he would teach little children just like lambs, he would be like dear papa; anything the poor little fellow could think of he poured out with kisses and entreaties to know if he were naughty still; while his sister, after her usual fashion on such occasions, began to race up and down the room with paroxysms, sometimes of stamping, sometimes of something like laughter.

Some minutes passed before Honora could compose herself, or soothe the boy, by her assurances that he was not to blame, only those who put things in his head that he could not understand; and it was not till after much tender fondling that she had calmed him enough for his morning

devotions. No sooner were these over than he looked up and said, while the tears still glazed his cheeks, 'Sweet Honey, I'll tell nurse and Mr. Jones that I'm on pilgrimage to the Eastern land, and I'll not turn into by-ways after red coats and little kids to vex you.'

Whether Owen quite separated fact from allegory might have been doubtful to a more prosaic mind than Honora's, but he had brought this dreamy strain with him from his father, and she thought it one of his great charms. She had been obliged to leave him to himself much more than usual of late, and she fervently resolved to devote herself with double energy to watching over him, and eradicating any weeds that might have been sown during her temporary inattention. He clung so fast to her hand, and was so much delighted to have her with him again, so often repeating that she must not go away again, that the genuineness of his affection could not be doubted, and probably he would only retain an impression of having been led to say something very shocking, and the alarm to his sensitive conscience would hinder him from ever even trying to remember what it was.

She spoke, however, to nurse, telling her that the subject must never be mentioned to the children, since it was by no means desirable for them, and besides, she had no intention of the kind.

She wished it to be distinctly understood that Master Owen was not to be looked upon as her heir.

'Very true, ma'am, it is too soon to be talking of such things yet, and I must say, I was as sorry as possible to find that the child had had it named to him. People will talk, you see, Miss Charlecote, though I am sure so young a lady as you are . . .'

'That has nothing to do with it,' said Honora; 'I consider nothing so bad for a child as to be brought up to expectations to which he has no right, when he is sure to have to provide for himself. I beg that if you hear the subject entered on again, in the children's presence, you will put a stop to it.'

'Certainly, ma'am; their poor dear papa never would have wished them to be occupied with earthly things of that sort. As I often said, there never was such an unworldly gentleman; he never would have known if there were a sixpence in the house, nor a joint in the larder, if there had not been cook and me to care for him. I often said to cook—"Well for him that he has honest people about him."'

Honora likewise spoke to Jones, her private retainer. He smiled scorn of the accusation, and answered her as the child he had known in frocks. 'Yes, ma'am, I did tell the young gentleman to hold his tongue, for it never would be his in your lifetime, nor after, in my judgment.'

'Why, certainly, it does seem early days to speak of such a matter,' said Honora, sadly.

'It is unaccountable what people will not put in children's heads,' said Jones, sagely; 'not but what he is a nice quiet young gentleman, and gives very little trouble, but they might let *that* alone.

Miss Honora, when will it be convenient to you to take my account of the plate?'

She felt pretty well convinced that Jones had only resented the whole on her account, and that it was not he who had put the notion into the boy's head. As to nurse, she was far from equally clear. Doubts of nurse's sincerity had long been growing upon her, and she was in the uncomfortable position of being able to bear neither to think of the children's intercourse with any one tainted with falsehood, nor to dismiss a person implicitly trusted by their father. She could only decide that the first detected act of untruth should be the turning-point.

Meantime, painful as was many an association, Honor did not find her position so dreary or so oppressive as she had anticipated. She had a great deal to do, and the tracks had been duly made out for her by her cousin. Mr. Saville, or Humfrey's old friend, Sir John Raymond, were always ready to help her in great matters, and Brooks was an excellent dictatorial deputy in small ones. Her real love for country life, for live animals, and, above all, the power of doing good, all found scope. Humfrey's charge gave her a sense of a fulfilled duty; and mournful and broken-spirited as she believed herself, if Humfrey could have looked at her as she scrupulously made entries in his book, rode out with the children to try to look knowing at the crops, or sat by the fire in the evening with his dogs at her feet, telling stories to the children, he would not have feared too much for his Honor. Living or dead, the love of Humfrey could hardly help being a spring of peace and happiness; and the consciousness

of it had been too brief, and the tie never close enough, to lead to a state of crushed spirits. The many little tender observances that she paid to him were a source of mournful sweetness rather than of heart-rending.

It was a quietly but fully occupied life, with a certain severity towards her own comforts, and liberality towards those of other people, which had always been a part of her character, ever since Owen Sandbrook had read sermons with her on self-denial. If Miss Wells had a fire in her bedroom forced upon her, Miss Charlecote had none, and hurried down in the bleak winter morning in shawl and gloves to Humfrey's great Bible, and then to his account books and her business letters. She was fresh with cold when she met the children for their early reading. And then—but it was not soon that she learnt to bear that, though she had gone through the like before, she had to read the household devotions, where every petition seemed to be lacking the manly tone to give it fulness and force.

Breakfast followed, the silver kettle making it home-like, the children chattering, Miss Wells smiling, letters coming in to perplex or to clear up perplexities, amuse or cheer. The children were then turned out for an hour's hoop-driving on the gravel drive, horse-chestnut picking, or whatever might not be mischief, while Honora was conferring with Jones or with Brooks, and receiving her orders for the day. Next followed letter-writing, then lessons in general, a real enjoyment, unless Lucilla happened to have picked up a fit of perverseness—some reading to them, or rationalizing of play—the early dinner—the subsequent expedition with them, either walking or riding—for Brooks had soon found ponies for them, and they were gallant little riders. Honor would not give up the old pony, long since trained for her by Humfrey, though, maybe, that was her most undutiful proceeding towards him, as he would certainly have told her that the creature was shaky on the legs. So at last it tumbled down with her, but without any damage, save a hole in her skirt, and a dreadful crying fit of little Owen, who was frightened out of his wits. She owned that it must be degraded to light cart work, and mounted an animal which Hiltonbury agreed to be more worthy of her. Coming in, the children played; she either did her business or found leisure for reading; then came tea-time, then the reading of a story book to the children, and when they were disposed of, of something mildly moral and instructive to suit Miss Wells's taste.

The neighbourhood all mourned Mr. Charlecote as a personal loss, and could hardly help regarding any successor as their enemy. Miss Charlecote had been just enough known in her girlish days not to make her popular in a commonplace neighbourhood; the ladies had criticised her hair and her genius, and the gentlemen had been puzzled by her searching questions into their county antiquities, and obliged to own themselves unaware of a Roman milestone propping their bailiff's pigstye, or of the spur of a champion of one of the Roses being hung over their family pew. But when Mr. Henderson and the Raymonds reported pleasantly of her, and when once or twice she had been seen cantering down the lanes, or shopping in Elverslope, and had exchanged a bow with a familiar face, the gentlemen took to declaring that the heiress was an uncommonly fine woman after all, and the ladies became possessed with the perception that it was high time to call upon Miss Charlecote—what could she be doing with those two children?

So there were calls, which Honor duly returned, and then came invitations, but to Miss Wells's great annoyance, Honor decided against these. It was not self-denial, but she thought it suitable.

She did not love the round of county gaieties, and in her position she did not think them a duty.

Retirement seemed to befit the widowhood, which she felt so entirely that when Miss Wells once drove her into disclaiming all possibility of marrying, she called it 'marrying again.' When Miss Wells urged the inexpediency of absolute seclusion, she said she would continue to make morning calls, and she hoped in time to have friends of her own to stay with her; she might ask the Raymonds, or some of the quiet, clerical families (the real *élite*, be it observed) to spend a day or drink tea, but the dinner and ball life was too utterly incongruous for an elderly heiress. When it came to the elderly heiress poor Miss Wells was always shut up in utter despair—she who thought her bright-locked darling only grew handsomer each day of her pride of womanhood.

The brass which Honora had chosen for her cousin's memorial was slow in being executed, and summer days had come in before it was sent to Hiltonbury. She walked down, a good deal agitated, to ascertain whether it were being rightly managed, but, to her great annoyance, found that the church having been left open, so many idle people were standing about that she could not bear to mingle with them. Had it been only the Holt vassalage, either their feeling would have been one with her own, or they would have made way for her, but there were some pert nursery maids gaping about with the children from Beauchamp, whence the heads of the family had been absent all the winter and spring, leaving various nurses and governesses in charge. Honora could not encounter their eyes, and went to the vicarage to send Mr. Henderson, and finding him absent, walked over sundry fields in a vain search for Brooks. Rain came on so violently as to wet her considerably, and to her exceeding mortification, she was obliged to relinquish her superintendence, either in person or by deputy.

However, when she awoke early and saw the sun laughing through the shining drops, she decided on going down ere the curious world was astir, to see what had been done. It was not far from six, when she let herself out at the porch, and very like a morning with Humfrey, with the tremulous glistening of every spray, and the steamy fragrance rising wherever the sun touched the grass, that seemed almost to grow visibly. The woods were ringing with the song of birds, circle beyond circle, and there was something in the exuberant merriment of those blackbirds and thrushes that would not let her be sad, though they had been Humfrey's special glory. The thought of such pleasures did not seem out of keeping. The lane was overhung with bushes; the banks, a whole wealth of ferns, climbing plants, tall grasses, and nettles, had not yet felt the sun and were dank and dreary, so she hurried on, and arriving at the clerk's door, knocked and opened. He was gone to his work, and sounds above showed the wife to be engaged on the toilette of the younger branches. She called out that she had come for the keys of the church, and seeing them on the dresser, abstracted them, bidding the good woman give herself no trouble.

She paused under the porch, and ere fitting the heavy key to the lock, felt that strange pressure and emotion of the heart that even if it be sorrow is also an exquisite sensation. If it were mournful that the one last office she could render to Humfrey was over, it was precious to her to be the only one who had a right to pay it, the one whom he had loved best upon earth, round whom she liked to believe that he still might be often hovering—whom he might welcome by and by. Here was the place for communion with him, the spot which had, indeed, been to him none other than the gate of Heaven.

Yet, will it be believed? Not one look did Honora cast at Humfrey Charlecote's monument that morning.

With both hands she turned the reluctant bolts of the lock, and pushed open the nail-studded door. She slowly advanced along the uneven floor of the aisle, and had just reached the chancel arch, when something suddenly stirred, making her start violently. It was still, and after a pause she again advanced, but her heart gave a sudden throb, and a strange chill of awe rushed over her as she beheld a little white face over the altar rail, the chin resting on a pair of folded hands, the dark eyes fixed in a strange, dreamy, spiritual expression of awe.

The shock was but for a moment, the next the blood rallied to her heart, and she told herself that Humfrey would say, that either the state of her spirits had produced an illusion, or else that some child had been left here by accident. She advanced, but as she did so the two hands were stretched out and locked together as in an agony, and the childish, feeble voice cried out, 'Oh! if you're an angel, please don't frighten me; I'll be very good.'

Honora was in a pale, soft, gray dress, that caught the light in a rosy glow from the east window, and her golden hair was hanging in radiant masses beneath her straw bonnet, but she could not appreciate the angelic impression she made on the child, who had been tried so long by such a captivity. 'My poor child,' she said, 'I am no angel; I am only Miss Charlecote. I'm afraid you have been shut up here;' and, coming nearer, she perceived that it was a boy of about seven years old, well dressed, though his garments were disordered. He stood up as she came near, but he was trembling

all over, and as she drew him into her bosom, and put her arms round him, she found him quivering with icy cold.

‘Poor little fellow,’ she said, rocking him, as she sat on the step and folded her shawl round him, ‘have you been here all night? How cold you are; I must take you home, my dear. What is your name?’

‘I’m Robert Mervyn Fulmort,’ said the little boy, clinging to her. ‘We came in to see Mr. Charlecote’s monument put up, and I suppose they forgot me. I waked up, and everybody was gone, and the door was locked. Oh! please,’ he gasped, ‘take me out. I don’t want to cry.’

She thought it best to take him at once into the cheerful sunlight, but it did not yet yield the warmth that he needed; and all her soothing words could not check the nervous tremor, though he held her so tight that it seemed as if he would never let her go.

‘You shall come home with me, my dear little boy; you shall have some breakfast, and then I will take you safe home to Beauchamp.’

‘Oh, if you please!’ said the boy, gratefully.

Exercise was thawing his numbed limbs, and his eyes brightened.

‘Whom were you with?’ she asked. ‘Who could have forgotten you?’

‘I came with Lieschen and nurse and the babies. The others went out with Mademoiselle.’

‘And you went to sleep?’

‘Yes; I liked to see the mason go chip, chip, and I wanted to see them fit the thing in. I got into that great pew, to see better; and I made myself a nest, but at last they were all gone.’

‘And what did you do, then? Were you afraid?’

‘I didn’t know what to do. I ran all about to see if I could look out at a window, but I couldn’t.’

‘Did you try to call?’

‘Wouldn’t it have been naughty?’ said the boy; and then with an impulse of honest truthfulness, ‘I did try once; but do you know, there was another voice came back again, and I thought that *die Geister wachten sich auf*.’

‘The what?’

‘*Die Geister das Lieschen sagt in die Gewolben wohnen*,’ said little Robert, evidently quite unconscious whether he spoke German or English.

‘So you could not call for the echo. Well, did you not think of the bells?’

‘Yes; but, oh! the door was shut; and then, I’ll tell you—but don’t tell Mervyn—I did cry.’

‘Indeed, I don’t wonder. It must have been very lonely.’

‘I didn’t like it,’ said Robert, shivering; and getting to his German again, he described ‘*das Gewitter*’ beating on the panes, with wind and whirling leaves, and the unearthly noises of the creaking vane. The terror of the lonely, supperless child was dreadful to think of; and she begged to know what he could have done as it grew dark.

‘I got to Mr. Charlecote,’ said Robert—an answer that thrilled her all over. ‘I said I’d be always very good, if he would take care of me, and not let them frighten me. And so I did go to sleep.’

‘I’m sure Mr. Charlecote would, my dear little man,’ began Honora, then checked by remembering what he would have said. ‘But didn’t you think of One more sure to take care of you than Mr. Charlecote?’

‘Lieschen talks of *der Lieber Gott*,’ said the little boy. ‘We said our prayers in the nursery, but Mervyn says only babies do.’

‘Mervyn is terribly wrong, then,’ said Honora, shuddering. ‘Oh! Robert, Mr. Charlecote never got up nor went to bed without asking the good God to take care of him, and make him good.’

‘Was that why he was so good?’ asked Robert.

‘Indeed it was,’ said she, fervently; ‘nobody can be good without it. I hope my little friend will never miss his prayers again, for they are the only way to be manly and afraid of nothing but doing wrong, as he was.’

‘I won’t miss them,’ said Robert, eagerly; then, with a sudden, puzzled look—‘Did he send you?’

‘Who?’

‘Mr. Charlecote.’

‘Why—how should . . . ? What made you think so?’

‘I—why, once in the night I woke up; and oh! it was so dark, and there were such noises, such rattlings and roarings; and then it came all white—white light—all the window-bars and all so plain upon the wall; and then came—bending, bending over—a great gray darkness—oh! so horrible!—and went away, and came back.’

‘The shadow of the trees, swaying in the moonlight.’

‘Was it? I thought it was the *Nebel Wittwen neckten mir*, and then the *Erlkonung-tochter*. *Wissen sie*—and oh! I did scream once; and then, somehow, it grew quietly darker; and I thought Mr. Charlecote had me folded up so warm on his horse’s back, and that we rode ever so far; and they stretched out their long white arms, and could not get me; but somehow he set me down on a cold stone, and said, “Wait here, Robin, and I’ll send her to lead you.” And then came a creaking, and there were you.’

‘Well, little Robin, he did not quite send me; but it was to see his tablet that I came down this morning; so he brought me after all. He was my very dear Cousin Humfrey, and I like you for having been his little friend. Will you be mine, too, and let me help you, if I can? and if your papa and mamma give leave, come and see me, and play with the little girl and boy who live with me?’

‘Oh, yes!’ cried Robert; ‘I like you.’

The alliance was sealed with a hearty kiss.

‘But,’ said Robert, ‘you must ask Mademoiselle; papa and mamma are away!’

‘And how was it no one ever missed you?’

Robert was far less surprised at this than she was; for, like all children, to be left behind appeared to him a contingency rather probable than otherwise.

He was a fine-looking boy, with dark gray, thoughtful eyes, and a pleasant countenance; but his nerves had been so much shaken that he started, and seemed ready to catch hold of her at every sound.

‘What’s that?’ he cried, as a trampling came along the alley as they entered the garden.

‘Only my two little cousins,’ said Honora, smiling. ‘I hope you will be good friends, though perhaps Owen is too young a playfellow. Here, Lucy, Owen—here is a little friend for you—Robert Fulmort.’

The children came eagerly up, and Lucilla, taking her hand, raised her face to kiss the stranger; but Robert did not approve of the proceeding, and held up his head. Lucilla rose on tiptoe; Robin did the same. As he had the advantage of a whole year’s height, he fully succeeded in keeping out of her reach; and very comical was the effect. She gave it up at last, and contented herself with asking, ‘And where do you come from?’

‘Out of the church,’ was Robin’s reply.

‘Then you are very good and holy, indeed,’ said Owen, looking at him earnestly, with clasped hands.

‘No!’ said Robert, gruffly.

‘Poor little man! he was left behind, and shut up in the church all night, without any supper,’ said Honora.

‘Shut up in the church like Goody Two-shoes!’ cried Lucilla dancing about. ‘Oh, what fun!’

‘Did the angels come and sing to you?’ asked Owen.

‘Don’t ask such stupid questions,’ cried his sister. ‘Oh, I know what I’d have done! Didn’t you get up into the pulpit?’

‘No!’

‘And I do so want to know if the lady and gentleman on the monument have their ruffs the same on the inside, towards the wall, as outside; and, oh! I do so want to get all the dust out of the folds of the lady’s ruff: I wish they’d lock me into the church, and I’d soon get out when I was tired.’

Lucilla and Owen decidedly thought Robin had not profited by his opportunities, but he figured better in an examination on his brothers and sisters. There were seven, of whom he was the fourth—Augusta, Juliana, and Mervyn being his elders; Phœbe, Maria, and Bertha, his juniors. The three seniors were under the rule of Mademoiselle, the little ones under that of nurse and Lieschen, and Robert stood on neutral ground, doing lessons with Mademoiselle, whom, he said, in unpicked language which astounded little Owen, ‘he morally hated,’ and at the same time free of the nursery, where, it appeared, that ‘Phœbe was the jolliest little fellow in the world,’ and Lieschen was the only ‘good-natured body going,’ and knew no end of *Mährchen*. The boy spoke a very odd mixture of Lieschen’s German and of English, pervaded by stable slang, and was altogether a curious study of the effects of absentee parents; nevertheless Honora and Lucilla both took a considerable fancy to him, the latter patronizing him to such a degree that she hardly allowed him to eat the much-needed breakfast, which recalled colour to his cheek and substance to his voice.

After much thought, Owen delivered himself of the sentiment that ‘people’s papas and mammas were very funny,’ doubtless philosophizing on the inconsistency of the class in being, some so willing, some so reluctant, to leave their children behind them. Honor fully agreed with him, but did not think the discussion profitable for Robin, whom she now proposed to take home in the pony-carriage.

Lucilla, always eager for novelty, and ardent for her new friendship, begged to accompany her. Owen was afraid of the strangers, and preferred Miss Wells.

Even as they set out, they found that Robert’s disappearance had created some sensation, for the clerk’s wife was hurrying up to ask if Miss Charlecote had the keys, that she might satisfy the man from Beauchamp that Master Fulmort was not in the church. At the lodge the woman threw up her hands with joy at the sight of the child; and some way off, on the sward, stood a bigger boy, who, with a loud hurrah, scoured away towards the house as the carriage appeared.

‘That’s Mervyn,’ said Robert; ‘he is gone to tell them.’

Beauchamp was many degrees grander since Honor had last visited it. The approach was entirely new. Two fresh wings had been added, and the front was all over scaffolds and cement, in all stages of colour, from rich brown to permanent white. Robert explained that nothing was so nice as to watch the workmen, and showed Lucilla a plasterer on the topmost stage of the scaffolding, who, he said, was the nicest man he knew, and could sing all manner of songs.

Rather nervously Honora drove under the poles to the hall-door, where two girls were seen in the rear of a Frenchwoman; and Honor felt as if Robin might have grounds for his ‘moral hatred’ when her voluble transports of gratitude and affection broke forth, and the desolation in which the loss had left them was described. Robert edged back from her at once, and flew to another party at the bottom of the stairs—a very stout nurse and an uncapped, flaxen-haired *mädchen*, who clasped him in her arms, and cried, and sobbed over him. As soon as he could release himself, he caught hold of a fat little bundle, which had been coaxing one of his legs all through Lieschen’s embrace, and dragging it forwards, cried, ‘Here she is—here’s Phœbe!’ Phœbe, however, was shy, and cried and fought her way back to hide her face in Lieschen’s apron; and meantime a very odd scene took place. School-room and nursery were evidently at most direful war. Each wanted to justify itself lest the lady should write to the parents; each tried to be too grand to seem to care, and threw all the blame on the other. On the whole, Honor gathered that Mademoiselle believed the boy *enfantin* enough to be in the nursery, the nurses that he was in the school-room, and he had not been really missed till bed-time, when each party recriminated instead of seeking him, and neither would allow itself to be responsible for him. Lieschen, who alone had her suspicions where he might be, abstained from naming them in sheer terror of *Kobolden*, *Geistern*, corpse-candles, and what not, and had lain conjuring up his miseries till morning. Honora did not much care how they settled it amongst them, but tried to make friends with the young people, who seemed to take their brother’s restoration rather coolly, and to be chiefly occupied by staring at Lucilla. Augusta and Juliana were self-possessed, and rather *maniérées*, acquitting themselves evidently to the satisfaction of the French governess, and

Honor, perceiving her to be a necessary infliction, invited her and her pupils, especially Robin, to spend a day in the next week at the Holt.

The proposal was graciously accepted, and Lucilla spent the intervening time in a tumult of excitement.

Nor was the day entirely unsuccessful; Mademoiselle behaved herself with French tact, and Miss Wells took her off Honora's hands a good deal, leaving them free for the children. Lucilla, always aspiring, began a grand whispering friendship with the two girls, and set her little cap strongly at Mervyn, but that young gentleman was contemptuous and bored when he found no entertainment in Miss Charlecote's stud, and was only to be kept placable by the bagatelle-board and the strawberry-bed. Robert followed his lead more than was satisfactory, but with visible predilections for the Holt ladies, old and young. Honor talked to him about little Phœbe, and he lighted up and began to detail her accomplishments, and to be very communicative about his home vexations and pleasures, and finally, when the children were wishing good night, he bluntly said, 'It would be better fun to bring Lieschen and Phœbe.'

Honor thought so too, and proposed giving the invitation.

'Don't,' said Robert, 'she'd be cross; I'll bring them.'

And so he did. Two days after, the broad German face and the flaxen head appeared, leading that fat ball, Phœbe, and Robin frisking in triumph beside her. Henceforth a great friendship arose between the children. Phœbe soon lost all dread of those who petted her, and favoured them with broad smiles and an incomprehensible patois. Owen made very much of her, and pursued and imitated Robert with the devotion of a small boy to a larger one. Lucilla devoted herself to him for want of better game, and moreover he plainly told her that she was the prettiest little girl he ever saw, and laid all manner of remarkable treasures at her feet. Miss Charlecote believed that he made some curious confidences to her, for once Owen said, 'I want to know why Robin hasn't a Sweet Honey to make him good?'

'Robin has a papa and mamma, and a governess.'

'Robin was telling Lucy he wanted some one to teach him to be good, and she said she would, but I think she is not old enough.'

'Any one who is good is teaching others, my Owen,' said Honor. 'We will ask in our prayers that poor little Robin may be helped.'

When Mr. and Mrs. Fulmort came home, there was an interchange of calls, many thanks for her kindness to the children, and sanction of future intercourse. Mr. Fulmort was a great distiller, who had married a county heiress, and endeavoured to take his place among the country squires, whom he far exceeded in display; and his wife, a meek, sickly person, lived a life of slavery to the supposed exigencies of fashion. She had always had, in her maiden days, a species of awe of the Charlecotes' London cousin, and was now disposed to be rather gratified by her notice of her children. Mervyn had been disposed of at a tutor's, and Robert was adrift for many hours of the day. As soon as he had discovered the possibility of getting to the Holt alone, he was frequently there, following Honora about in her gardening and farming, as much at home as the little Sandbrooks, sharing in their sports, and often listening to the little books that she read aloud to them. He was very far from being such an angelic little mortal as Owen, with whom indeed his sympathies were few. Once some words were caught from him by both children, which startled Honor exceedingly, and obliged her to tell him that if ever she found him to have repeated the like, she should forbid his coming near them. He looked excessively sullen, and did not come for a week, during which Lucilla was intolerably naughty, and was twice severely punished for using the identical expressions in defiance.

Then he came again, and behaved as if nothing had happened, but the offence never recurred.

Some time after, when he boasted of having come away with a lesson unlearned, in flat disobedience to Mademoiselle, Honor sent him straight home, though Lucilla stamped and danced at her in a frenzy.

Another time Owen rushed up to her in great agony at some torture that Robin was inflicting upon

a live mouse. Upon this, Honor, full of the spirit of indignation, fairly struck the offender sharply on the fingers with her riding-whip. He scowled at her, but it was only for a moment. She held him tightly by the hand, while she sent the gardener to put his victim out of its misery, and then she talked to him, not sentimentally, her feelings were too strongly stirred, but with all her horror of cruelty.

He muttered that Mervyn and the grooms always did it; but he did not hold out long—Lucilla was holding aloof, too much horrified to come near—and finally he burst into tears, and owned that he had never thought!

Every now and then, such outbreaks made Honor wonder why she let him come, perhaps to tempt her children; but she remembered that he and Humfrey had been fond of one another, and she felt drawn towards him, though in all prudence she resolved to lessen the attractions of the Holt by being very strict with all, and rather ungracious to him. Yet, strange to say, the more regulations she made, and the more she flashed out at his faults, the more constant was her visitor, the Robin who seemed to thrive upon the veriest crumbs of good-nature.

Positively, Honora was sometimes amazed to find what a dragon she could be upon occasion.

Since she had been brought into subordination at six or eight years old, she had never had occasion to find out that she had a spirit of her own, till she found herself astonishing Jones and Brooks for taking the liberty of having a deadly feud; making Brooks understand that cows were not to be sold, nor promises made to tenants, without reference to her; or showing a determined marauder that Humfrey's wood was not to be preyed upon any more than in his own time. They were very feminine explosions to be sure, but they had their effect, and Miss Charlecote's was a real government.

The uproar with nurse came at last, through a chance discovery that she had taken Owen to a certain forbidden house of gossip, where he had been bribed to secrecy with bread and treacle.

Honora wrote to Mrs. Charteris for permission to dismiss the mischievous woman, and obtained full consent, and the most complete expression of confidence and gratitude. So there ensued a month, when every visit to the nursery seemed to be spent in tears. Nurse was really very fond of the children, and cried over them incessantly, only consoling herself by auguring a brilliant future for them, when Master Owen should reign over Hiltonbury, like the gentleman he was.

'But, nurse, Cousin Honor says I never shall—I'm to be a clergyman, like papa. She says . . . '

Nurse winked knowingly at the housemaid. 'Yes, yes, my darling, no one likes to hear who is to come after them. Don't you say nothing about it; ain't becoming; but, by and by, see if it don't come so, and if my boy ain't master here.'

'I wish I was, and then nurse would never go.'

However, nurse did go, and after some tears Owen was consoled by promotion to the habits of an older boy.

Lucilla was very angry, and revenged herself by every variety of opposition in her power, all which were put down by the strong hand. It was a matter of necessity to keep a tight grasp on this little wilful sprite, the most fiery morsel of engaging caprice and naughtiness that a quiet spinster could well have lit upon. It really sometimes seemed to Honora as if there were scarcely a fault in the range of possibilities that she had not committed; and indeed a bit of good advice generally seemed to act by contraries, and served to suggest mischief. Softness and warmth of feeling seemed to have been lost with her father; she did not show any particular affection towards her brother or Honora.

Perhaps she liked Miss Wells, but that might be only opposition; nay, Honor would have been almost thankful if she had melted at the departure of the undesirable nurse, but she appeared only hard and cross. If she liked any one it was Robert Fulmort, but that was too much in the way of flirtation.

Vanity was an extremely traceable spring of action. When nurse went, Miss Lucilla gave the household no peace, because no one could rightly curl the long flaxen tresses upon her shoulders, until the worry became so intolerable that Honora, partly as penance, partly because she thought the present mode neither conducive to tidiness nor comfort, took her scissors and trimmed all the ringlets behind, bowl-dish fashion, as her own carrots had figured all the days of her childhood.

Lucilla was held by Mrs. Stubbs during the operation. She did not cry or scream after she felt herself conquered by main strength, but her blue eyes gleamed with a strange, wild light; she would not speak to Miss Charlecote all the rest of the day, and Honora doubted whether she were ever forgiven.

Another offence was the cutting down her name into Lucy. Honor had avoided Cilly from the first; Silly Sandbrook would be too dreadful a sobriquet to be allowed to attach to any one, but Lucilla resented the change more deeply than she showed. Lucy was a housemaid's name, she said, and Honor reproved her for vanity, and called her so all the more. She did not love Miss Charlecote well enough to say that Cilly had been her father's name for her, and that he had loved to wind the flaxen curls round his fingers.

Every new study, every new injunction cost a warfare, disobedience, and passionate defiance and resistance on the one hand, and steady, good-tempered firmness on the other, gradually growing a little stern. The waves became weary of beating on the rock at last. The fiery child was growing into a girl, and the calm will had the mastery of her; she succumbed insensibly; and owing all her pleasures to Cousin Honor, she grew to depend upon her, and mind, manners, and opinions were taking their mould from her.

CHAPTER V

*Too soon the happy child
His nook of heavenward thought must change
For life's seducing wild.*

—*Christian Year*

The summer sun peeped through the Venetian blinds greenly shading the breakfast-table.

Only three sides were occupied. For more than two years past good Miss Wells had been lying under the shade of Hiltonbury Church, taking with her Honora Charlecote's last semblance of the dependence and deference of her young ladyhood. The kind governess had been fondly mourned, but she had not left her child to loneliness, for the brother and sister sat on either side, each with a particular pet—Lucilla's, a large pointer, who kept his nose on her knee; Owen's, a white fan-tailed pigeon, seldom long absent from his shoulder, where it sat quivering and bending backwards its graceful head.

Lucilla, now nearly fourteen, looked younger from the unusual smallness of her stature, and the exceeding delicacy of her features and complexion, and she would never have been imagined to be two years the senior of the handsome-faced, large-limbed young Saxon who had so far outstripped her in height; and yet there was something in those deep blue eyes, that on a second glance proclaimed a keen intelligence as much above her age as her appearance was below it.

'What's the matter?' said she, rather suddenly.

'Yes, sweetest Honey,' added the boy, 'you look bothered. Is that rascal not paying his rent?'

'No!' she said, 'it is a different matter entirely. What do you think of an invitation to Castle Blanch?'

'For us all?' asked Owen.

'Yes, all, to meet your Uncle Christopher, the last week in August.'

'Why can't he come here?' asked Lucilla.

'I believe we must go,' said Honora. 'You ought to know both your uncles, and they should be consulted before Owen goes to school.'

'I wonder if they will examine me,' said Owen. 'How they will stare to find Sweet Honey's teaching as good as all their preparatory schools.'

'Conceited boy.'

'I'm not conceited—only in my teacher. Mr. Henderson said I should take as good a place as Robert Fulmort did at Winchester, after four years in that humbugging place at Elverslope.'

'We can't go!' cried Lucilla. 'It's the last week of Robin's holidays!'

'Well done, Lucy!' and both Honor and Owen laughed heartily.

'It is nothing to me,' said she, tossing her head, 'only I thought Cousin Honor thought it good for him.'

'You may stay at home to do him good,' laughed Owen; 'I'm sure I don't want him. You are very welcome, such a bore as he is.'

'Now, Owen.'

'Honey dear, I do take my solemn affidavit that I have tried my utmost to be friends with him,' said Owen; 'but he is such a fellow—never has the least notion beyond Winchester routine—Latin and Greek, cricket and football.'

'You'll soon be a schoolboy yourself,' said Lucilla.

'Then I shan't make such an ass of myself,' returned Owen.

'Robin is a very good boy, I believe,' said Honor.

‘That’s the worst of him!’ cried Lucilla, running away and clapping the door after her as she went.

‘Well, I don’t know,’ said Owen, very seriously, ‘he says he does not care about the Saints’ days because he has no one to get him leave out.’

‘I remember,’ said Honor, with a sweet smile of tender memory, ‘when to me the merit of Saints’ days was that they were your father’s holidays.’

‘Yes, you’ll send me to Westminster, and be always coming to Woolstone-lane,’ said Owen.

‘Your uncles must decide,’ she said, half mournfully, half proudly; ‘you are getting to be a big boy—past me, Oney.’

It brought her a roughly playful caress, and he added, ‘You’ve got the best right, I’m sure.’

‘I had thought of Winchester,’ she said. ‘Robert would be a friend.’

Owen made a face, and caused her to laugh, while scandalizing her by humming, ‘Not there, not there, my child.’

‘Well, be it where it may, you had better look over your Virgil, while I go down to my practical Georgics with Brooks.’

Owen obeyed. He was like a spirited horse in a leash of silk. Strong, fearless, and manly, he was still perfectly amenable to her, and had never shown any impatience of her rule. She had taught him entirely herself, and both working together with a thorough good will, she had rendered him a better classical scholar, as all judges allowed, than most boys of the same age, and far superior to them in general cultivation; and she should be proud to convince Captain Charteris that she had not made him the mollicoddle that was obviously anticipated. The other relatives, who had seen the children in their yearly visits to London, had always expressed unqualified satisfaction, though not advancing much in the good graces of Lucy and Owen. But Honor thought the public school ought to be left to the selection of the two uncles, though she wished to be answerable for the expense, both there and at the university. The provision inherited by her charges was very slender, for, contrary to all expectation, old Mr. Sandbrook’s property had descended in another quarter, and there was barely £5000 between the two.

To preserve this untouched by the expenses of education was Honora’s object, and she hoped to be able to smooth their path in life by occasional assistance, but on principle she was determined to make them independent of her, and she had always made it known that she regarded it as her duty to Humfrey that her Hiltonbury property should be destined—if not to the apocryphal American Charlecote—to a relation of their mutual great-grandmother.

Cold invitations had been given and declined, but this one was evidently in earnest, and the consideration of the captain decided Honora on accepting it, but not without much murmuring from Lucilla. Caroline and Horatia were detestable grown-up young ladies, her aunt was horrid, Castle Blanch was the slowest place in the world; she should be shut up in some abominable school-room to do fancy-work, and never to get a bit of fun. Even the being reminded of Wrapworth and its associations only made her more cross. She was of a nature to fly from thought or feeling—she was keen to perceive, but hated reflection, and from the very violence of her feelings, she unconsciously abhorred any awakening of them, and steeled herself by levity.

Her distaste only gave way in Robert’s presence, when she appeared highly gratified by the change, certain that Castle Blanch would be charming, and her cousin the Life-guardsmen especially so. The more disconsolate she saw Robert, the higher rose her spirits, and his arrival to see the party off sent her away in open triumph, glorifying her whole cousinhood without a civil word to him; but when seated in the carriage she launched at him a drawing, the favourite work of her leisure hours, broke into unrestrained giggling at his grateful surprise, and ere the wood was past, was almost strangled with sobs.

Castle Blanch was just beyond the suburbs of London, in complete country, but with an immense neighbourhood, and not half-an-hour by train from town. Honora drove all the way, to

enjoy the lovely Thames scenery to the full. They passed through Wrapworth, and as they did so, Lucilla chattered to the utmost, while Honora stole her hand over Owen's and gently pressed it. He returned the squeeze with interest, and looked up in her face with a loving smile—mother and home were not wanting to him!

About two miles further on, and not in the same parish, began the Castle Blanch demesne. The park sloped down to the Thames, and was handsome, and quite full of timber, and the mansion, as the name imported, had been built in the height of pseudo-Gothic, with a formidable keep-looking tower at each corner, but the fortification below consisting of glass; the sham cloister, likewise glass windows, for drawing-room, music-room, and conservatory; and jutting out far in advance, a great embattled gateway, with a sham portcullis, and doors fit to defy an army.

Three men-servants met the guests in the hall, and Mrs. Charteris received them in the drawing-room, with the woman-of-the-world tact that Honora particularly hated; there was always such deference to Miss Charlecote, and such an assumption of affection for the children, and gratitude for her care of them, and Miss Charlecote had not been an heiress early enough in life for such attentions to seem matters of course.

It was explained that there was no school-room at present, and as a girl of Lucilla's age, who was already a guest, joined the rest of the party at dinner, it was proposed that she and her brother should do the same, provided Miss Charlecote did not object. Honor was really glad of the gratification for Lucilla, and Mrs. Charteris agreed with her before she had time to express her opinion as to girls being kept back or brought forward.

Honor found herself lodged in great state, in a world of looking-glass that had perfectly scared her poor little Hiltonbury maiden, and with a large dressing-room, where she hoped to have seen a bed for Lucilla, but she found that the little girl was quartered in another story, near the cousins; and unwilling to imply distrust, and hating to incite obsequious compliance, she did not ask for any change, but only begged to see the room.

It was in a long passage whence doors opened every way, and one being left ajar, sounds of laughter and talking were heard in tones as if the young ladies were above good breeding in their private moments. Mrs. Charteris said something about her daughters' morning-room, and was leading the way thither, when an unguarded voice exclaimed—'Rouge dragon and all,' and a start and suppressed laughter at the entrance of the newcomers gave an air of having been caught.

Four young ladies, in *dégagé* attitudes, were lounging round their afternoon refection of tea.

Two, Caroline and Horatia Charteris, shook hands with Miss Charlecote, and kissed Lucilla, who still looked at them ungraciously, followed Honora's example in refusing their offer of tea, and only waiting to learn her own habitation, came down to her room to be dressed for dinner, and to criticize cousins, aunt, house and all. The cousins were not striking—both were on a small scale, Caroline the best looking in features and complexion, but Horatia the most vivacious and demonstrative, and with an air of dash and fashion that was more effective than beauty. Lucilla, not sensible to these advantages, broadly declared both young ladies to be frights, and commented so freely on them to the willing ears of Owen, who likewise came in to go down under Sweet Honey's protection, as to call for a reproof from Honora, one of whose chief labours ever was to destroy the little lady's faith in beauty, and complacency in her own.

The latter sensation was strong in Honor herself, as she walked into the room between her beautiful pair, and contrasted Lucilla with her contemporary, a formed and finished young lady, all plaits, ribbons, and bracelets—not half so pleasing an object as the little maid in her white frock, blue sash, and short wavy hair, though maybe there was something quaint in such simplicity, to eyes trained by fashion instead of by good taste.

Here was Captain Charteris, just what he had been when he went away. How different from his stately, dull, wife-ridden elder brother. So brisk, and blunt, and eager, quite lifting his niece off

her feet, and almost crushing her in his embrace, telling her she was still but a hop-o'-my-thumb, and shaking hands with his nephew with a look of scrutiny that brought the blood to the boy's cheek.

His eyes were never off the children while he was listening to Honora, and she perceived that what she said went for nothing; he would form his judgment solely by what he observed for himself.

At dinner, he was seated between Miss Charlecote and his niece, and Honora was pleased with him for his neglect of her and attention to his smaller neighbour, whose face soon sparkled with merriment, while his increasing animation proved that the saucy little woman was as usual enchanting him. Much that was very entertaining was passing about tiger-hunting, when at dessert, as he stretched out his arm to reach some water for her, she exclaimed, 'Why, Uncle Kit, you *have* brought away the marks! no use to deny it, the tigers did bite you.'

The palm of his hand certainly bore in purple, marks resembling those of a set of teeth; and he looked meaningly at Honora, as he quietly replied, 'Something rather like a tigress.'

'Then it was a bite, Uncle Kit?'

Yes,' in a put-an-end-to-it tone, which silenced Lucilla, her tact being much more ready when concerned with the nobler sex.

In the drawing-room, Mrs. Charteris's civilities kept Honora occupied, while she saw Owen bursting with some request, and when at length he succeeded in claiming her attention, it was to tell her of his cousin's offer to take him out shooting, and his elder uncle's proviso that it must be with her permission. He had gone out with the careful gamekeeper at Hiltonbury, but this was a different matter, more trying to the nerves of those who stayed at home. However, Honora suspected that the uncle's opinion of her competence to be trusted with Owen would be much diminished by any betrayal of womanly terrors, and she made her only conditions that he should mind Uncle Kit, and not go in front of the guns, otherwise he would never be taken out again, a menace which she judiciously thought more telling than that he would be shot.

By and by Mr. Charteris came to discuss subjects so interesting to her as a farmer, that it was past nine o'clock before she looked round for her children. Healthy as Lucilla was, her frame was so slight and unsubstantial, and her spirits so excitable, that over-fatigue or irregularity always told upon her strength and temper; for which reason Honor had issued a decree that she should go to bed at nine, and spend two hours of every morning in quiet employment, as a counterbalance to the excitement of the visit.

Looking about to give the summons, Honor found that Owen had disappeared. Unnoticed, and wearied by the agricultural dialogue, he had hailed nine o'clock as the moment of release, and crept off with unobtrusive obedience, which Honor doubly prized when she beheld his sister full of eagerness, among cousins and gentlemen, at the racing game. Strongly impelled to end it at once, Honor waited, however, till the little white horseman had reached the goal, and just as challenges to a fresh race were beginning, she came forward with her needful summons.

'Oh, Miss Charlecote, how cruel!' was the universal cry.

'We can't spare all the life of our game!' said Charles Charteris.

'I solemnly declare we weren't betting,' cried Horatia. 'Come, the first evening—'

'No,' said Honor, smiling. 'I can't have her lying awake to be good for nothing to-morrow, as she will do if you entertain her too much.'

'Another night, then, you promise,' said Charles.

'I promise nothing but to do my best to keep her fit to enjoy herself. Come, Lucy.'

The habit of obedience was fixed, but not the habit of conquering annoyance, and Lucilla went off doggedly. Honora would have accompanied her to soothe away her troubles, but her cousin Ratia ran after her, and Captain Charteris stood in the way, disposed to talk. 'Discipline,' he said, approvingly.

'Harsh discipline, I fear, it seemed to her, poor child,' said Honor; 'but she is so excitable that I must try to keep her as quiet as possible.'

‘Right,’ said the captain; ‘I like to see a child a child still. You must have had some tussles with that little spirit.’

‘A few,’ she said, smiling. ‘She is a very good girl now, but it has been rather a contrast with her brother.’

‘Ha!’ quoth the captain; and mindful of the milk-sop charge, Honora eagerly continued, ‘You will soon see what a spirit he has! He rides very well, and is quite fearless. I have always wished him to be with other boys, and there are some very nice ones near us—they think him a capital cricketer, and you should see him run and vault.’

‘He is an active-looking chap,’ his uncle granted.

‘Every one tells me he is quite able to make his way at school; I am only anxious to know which public school you and your brother would prefer.’

‘How old is he?’

‘Only twelve last month, though you would take him for fifteen.’

‘Twelve; then there would be just time to send him to Portsmouth, get him prepared for a naval cadetship, then, when I go out with Sir David Horfield, I could take him under my own eye, and make a man of him at once.’

‘Oh! Captain Charteris,’ cried Honora, aghast, ‘his whole bent is towards his father’s profession.’

The captain had very nearly whistled, unable to conceive any lad of spirit preferring study.

‘Whatever Miss Charlecote’s wishes may be, Kit,’ interposed the diplomatic elder brother, ‘we only desire to be guided by them.’

‘Oh no, indeed,’ cried Honor; ‘I would not think of such a responsibility, it can belong only to his nearer connections;’ then, feeling as if this were casting him off to be pressed by the sailor the next instant, she added, in haste—‘Only I hoped it was understood—if you will let me—the expenses of his education need not be considered. And if he *might* be with me in the holidays,’ she proceeded imploringly. ‘When Captain Charteris has seen more of him, I am sure he will think it a pity that his talents . . .’ and there she stopped, shocked at finding herself insulting the navy.

‘If a boy have no turn that way, it cannot be forced on him,’ said the captain, moodily.

Honora pitied his disappointment, wondering whether he ascribed it to her influence, and Mr. Charteris blandly expressed great obligation and more complete resignation of the boy than she desired; disclaimers ran into mere civilities, and she was thankful to the captain for saying, shortly, ‘We’ll leave it till we have seen more of the boy.’

Breakfast was very late at Castle Blanch; and Honora expected a tranquil hour in her dressing-room with her children, but Owen alone appeared, anxious for the shooting, but already wearying to be at home with his own pleasures, and indignant with everything, especially the absence of family prayers.

The breakfast was long and desultory, and in the midst Lucilla made her appearance with Horatia, who was laughing and saying, ‘I found this child wandering about the park, and the little pussycat won’t tell where she has been.’

‘Poaching, of course,’ responded Charles; ‘it is what pussycats always do till they get shot by the keepers.’

Et cætera, et cætera, et cætera. Lucilla was among all the young people, in the full tide of fun, nonsense, banter, and repartee of a style new to her, but in which she was formed to excel, and there was such a black look when Honor summoned her after the meal, as impressed the awkwardness of enforcing authority among nearer relations; but it was in vain, she was carried off to the dressing-room, and reminded of the bargain for two hours’ occupation. She murmured something about Owen going out as he liked.

‘He came to me before breakfast; besides, he is a boy. What made you go out in that strange manner?’

There was no answer, but Honor had learnt by experience that to insist was apt to end in obtaining nothing but a collision of wills, and she merely put out the Prayer Books for the morning's reading of the Psalms. By the time it was over, Lucilla's fit of temper had past, and she leant back in her chair. 'What are you listening to, Lucy?' said Honor, seeing her fixed eye.

'The river,' said Lucilla, pausing with a satisfied look to attend to the deep regular rush. 'I couldn't think before what it was that always seemed to be wanting, and now I know. It came to me when I went to bed; it was so nice!'

'The river voice! Yes; it must be one of your oldest friends,' said Honora, gratified at the softening. 'So that carried you out.'

'I couldn't help it! I went home,' said Lucilla.

'Home? To Wrapworth? All alone?' cried Honor, kindly, but aghast.

'I couldn't help it,' again said the girl. 'The river noise was so like everything—and I knew the way—and I felt as if I must go before any one was up.'

'So you really went. And what did you do?'

'I got over the palings our own old way, and there's my throne still in the back of the laurels, and I popped in on old Madge, and oh! she was so surprised! And then I came on Mr. Prendergast, and he walked all the way back with me, till he saw Ratia coming, and then he would not go on any farther.'

'Well, my dear, I can't blame you this time. I am hoping myself to go to Wrapworth with you and Owen.'

'Ratia is going to take me out riding and in the boat,' said Lucy, without a direct answer.

'You like your cousins better than you expected?'

'Rashe is famous,' was the answer, 'and so is Uncle Kit.'

'My dear, you noticed the mark on his hand,' said Honora; 'you do not know the cause?'

'No! Was it a shark or a mad dog?' eagerly asked the child, slightly alarmed by her manner.

'Neither. But do not you remember his carrying you into Woolstone-lane? I always believed you did not know what your little teeth were doing.'

It was not received as Honora expected. Probably the scenes of the girl's infancy had brought back associations more strongly than she was prepared for—she turned white, gasped, and vindictively said, 'I'm glad of it.'

Honora, shocked, had not discovered a reply, when Lucilla, somewhat confused at the sound of her own words, said, 'I know—not quite that—he meant the best—but, Cousin Honor, it was cruel, it was wicked, to part my father and me! Father—oh, the river is going on still, but not my father!'

The excitable girl burst into a flood of passionate tears, as though the death of her father were more present to her than ever before; and she had never truly missed him till she was brought in contact with her old home. The fatigue and change, the talking evening and restless night, had produced their effect; her very thoughtlessness and ordinary *insouciance* rendered the rush more overwhelming when it did come, and the weeping was almost hysterical.

It was not a propitious circumstance that Caroline knocked at the door with some message as to the afternoon's arrangements. Honor answered at haphazard, standing so as to intercept the view, but aware that the long-drawn sobs would be set down to the account of her own tyranny, and nevertheless resolving the more on enforcing the quiescence, the need of which was so evident; but the creature was volatile as well as sensitive, and by the time the door was shut, stood with heaving breast and undried tears, eagerly demanding whether her cousins wanted her.

'Not at all,' said Honora, somewhat annoyed at the sudden transition; 'it was only to ask if I would ride.'

'Charles was to bring the pony for me; I must go,' cried Lucy, with an eye like that of a greyhound in the leash.

'Not yet,' said Honor. 'My dear, you promised.'

'I'll never promise anything again,' was the pettish murmur.

Poor child, these two morning hours were to her a terrible penance, day after day. Practically, she might have found them heavy had they been left to her own disposal, but it was expecting overmuch from human nature to hope that she would believe so without experience, and her lessons were a daily irritation, an apparent act of tyranny, hardening her feelings against the exactor, at the same time that the influence of kindred blood drew her closer to her own family, with a revulsion the stronger from her own former exaggerated dislike.

The nursery at Castle Blanch, and the cousins who domineered over her as a plaything, had been intolerable to the little important companion of a grown man, but it was far otherwise to emerge from the calm seclusion and sober restraints of the Holt into the gaities of a large party, to be promoted to young ladyhood, and treated on equal terms, save for extra petting and attention. Instead of Robert Fulmort alone, all the gentlemen in the house gave her flattering notice—eye, ear, and helping hand at her disposal, and blunt Uncle Kit himself was ten times more civil to her than to either of her cousins. What was the use of trying to disguise from her the witchery of her piquant prettiness?

Her cousin Horatia had always had a great passion for her as a beautiful little toy, and her affection, once so trying to its object, had taken the far more agreeable form of promoting her pleasures and sympathizing with her vexations. Patronage from two-and-twenty to fourteen, from a daughter of the house to a guest, was too natural to offend, and Lucilla requited it with vehement attachment, running after her at every moment, confiding all her grievances, and being made sensible of many more. Ratia, always devising delights for her, took her on the river, rode with her, set her dancing, opened the world to her, and enjoyed her pleasures, amused by her precocious vivacity, fostering her sauciness, extolling the wit of her audacious speeches, and extremely resenting all poor Honora's attempts to counteract this terrible spoiling, or to put a check upon undesirable diversions and absolute pertness. Every conscientious interference on her part was regarded as duenna-like harshness, and her restrictions as a grievous yoke, and Lucilla made no secret that it was so, treating her to almost unvaried ill-humour and murmurs.

Little did Lucilla know, nor even Horatia, how much of the charms that produced so much effect were due to these very restraints, nor how the droll sauciness and womanly airs were enhanced by the simplicity of appearance, which embellished her far more than the most fashionable air set off her companions. Once Lucilla had overheard her aunt thus excusing her short locks and simple dress—'It is Miss Charlecote's doing. Of course, when so much depends on her, we must give way.

Excellent person, rather peculiar, but we are under great obligations to her. Very good property.'

No wonder that sojourn at Castle Blanch was one of the most irksome periods of Honora's life, disappointing, fretting, and tedious. There was a grievous dearth of books and of reasonable conversation, and both she and Owen were exceedingly at a loss for occupation, and used to sit in the boat on the river, and heartily wish themselves at home. He had no companion of his own age, and was just too young and too enterprising to be welcome to gentlemen bent more on amusing themselves than pleasing him. He was roughly admonished when he spoilt sport or ran into danger; his cousin Charles was fitfully good-natured, but generally showed that he was in the way; his uncle Kit was more brief and stern with him than 'Sweet Honey's' pupil could endure; and Honor was his only refuge. His dreariness was only complete when the sedulous civilities of his aunt carried her beyond his reach.

She could not attain a visit to Wrapworth till the Sunday. The carriage went in state to the parish church in the morning, and the music and preaching furnished subjects for *persiflage* at luncheon, to her great discomfort, and the horror of Owen; and she thought she might venture to Wrapworth in the afternoon. She had a longing for Owen's church, 'for auld lang syne'—no more. Even his bark church in the backwoods could not have rivalled Hiltonbury and the brass.

Owen, true to his allegiance, joined her in good time, but reported that his sister was gone on with Ratia. Whereas Ratia would probably otherwise not have gone to church at all, Honor was deprived of all satisfaction in her annoyance, and the compensation of a *tête-à-tête* with Owen over

his father's memory was lost by the unwelcome addition of Captain Charteris. The loss signified the less as Owen's reminiscences were never allowed to languish for want of being dug up and revived, but she could not quite pardon the sailor for the commonplace air his presence cast over the walk.

The days were gone by when Mr. Sandbrook's pulpit eloquence had rendered Wrapworth Church a Sunday show to Castle Blanch. His successor was a cathedral dignitary, so constantly absent that the former curate, who had been continued on at Wrapworth, was, in the eyes of every one, the veritable master. Poor Mr. Prendergast—whatever were his qualifications as a preacher—had always been regarded as a disappointment; people had felt themselves defrauded when the sermon fell to his share instead of that of Mr. Sandbrook, and odious comparison had so much established the opinion of his deficiencies, that Honora was not surprised to see a large-limbed and rather quaint-looking man appear in the desk, but the service was gone through with striking reverence, and the sermon was excellent, though homely and very plain-spoken. The church had been cruelly mauled by churchwardens of the last century, and a few Gothic decorations, intended for the beginning of restoration, only made it the more incongruous. The east window, of stained glass, of a quality left far behind by the advances of the last twenty years, bore an inscription showing that it was a memorial, and there was a really handsome font. Honor could trace the late rector's predilections in a manner that carried her back twenty years, and showed her, almost to her amusement, how her own notions and sympathies had been carried onwards with the current of the world around her.

On coming out, she found that there might have been more kindness in Captain Charteris than she had suspected, for he kept Horatia near him, and waited for the curate, so as to leave her at liberty and unobserved. Her first object was that Owen should see his mother's grave. It was beside the parsonage path, a flat stone, fenced by a low iron border, enclosing likewise a small flower-bed, weedy, ruinous, and forlorn. A floriated cross, filled up with green lichen, was engraven above the name.

Lucilla Horatia

beloved wife of the Reverend Owen Sandbrook

Rector of this parish

and only daughter

of Lieutenant-General Sir Christopher Charteris

She died November the 18th 1837

Aged 29 years

—

Mary Caroline

her daughter

Born November 11th 1837

Died April 14th 1838

I shall go to them, but they shall not return to me

How like it was to poor Owen! that necessity of expression, and the visible presage of weakening health so surely fulfilled! And his Lucilla! It was a melancholy work to have brought home a missionary, and secularized a parish priest! ‘Not a generous reflection,’ thought Honora, ‘at a rival’s grave,’ and she turned to the boy, who had stooped to pull at some of the bits of groundsel.

‘Shall we come here in the early morning, and set it to rights?’

‘I forgot it was Sunday,’ said Owen, hastily throwing down the weed he had plucked up.

‘You were doing no harm, my dear; but we will not leave it in this state. Will you come with us, Lucy?’

Lucilla had escaped, and was standing aloof at the end of the path, and when her brother went towards her, she turned away.

‘Come, Lucy,’ he entreated, ‘come into the garden with us. We want you to tell us the old places.’

‘I’m not coming,’ was all her answer, and she ran back to the party who stood by the church door, and began to chatter to Mr. Prendergast, over whom she had domineered even before she could speak plain. A silent, shy man, wrapped up in his duties, he was mortally afraid of the Castle Blanch young ladies, and stood ill at ease, talked down by Miss Horatia Charteris, but his eye lighted into a smile as the fairy plaything of past years danced up to him, and began her merry chatter, asking after every one in the parish, and showing a perfect memory of names and faces such as amazed him, in a child so young as she had been at the time when she had left the parish. Honora and Owen meantime were retracing recollections in the rectory garden, eking out the boy’s four years old memories with imaginations and moralizings, pondering over the border whence Owen declared he had gathered snowdrops for his mother’s coffin; and the noble plane tree by the water-side, sacred to the memory of Bible stories told by his father in the summer evenings—

‘That tree!’ laughed Lucilla, when he told her that night as they walked up-stairs to bed. ‘Nobody could sit there because of the mosquitoes. And I should like to see the snowdrops you found in November!’

‘I know there were some white flowers. Were they lilies of the valley for little Mary?’

‘It will do just as well,’ said Lucilla. She knew that she could bring either scene before her mind with vivid distinctness, but shrinking from the pain almost with horror, she only said, ‘It’s a pity you aren’t a Roman Catholic, Owen; you would soon find a hole in a rock, and say it was where a saint, with his head under his arm, had made a footmark.’

‘You are very irreverent, Lucy, and very cross besides. If you would not come and tell us, what could we do?’

‘Let it alone.’

‘If you don’t care for dear papa and mamma, I do,’ said Owen, the tears coming into his eyes.

‘I’m not going to rake it up to please Honora,’ returned his sister. ‘If you like to go and poke with her over places where things never happened, you may, but she shan’t meddle with my real things.’

‘You are very unkind,’ was the next accusation from Owen, much grieved and distressed, ‘when she is so good and dear, and was so fond of our dear father.’

‘I know,’ said Lucilla, in a tone he did not understand; then, with an air of eldership, ill assorting with their respective sizes, ‘You are a mere child. It is all very well for you, and you are very welcome to your Sweet Honey.’

Owen insisted on hearing her meaning, and on her refusal to explain, used his superior strength to put her to sufficient torture to elicit an answer. ‘Don’t, Owen! Let go! There, then! Why, she was in love with our father, and nearly died of it when he married; and Rashe says of course she bullies me for being like my mother.’

‘She never bullies you,’ cried Owen, indignantly; ‘she’s much kinder to you than you deserve, and I hate Ratia for putting it into your head, and teaching you such nasty man’s words about my own Honor.’

‘Ah! you’ll never be a man while you are under her. She only wants to keep us a couple of babies for ever—sending us to bed, and making such a figure of me;’ and Lucy relieved her feelings by five perpendicular leaps into the air, like an India-rubber ball, her hair flying out, and her eyes flashing.

Owen was not much astonished, for Lucy’s furies often worked off in this fashion; but he was very angry on Honor’s account, loving her thoroughly, and perceiving no offence in her affection for his father; and the conversation assumed a highly quarrelsome character. It was much to the credit of masculine discretion that he refrained from reporting it when he joined Honora in the morning’s

walk to Wrapworth churchyard. Behold! some one was beforehand with them—even Lucilla and the curate!

The wearisome visit was drawing to a close when Captain Charteris began—‘Well, Miss Charlecote, have you thought over my proposal?’

‘To take Owen to sea? Indeed, I hoped you were convinced that it would never answer.’

‘So far from being so, that I see it is his best chance. He will do no good till the priggishness is knocked out of him.’

Honor would not trust herself to answer. Any accusation but this might have been borne.

‘Well, well,’ said the captain, in a tone still more provoking, it was so like hushing a petulant child, ‘we know how kind you were, and that you meant everything good; but it is not in the nature of things that a lad alone with women should not be cock of the walk, and nothing cures that like a month on board.’

‘He will go to school,’ said Honor, convinced all this was prejudice.

‘Ay, and come home in the holidays, lording it as if he were master and more, like the son and heir.’

‘Indeed, Captain Charteris, you are quite mistaken; I have never allowed Owen to think himself in that position. He knows perfectly well that there are nearer claims upon me, and that Hiltonbury can never belong to him. I have always rejoiced that it should be so. I should not like to have the least suspicion that there could be self-interest in his affection for me in the time to come; and I think it presumptuous to interfere with the course of Providence in the matter of inheritances.’

‘My good Miss Charlecote,’ said the captain, who had looked at her with somewhat of a pitying smile, instead of attending to her last words, ‘do you imagine that you know that boy?’

‘I do not know who else should,’ she answered, quivering between a disposition to tears at the harshness, and to laughter at the assumption of the stranger uncle to see farther than herself into her darling.

‘Ha!’ quoth the sailor, ‘slippery—slippery fellows.’

‘I do not understand you. You do not mean to imply that I have not his perfect confidence, or do you think I have managed him wrongly? If you do, pray tell me at once. I dare say I have.’

‘I couldn’t say so,’ said Captain Charteris. ‘You are an excellent good woman, Miss Charlecote, and the best friend the poor things have had in the world; and you have taught them more good than I could, I’m sure; but I never yet saw a woman who could be up to a boy, any more than she could sail a ship.’

‘Very likely not,’ said Honor, with a lame attempt at a good-humoured laugh; ‘but I should be very glad to know whether you are speaking from general experience of woman and boy, or from individual observation of the case in point.’

The captain made a very odd, incomprehensible little bow; and after a moment’s thought, said, ‘Plainly speaking, then, I don’t think you do get to the bottom of that lad; but there’s no telling, and I never had any turn for those smooth chaps. If a fellow begins by being over-precise in what is of no consequence, ten to one but he ends by being reckless in all the rest.’

This last speech entirely reassured Honor, by proving to her that the captain was entirely actuated by prejudice against his nephew’s gentle and courteous manners and her own religious views.

He did not believe in the possibility of the success of such an education, and therefore was of course insensible to Owen’s manifold excellences.

Thenceforth she indignantly avoided the subject, and made no attempt to discover whether the captain’s eye, practised in midshipmen, had made any positive observations on which to found his dissatisfaction. Wounded by his want of gratitude, and still more hurt by his unkind judgment of her beloved pupil, she transferred her consultations to the more deferential uncle, who was entirely contented with his nephew, transported with admiration of her management, and ready to make her a present of him with all his heart. So readily did he accede to all that she said of schools, that the

choice was virtually left to her. Eton was rejected as a fitter preparation for the squirearchy than the ministry; Winchester on account of the distaste between Owen and young Fulmort; and her decision was fixed in favour of Westminster, partly for his father's sake, partly on account of the proximity of St. Wulstan's—such an infinite advantage, as Mr. Charteris observed.

The sailor declared that he knew nothing of schools, and would take no part in the discussion.

There had, in truth, been high words between the brothers, each accusing the other of going the way to ruin their nephew, ending by the captain's exclaiming, 'Well, I wash my hands of it! I can't flatter a foolish woman into spoiling poor Lucilla's son. If I am not to do what I think right by him, I shall get out of sight of it all.'

'His prospects, Kit; how often I have told you it is our duty to consider his prospects.'

'Hang his prospects! A handsome heiress under forty! How can you be such an ass, Charles?

He ought to be able to make an independent fortune before he could stand in her shoes, if he were ever to do so, which she declares he never will. Yes, you may look knowing if you will, but she is no such fool in some things; and depend upon it she will make a principle of leaving her property in the right channel; and be that as it may, I warn you that you can't do this lad a worse mischief than by putting any such notion into his head, if it be not there already. There's not a more deplorable condition in the world than to be always dangling after an estate, never knowing if it is to be your own or not, and most likely to be disappointed at last; and, to do Miss Charlecote justice, she is perfectly aware of that; and it will not be her fault if he have any false expectations! So, if you feed him with them, it will all be your fault; and that's the last I mean to say about him.'

Captain Charteris was not aware of a colloquy in which Owen had a share.

'This lucky fellow,' said the young Life-guardsman, 'he is as good as an eldest son—famous shooting county—capital, well-timbered estate.'

'No, Charles,' said Owen, 'my cousin Honor always says I am nothing like an eldest son, for there are nearer relations.'

'Oh ha!' said Charles, with a wink of superior wisdom, 'we understand that. She knows how to keep you on your good behaviour. Why, but for cutting you out, I would even make up to her myself—fine-looking, comely woman, and well-preserved—and only the women quarrel with that splendid hair. Never mind, my boy, I don't mean it. I wouldn't stand in your light.'

'As if Honor would have *you*!' cried Owen, in fierce scorn. Charles Charteris and his companions, with loud laughter, insisted on the reasons.

'Because,' cried the boy, with flashing looks, 'she would not be ridiculous; and you are—' He paused, but they held him fast, and insisted on hearing what Charles was.

'Not a good Churchman,' he finally pronounced. 'Yes, you may laugh at me, but Honor shan't be laughed at.'

Possibly Owen's views at present were that 'not to be a good Churchman' was synonymous with all imaginable evil, and that he had put it in a delicate manner. Whether he heard the last of it for the rest of his visit may be imagined. And, poor boy, though he was strong and spirited enough with his own contemporaries, there was no dealing with the full-fledged soldier. Nor, when conversation turned to what 'we' did at Hiltonbury, was it possible always to disclaim standing in the same relation to the Holt as did Charles to Castle Blanch; nay, a certain importance seemed to attach to such an assumption of dignity, of which Owen was not loth to avail himself in his disregarded condition.

PART II

CHAPTER I

*We hold our greyhound in our hand,
Our falcon on our glove;
But where shall we find leash or band
For dame that loves to rove?*

—Scott

A June evening shed a slanting light over the greensward of Hiltonbury Holt, and made the western windows glisten like diamonds, as Honora Charlecote slowly walked homewards to her solitary evening meal, alone, except for the nearly blind old pointer who laid his grizzled muzzle upon her knees, gazing wistfully into her face, as seating herself upon the step of the sun-dial, she fondled his smooth, depressed black head.

‘Poor Ponto!’ she said, ‘we are grown old together. Our young ones are all gone.’

Grown old? Less old in proportion than Ponto—still in full vigour of mind and body, but old in disenchantment, and not without the traces of her forty-seven years. The auburn hair was still in rich masses of curl; only on close inspection were silver threads to be detected; the cheek was paler, the brow worn, and the gravely handsome dress was chosen to suit the representative of the Charlecotes, not with regard to lingering youthfulness. The slow movement, subdued tone, and downcast eye, had an air of habitual dejection and patience, as though disappointment had gone deeper, or solitude were telling more on the spirits, than any past blow had done.

She saw the preparations for her tea going on within the window, but ere going indoors, she took out and re-read two letters.

The first was in the irregular decided characters affected by young ladies in the reaction from their grandmothers’ pointed illegibilities, and bore a scroll at the top, with the word ‘Cilly,’ in old English letters of bright blue.

Lowndes Square, June 14th.

‘My dear Honor,—Many thanks for wishing for your will-o’-th’-wisp again, but it is going to dance off in another direction. Rashe and I are bound to the west of Ireland, as soon as Charles’s inauguration is over at Castle Blanch; an odd jumble of festivities it is to be, but Lolly is just cockney enough to be determinedly rural, and there’s sure to be some fun to be got out of it; besides, I am pacified by having my special darling, Edna Murrell, the lovely schoolmistress at Wrapworth, to sing to them. How Mr. Calthorp will admire her, as long as he thinks she is Italian!

It will be hard if I can’t get a rise out of some of them! This being the case, I have not a moment for coming home; but I send some contributions for the prize-giving, some stunning articles from the Lowther Arcade. The gutta-percha face is for Billy Harrison, *whether in disgrace or not*. He deserves compensation for his many weary hours of Sunday School, and it may suggest a new art for beguiling the time. *Mind* you tell him it is from me, with my love; and bestow the rest on all the chief reprobates. I wish I could see them; but you have no loss, you know how unedifying I am. Kiss Ponto for me, and ask Robin for his commands to

Connaught. I know his sulkiness will transpire through Phœbe. Love to that dear little Cinderella, and tell her mamma and Juliana, that if she does not come out this winter, Mrs. Fulmort shall have no peace and Juliana no partners. Please to look in my room for my great nailed boots and hedging-gloves, also for the pig's wool in the left-hand drawer of the cabinet, and send them to me before the end of next week. Owen would give his ears to come with us, but gentlemen would only obstruct Irish chivalry; I am only afraid there is no hope of a faction fight. Mr. Saville called yesterday, so I made him dine here, and sung him into raptures. What a dear old Don he is!

'Your affectionate cousin, Cilly.'

The second letter stood thus:—

'Farrance's Hotel, June 14th.

'My dear miss Charlecote,—I have seen Lawrence on your business, and he will prepare the leases for your signature. He suggests that it might be more satisfactory to wait, in case you should be coming to town, so that you might have a personal meeting with the parties; but this will be for you to determine. I came up from — College on Wednesday, having much enjoyed my visit. Oxford is in many respects a changed place, but as long as our old Head remains to us, I am sure of a gratifying welcome, and I saw many old friends. I exchanged cards with Owen Sandbrook, but only saw him as we met in the street, and a very fine-looking youth he is, a perfect Hercules, and the champion of his college in all feats of strength; likely, too, to stand well in the class list. His costume was not what we should once have considered academical; but his is a daring set, intellectual as well as bodily, and the clever young men of the present day are not what they were in my time.

It is gratifying to hear how warmly and affectionately he talks of you. I do not know how far you have undertaken the supplies, but I give you a hint that a warning on that subject might not be inappropriate, unless they have come into some great accession of fortune on their uncle's death. I ventured to call upon the young lady in Lowndes Square, and was most graciously received, and asked to dinner by the young Mrs. Charteris. It was a most *récherché* dinner in the new Italian fashion, which does not quite approve itself to me. "Regardless of expense," seems to be the family motto. Your pupil sings better than ever, and knew how to keep her hold of my heart, though I suspected her of patronizing the old parson to pique her more brilliant admirers, whom she possesses in plenty; and no wonder, for she is pretty enough to turn any man's head and shows to great advantage beside her cousin, Miss Charteris. I hope you will be able to prevent the cousins from really undertaking the wild plan of travelling alone in Ireland, for the sake, they say, of salmon-fishing. I should have thought them not in earnest, but girls are as much altered as boys from the days of my experience, and brothers, too; for Mr. Charteris seemed to view the scheme very coolly; but, as I told my friend Lucilla, I hope you will bring her to reason. I hope your hay-crop promises favourably.

'Yours sincerely, W. Saville.'

No wonder that these letters made loneliness more lonely!

'Oh, that Horatia!' exclaimed she, almost aloud. 'Oh, that Captain Charteris were available!

No one else ever had any real power with Lucy! It was an unlucky day when he saw that colonial young lady, and settled down in Vancouver's Island! And yet how I used to wish him away, with the surly independence he was always infusing into Owen. Wanting to take him out there, indeed!

And yet, and yet—I sometimes doubt whether I did right to set my personal influence over my dear affectionate boy so much in opposition to his uncle—Mr. Charteris was on my side, though! And I always took care to have it clearly understood that it was his education alone that I undertook. What can Mr. Saville mean?—The supplies? Owen knows what he has to trust to, but I can talk to him. A daring set!—Yes, everything appears daring to an old-world man like Mr. Saville. I am sure of my Owen; with our happy home Sundays. I know I am his Sweet Honey still. And yet—then hastily turning from that dubious ‘and yet’—‘Owen is the only chance for his sister. She does care for him; and he will view this mad scheme in the right light. Shall I meet him at the beginning of the vacation, and see what he can do with Lucy? Mr. Saville thinks I ought to be in London, and I think I might be useful to the Parsons. I suppose I must; but it *is* a heart-ache to be at St. Wulstan’s. One is used to it here; and there are the poor people, and the farm, and the garden—yes, and those dear nightingales—and you, poor Ponto! One is used to it here, but St. Wulstan’s is a fresh pain, and so is coming back. But, if it be in the way of right, and to save poor Lucy, it must be, and it is what life is made of. It is a “following of the funeral” of the hopes that sprang up after my spring-time.

Is it my chastisement, or is it my training? Alas! maybe I took those children more for *myself* than for duty’s sake! May it all be for their true good in the end, whatever it may be with me. And now I *will* not dream. It is of no use save to unnerve me. Let me go to my book. It must be a story to-night. I cannot fix my attention yet.’

As she rose, however, her face brightened at the sight of two advancing figures, and she went forward to meet them.

One was a long, loosely-limbed youth of two-and-twenty, with broad shoulders, a heavy overhanging brow, dark gray serious eyes, and a mouth scarcely curved, and so fast shut as to disclose hardly any lip. The hair was dark and lank; the air was of ungainly force, that had not yet found its purpose, and therefore was not at ease; and but for the educated cast of countenance he would have had a peasant look, in the brown, homely undress garb, which to most youths of his age would have been becoming.

With him was a girl, tall, slim, and lightly made, though of nicely rounded figure. In height she looked like seventeen, but her dress was more childish than usual at that age; and the contour of her smooth cheeks and short rounded chin, her long neck, her happy blue eyes, fully opened like those of a child, her fair rosy skin and fresh simple air, might almost have belonged to seven years old: and there was all the earnestness, innocence, and careless ease of childhood in her movements and gestures, as she sprang forward to meet Miss Charlecote, exclaiming, ‘Robin said I might come.’

‘And very right of him. You are both come to tea?’ she added, in affirmative interrogation, as she shook hands with the young man.

‘No, thank you,’ he answered; ‘at least I only brought Phœbe, having rescued her from Miss Fennimore’s clutches. I must be at dinner. But I will come again for her.’ And he yawned wearily.

‘I will drive her back; you are tired.’

‘No!’ he said. ‘At least the walk is one of the few tolerable things there is. I’ll come as soon as I can escape, Phœbe. Past seven—I must go!’

‘Can’t you stay? I could find some food for you.’

‘No, thank you,’ he still said; ‘I do not know whether Mervyn will come home, and there must not be too many empty chairs. Good-bye!’ and he walked off with long strides, but with stooping shoulders, and an air of dejection almost amounting to discontent.

‘Poor Robin!’ said Honora, ‘I wish he could have stayed.’

‘He would have liked it very much,’ said Phœbe, casting wistful glances toward him.

‘What a pity he did not give notice of his intentions at home!’

‘He never will. He particularly dislikes—’

‘What?’ as Phoebe paused and coloured.

‘Saying anything to anybody,’ she answered with a little smile. ‘He cannot endure remarks.’

‘I am a very sober old body for a visit to me to be the occasion of remarks!’ said Honor, laughing more merrily than perhaps Robert himself could have done; but Phœbe answered with grave, straightforward sincerity, ‘Yes, but he did not know if Lucy might not be come home.’

Honora sighed, but playfully said, ‘In which case he would have stayed?’

‘No,’ said the still grave girl, ‘he would have been still less likely to do so.’

‘Ah! the remarks would have been more pointed! But he has brought you at any rate, and that is something! How did he achieve it?’

‘Miss Fennimore is really quite ready to be kind,’ said Phœbe, earnestly, with an air of defence, ‘whenever we have finished all that we have to do.’

‘And when is that?’ asked Honor, smiling.

‘Now for once,’ answered Phœbe, with a bright arch look. ‘Yes, I sometimes can; and so does Bertha when she tries; and, indeed, Miss Charlecote, I do like Miss Fennimore; she never is hard upon poor Maria. No governess we ever had made her cry so seldom.’

Miss Charlecote only said it was a comfort. Within herself she hoped that, for Maria’s peace and that of all concerned, her deficiency might become an acknowledged fact. She saw that the sparing Maria’s tears was such a boon to Phœbe as to make her forgive all overtaking of herself.

‘So you get on better,’ she said.

‘Much better than Robin chooses to believe we do,’ said Phœbe, smiling; ‘perhaps it seemed hard at first, but it is comfortable to be made to do everything thoroughly, and to be shown a better best than we had ever thought of. I think it ought to be a help in doing the duty of all one’s life in a thorough way.’

‘All that thou hast to do,’ said Honor, smiling, ‘the week-day side of the fourth commandment.’

‘Yes, that is just the reason why I like it,’ said Phœbe, with bright gladness in her countenance.

‘But is that the motive Miss Fennimore puts before you?’ said Honor, a little ironically.

‘She does not say so,’ answered Phœbe. ‘She says that she never interferes with her pupils’ religious tenets. But, indeed, I do not think she teaches us anything wrong, and there is always Robert to ask.’

This passed as the two ladies were entering the house and preparing for the evening meal. The table was placed in the bay of the open window, and looked very inviting, the little silver tea-pot steaming beside the two quaint china cups, the small crisp twists of bread, the butter cool in ice-plant leaves, and some fresh fruit blushing in a pretty basket. The Holt was a region of Paradise to Phœbe Fulmort; and glee shone upon her sweet face, though it was very quiet enjoyment, as the summer breeze played softly round her cheeks and danced with a merry little spiral that had detached itself from her glossy folds of light hair.

‘How delicious!’ she said. ‘How sweet the honeysuckle is, dear old thing! You say you have known it all your life, and yet it is fresh as ever.’

‘It is a little like you, Phœbe,’ said Honor, smiling.

‘What! because it is not exactly a pretty flower?’

‘Partly; and I could tell you of a few other likenesses, such as your being Robert’s woodbine, yet with a sort of clinging freedom. Yes, and for the qualities you share with the willow, ready to give thanks and live on the least that Heaven may give.’

‘But I don’t live on the least that Heaven may give,’ said Phœbe, in such wonder that Honor smiled at the justice of her simile, without impressing it upon Phœbe, only asking—

‘Is the French journey fixed upon, Phœbe?’

‘Yes; they start this day fortnight.’

‘They—not you?’

‘No; there would be no room for me,’ with a small sigh.

‘How can that be? Who is going? Papa, mamma, two sisters!’

‘Mervyn,’ added Phœbe, ‘the courier, and the two maids.’

‘Two maids! Impossible!’

‘It is always uncomfortable if mamma and my sisters have only one between them,’ said Phœbe, in her tone of perfect acquiescence and conviction; and as her friend could not restrain a gesture of indignation, she added eagerly—‘But, indeed, it is not only for that reason, but Miss Fennimore says I am not formed enough to profit by foreign travel.’

‘She wants you to finish Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*, eh?’

‘It might be a pity to go away and lose so much of her teaching,’ said Phœbe, with persevering contentment. ‘I dare say they will go abroad again, and perhaps I shall never have so much time for learning. But, Miss Charlecote, is Lucilla coming home for the Horticultural Show?’

‘I am afraid not, my dear. I think I shall go to London to see about her, among other things. The Charterises seem to have quite taken possession of her, ever since she went to be her cousin Caroline’s bridesmaid, and I must try to put in my claim.’

‘Ah! Robin so much wished to have seen her,’ sighed Phœbe. ‘He says he cannot settle to anything.’

‘Without seeing her?’ said Honor, amused, though not without pain.

‘Yes,’ said Phœbe; ‘he has thought so much about Lucilla.’

‘And he tells you?’

‘Yes,’ in a voice expressing of course; while the frank, clear eyes turned full on Miss Charlecote with such honest seriousness, that she thought Phœbe’s charm as a confidante might be this absence of romantic consciousness; and she knew of old that when Robert wanted her opinion or counsel, he spared his own embarrassment by seeking it through his favourite sister. Miss Charlecote’s influence had done as much for Robert as he had done for Phœbe, and Phœbe had become his medium of communication with her in all matters of near and delicate interest. She was not surprised when the maiden proceeded—‘Papa wants Robin to attend to the office while he is away.’

‘Indeed! Does Robin like it?’

‘He would not mind it for a time; but papa wants him, besides, to take to the business in earnest.

You know, my great-uncle, Robert Mervyn, left Robert all his fortune, quite in his own hands; and papa says that if he were to put that into the distillery it would do the business great good, and that Robert would be one of the richest men in England in ten years’ time.’

‘But that would be a complete change in his views,’ exclaimed Honor, unable to conceal her disapproval and consternation.

‘Just so,’ answered Phœbe; ‘and that is the reason why he wants to see Lucy. She always declared that she could not bear people in business, and we always thought of him as likely to be a clergyman; but, on the other hand, she has become used to London society, and it is only by his joining in the distillery that he could give her what she is accustomed to, and that is the reason he is anxious to see her.’

‘So Lucy is to decide his fate,’ said Honora. ‘I am almost sorry to hear it. Surely, he has never spoken to her.’

‘He never does speak,’ said Phœbe, with the calm gravity of simplicity which was like a halo of dignity. ‘There is no need of speaking. Lucilla knows how he feels as well as she knows that she breathes the air.’

And regards it as little, perhaps, thought Honor, sadly. ‘Poor Robin!’ she said; ‘I suppose he had better get his mind settled; but indeed it is a fearful responsibility for my poor foolish Lucy—’ and but for the fear of grieving Phœbe, she would have added, that such a purpose as that of entering Holy Orders ought not to have been made dependent upon the fancy of a girl. Possibly her expression betrayed her sentiments, for Phœbe answered—‘There can be no doubt that Lucy will set him at rest.

I am certain that she would be shocked at the notion that her tastes were making him doubt whether to be a clergyman.’

‘I hope so! I trust so!’ said Honora, almost mournfully. ‘It may be very good for her, as I believe it is for every woman of any soundness, to be taught that her follies tell upon man’s greater aims and purposes. It may be wholesome for her and a check, but—’

Phœbe wondered that her friend paused and looked so sad.

‘Oh! Phœbe,’ said Honora, after a moment’s silence, speaking fervently, ‘if you can in any way do so, warn your brother against making an idol! Let nothing come between him and the direct devotion of will and affection to the Higher Service. If he decide on the one or the other, let it be from duty, not with respect to anything else. I do not suppose it is of any use to warn him,’ she added, with the tears in her eyes. ‘Every one sets the whole soul upon some one object, not the right, and then comes the shipwreck.’

‘Dear Robin!’ said Phœbe. ‘He is so good! I am sure he always thinks first of what is right.

But I think I see what you mean. If he undertake the business, it should be as a matter of obedience to papa, not to keep Lucy in the great world. And, indeed, I do not think my father does care much, only he would like the additional capital; and Robert is so much more steady than Mervyn, that he would be more useful. Perhaps it would make him more important at home; no one there has any interest in common with him; and I think that moves him a little; but, after all, those do not seem reasons for not giving himself to God’s service,’ she finished, reverently and considerately.

‘No, indeed!’ cried Miss Charlecote.

‘Then you think he ought not to change his mind?’

‘You have thought so all along,’ smiled Honor.

‘I did not like it,’ said Phœbe, ‘but I did not know if I were right. I did tell him that I really believed Lucy would think the more highly of him if he settled for himself without reference to her.’

‘You did! You were a capital little adviser, Phœbe! A woman worthy to be loved at all had always rather be set second instead of first:—

“I could not love thee, dear, so much,
Loved I not honour more.”

That is the true spirit, and I am glad you judged Lucy to be capable of it. Keep your brother up to that, and all may be well!’

‘I believe Robert knows it all the time,’ said Phœbe. ‘He always is right at the bottom; but his feelings get so much tried that he does not know how to bear it! I hope Lucy will be kind to him if they meet in London, for he has been so much harassed that he wants some comfort from her. If she would only be in earnest!’

‘Does he go to London, at all events?’

‘He has promised to attend to the office in Great Whittington-street for a month, by way of experiment.’

‘I’ll tell you what, Phœbe,’ cried Honora, radiantly, ‘you and I will go too! You shall come with me to Woolstone-lane, and Robin shall be with us every day; and we will try and make this silly Lucy into a rational being.’

‘Oh! Miss Charlecote, thank you—thank you.’ The quiet girl’s face and neck were all one crimson glow of delight.

‘If you can sleep in a little brown cupboard of a room in the very core of the City’s heart.’

‘Delightful! I have so wished to see that house. Owen has told me such things about it. Oh, thank you, Miss Charlecote!’

‘Have you ever seen anything in London?’

‘Never. We hardly ever go with the rest; and if we do, we only walk in the square. What a holiday it will be!’

‘We will see everything, and do it justice. I’ll get an order for the print-room at the British Museum. I day say Robin never saw it either; and what a treat it will be to take you to the Egyptian Gallery!’ cried Honora, excited into looking at the expedition in the light of a party of pleasure, as she saw happiness beaming in the young face opposite.

They built up their schemes in the open window, pausing to listen to the nightingales, who, having ceased for two hours, apparently for supper, were now in full song, echoing each other in all the woods of Hiltonbury, casting over it a network of sweet melody. Honora was inclined to regret leaving them in their glory; but Phœbe, with the world before her, was too honest to profess poetry which she did not feel. Nightingales were all very well in their place, but the first real sight of London was more.

The lamp came in, and Phœbe held out her hands for something to do, and was instantly provided with a child’s frock, while Miss Charlecote read to her one of Fouqué’s shorter tales by way of supplying the element of chivalrous imagination which was wanting in the Beauchamp system of education.

So warm was the evening, that the window remained open, until Ponto erected his crest as a footfall came steadily along, nearer and nearer. Uplifting one of his pendant lips, he gave a low growl through his blunted teeth, and listened again; but apparently satisfied that the step was familiar, he replaced his head on his crossed paws, and presently Robert Fulmort’s head and the upper part of his person, in correct evening costume, were thrust in at the window, the moonlight making his face look very white, as he said, ‘Come, Phœbe, make haste; it is very late.’

‘Is it?’ cried Phœbe, springing up; ‘I thought I had only been here an hour.’

‘Three, at least,’ said Robert, yawning; ‘six by my feelings. I could not get away, for Mr. Crabbe stayed to dinner; Mervyn absented himself, and my father went to sleep.’

‘Robin, only think, Miss Charlecote is so kind as to say she will take me to London!’

‘It is very kind,’ said Robert, warmly, his weary face and voice suddenly relieved.

‘I shall be delighted to have a companion,’ said Honora; ‘and I reckon upon you too, Robin, whenever you can spare time from your work. Come in, and let us talk it over.’

‘Thank you, I can’t. The dragon will fall on Phœbe if I keep her out too late. Be quick, Phœbe.’

While his sister went to fetch her hat, he put his elbows on the sill, and leaning into the room, said, ‘Thank you again; it will be a wonderful treat to her, and she has never had one in her life!’

‘I was in hopes she would have gone to Germany.’

‘It is perfectly abominable! It is all the others’ doing! They know no one would look at them a second time if anything so much younger and pleasanter was by! They think her coming out would make them look older. I know it would make them look crosser.’

Laughing was the only way to treat this tirade, knowing, as Honor did, that there was but too much truth in it. She said, however, ‘Yet one could hardly wish Phœbe other than she is. The rosebud keeps its charm longer in the shade.’

‘I like justice,’ quoth Robert.

‘And,’ she continued, ‘I really think that she is much benefited by this formidable governess. Accuracy and solidity and clearness of head are worth cultivating.’

‘Nasty latitudinarian piece of machinery,’ said Robert, with his fingers over his mouth, like a sulky child.

‘Maybe so; but you guard Phœbe, and she guards Bertha; and whatever your sense of injustice may be, this surely is a better school for her than gaieties as yet.’

‘It will be a more intolerable shame than ever if they will not let her go with you.’

‘Too intolerable to be expected,’ smiled Honora. ‘I shall come and beg for her to-morrow, and I do not believe I shall be disappointed.’

She spoke with the security of one not in the habit of having her patronage obstructed by relations; and Phœbe coming down with renewed thanks, the brother and sister started on their way

home in the moonlight—the one plodding on moodily, the other, unable to repress her glee, bounding on in a succession of little skips, and pirouetting round to clap her hands, and exclaim, ‘Oh! Robin, is it not delightful?’

‘If they will let you go,’ said he, too desponding for hope.

‘Do you think they will not?’ said Phœbe, with slower and graver steps. ‘Do you really think so? But no! It can’t lead to coming out; and I know they like me to be happy when it interferes with nobody.’

‘Great generosity,’ said Robert, dryly.

‘Oh, but, Robin, you know elder ones come first.’

‘A truth we are not likely to forget,’ said Robert. ‘I wish my uncle had been sensible of it. That legacy of his stands between Mervyn and me, and will never do me any good.’

‘I don’t understand,’ said Phœbe; ‘Mervyn has always been completely the eldest son.’

‘Ay,’ returned Robert, ‘and with the tastes of an eldest son. His allowance does not suffice for them, and he does not like to see me independent. If my uncle had only been contented to let us share and share alike, then my father would have had no interest in drawing me into the precious gin and brandy manufacture.’

‘You did not think he meant to make it a matter of obedience,’ said Phœbe.

‘No; he could hardly do that after the way he has brought me up, and what we have been taught all our lives about liberty of the individual, absence of control, and the like jargon.’

‘Then you are not obliged?’

He made no answer, and they walked on in silence across the silvery lawn, the maythorns shining out like flaked towers of snow in the moonlight, and casting abyss-like shadows, the sky of the most deep and intense blue, and the carols of the nightingales ringing around them. Robert paused when he had passed through the gate leading into the dark path down-hill through the wood, and setting his elbows on it, leant over it, and looked back at the still and beautiful scene, in all the white mystery of moonlight, enhanced by the white-blossomed trees and the soft outlines of slumbering sheep. One of the birds, in a bush close to them, began prolonging its drawn-in notes in a continuous prelude, then breaking forth into a varied complex warbling, so wondrous that there was no moving till the creature paused.

It seemed to have been a song of peace to Robert, for he gave a long but much softer sigh, and pushed back his hat, saying, ‘All good things dwell on the Holt side of the boundary.’

‘A sort of Sunday world,’ said Phœbe.

‘Yes; after this wood one is in another atmosphere.’

‘Yet you have carried your cares there, poor Robin.’

‘So one does into Sunday, but to get another light thrown on them. The Holt has been the blessing of my life—of both our lives, Phœbe.’

She responded with all her heart. ‘Yes, it has made everything happier, at home and everywhere else. I never can think why Lucilla is not more fond of it.’

‘You are mistaken,’ exclaimed Robert; ‘she loves no place so well; but you don’t consider what claims her relations have upon her. That cousin Horatia, to whom she is so much attached, losing both her parents, how could she do otherwise than be with her?’

‘Miss Charteris does not seem to be in great trouble now,’ said Phœbe.

‘You do not consider; you have never seen grief, and you do not know how much more a sympathizing friend is needed when the world supposes the sorrow to be over, and ordinary habits to be resumed.’

Phœbe was willing to believe him right, though considering that Horatia Charteris lived with her brother and his wife, she could hardly be as lonely as Miss Charlecote.

‘We shall see Lucy in London,’ she said.

Robert again sighed heavily. 'Then it will be over,' he said. 'Did you say anything there?' he pursued, as they plunged into the dark shadows of the woodland path, more congenial to the subject than the light.

'Yes, I did,' said Phœbe.

'And she thought me a weak, unworthy wretch for ever dreaming of swerving from my original path.'

'No!' said Phœbe, 'not if it were your duty.'

'I tell you, Phœbe, it is as much my duty to consult Lucilla's happiness as if any words had passed between us. I have never pledged myself to take Orders. It has been only a wish, not a vocation; and if she have become averse to the prospect of a quiet country life, it would not be treating her fairly not to give her the choice of comparative wealth, though procured by means her family might despise.'

'Yes, I knew you would put right and duty first; and I suppose by doing so you make it certain to end rightly, one way or other.'

'A very few years, and I could realize as much as this Calthorp, the millionaire, whom they talk of as being so often at the Charterises.'

'It will not be so,' said Phœbe. 'I know what she will say;' and as Robert looked anxiously at her, she continued—

'She will say she never dreamt of your being turned from anything so great by any fancies she has seemed to have. She will say so more strongly, for you know her father was a clergyman, and Miss Charlecote brought her up.'

Phœbe's certainty made Robert catch something of her hopes.

'In that case,' he said, 'matters might be soon settled. This fortune of mine would be no misfortune then; and probably, Phœbe, my sisters would have no objection to your being happy with us.'

'As soon as you could get a curacy! Oh, how delightful! and Maria and Bertha would come too.'

Robert held his peace, not certain whether Lucilla would consider Maria an embellishment to his ideal parsonage; but they talked on with cheerful schemes while descending through the wood, unlocking a gate that formed the boundary between the Holt and the Beauchamp properties, crossing a field or two, and then coming out into the park. Presently they were in sight of the house, rising darkly before them, with many lights shining in the windows behind the blinds.

'They are all gone up-stairs!' said Phœbe, dismayed. 'How late it must be!'

'There's a light in the smoking-room,' said Robert; 'we can get in that way.'

'No, no! Mervyn may have some one with him. Come in quietly by the servants' entrance.'

No danger that people would not be on foot there! As the brother and sister moved along the long stone passage, fringed with labelled bells, one open door showed two weary maidens still toiling over the plates of the late dinner; and another, standing ajar, revealed various men-servants regaling themselves; and words and tones caught Robert's ear making his brow lower with sudden pain.

Phœbe was proceeding to mount the stone stairs, when a rustling and chattering, as of maids descending, caused her and her brother to stand aside to make way, and down came a pair of heads and candles together over a green bandbox, and then voices in vulgar tones half suppressed. 'I couldn't venture it, not with Miss Juliana—but Miss Fulmort—she never looks over her bills, nor knows what is in her drawers—I told her it was faded, when she had never worn it once!'

And tittering, they passed by the brother and sister, who were still unseen, but Robert heaved a sigh and murmured, 'Miserable work!' somewhat to his sister's surprise, for to her the great ill-regulated household was an unquestioned institution, and she did not expect him to bestow so much compassion on Augusta's discarded bonnet. At the top of the steps they opened a door, and entered a great wide hall. All was exceedingly still. A gas-light was burning over the fire-place, but the corners were in gloom, and the coats and cloaks looked like human figures in the distance. Phœbe waited while Robert lighted her candle for her. Albeit she was not nervous, she started when a door was

sharply pushed open, and another figure appeared; but it was nothing worse than her brother Mervyn, in easy costume, and redolent of tobacco.

About three years older than Robert, he was more neatly though not so strongly made, shorter, and with more regular features, but much less countenance. If the younger brother had a worn and dejected aspect, the elder, except in moments of excitement, looked *bored*. It was as if Robert really had the advantage of him in knowing what to be out of spirits about.

‘Oh! it’s you, is it?’ said he, coming forward, with a sauntering, scuffling movement in his slippers. ‘You larking, Phœbe? What next?’

‘I have been drinking tea with Miss Charlecote,’ explained Phœbe.

Mervyn slightly shrugged his shoulders, murmuring something about ‘Lively pastime.’

‘I could not fetch her sooner,’ said Robert, ‘for my father went to sleep, and no one chose to be at the pains of entertaining Crabbe.’

‘Ay—a prevision of his staying to dinner made me stay and dine with the –th mess. Very sagacious—eh, Pheebe?’ said he, turning, as if he liked to look into her fresh face.

‘Too sagacious,’ said she, smiling; ‘for you left him all to Robert.’

Manner and look expressed that this was a matter of no concern, and he said ungraciously: ‘Nobody detained Robert, it was his own concern.’

‘Respect to my father and his guests,’ said Robert, with downright gravity that gave it the effect of a reproach.

Mervyn only raised his shoulders up to his ears in contempt, took up his candle, and wished Phœbe good night.

Poor Mervyn Fulmort! Discontent had been his life-long comrade. He detested his father’s occupation as galling to family pride, yet was greedy both of the profits and the management. He hated country business and country life, yet chafed at not having the control of his mother’s estate, and grumbled at all his father’s measures. ‘What should an old distiller know of landed property?’ In fact he saw the same difference between himself and his father as did the ungracious Plantagenet between the son of a Count and the son of a King; and for want of Provençal troubadours with whom to rebel, he supplied their place by the turf and the billiard-table. At present he was expiating some heavy debts by a forced residence with his parents, and unwilling attention to the office, a most distasteful position, which he never attempted to improve, and which permitted him both the tedium of idleness and complaints against all the employment to which he was necessitated.

The ill-managed brothers were just nearly enough of an age for rivalry, and had never loved one another even as children. Robert’s steadiness had been made a reproach to Mervyn, and his grave, rather surly character had never been conciliating. The independence left to the younger brother by their mother’s relative was grudged by the elder as an injury to himself, and it was one of the misfortunes of Beauchamp that the two sons had never been upon happy terms together. Indeed, save that Robert’s right principles and silent habits hindered him from readily giving or taking offence, there might have been positive outbreaks of a very unbrotherly nature.

CHAPTER II

*Enough of science and of art,
Close up those barren leaves!
Come forth, and bring with you a heart
That watches and receives.*

—Wordsworth

‘Half-past five, Miss Phœbe.’

‘Thank you;’ and before her eyes were open, Phœbe was on the floor.

Six was the regulation hour. Systematic education had discovered that half-an-hour was the maximum allowable for morning toilette, and at half-past six the young ladies must present themselves in the school-room.

The Bible, Prayer Book, and ‘Daily Meditations’ could have been seldom touched, had not Phœbe, ever since Robert had impressed on her the duty of such constant study, made an arrangement for gaining an extra half-hour. Cold mornings and youthful sleepiness had received a daily defeat: and, mayhap, it was such a course of victory that made her frank eyes so blithesome, and her step so free and light.

That bright scheme, too, shone before her, as such a secret of glad hope, that, knowing how uncertain were her chances of pleasure, she prayed that she might not set her heart on it. It was no trifle to her, and her simple spirit ventured to lay her wishes before her loving Father in Heaven, and entreat that she might not be denied, if it were right for her and would be better for Robert; or, if not, that she might be good under the disappointment.

Her orisons sent her forth all brightness, with her small head raised like that of a young fawn, her fresh lips parted by an incipient smile of hope, and her cheeks in a rosy glow of health, a very Hebe, as Mr. Saville had once called her.

Such a morning face as hers was not always met by Miss Fennimore, who, herself able to exist on five hours’ sleep, had no mercy on that of her pupils; and she rewarded Phœbe’s smiling good-morrow with ‘This is better than I expected, you returned home so late.’

‘Robert could not come for me early,’ said Phœbe.

‘How did you spend the evening?’

‘Miss Charlecote read aloud to me. It was a delightful German story.’

‘Miss Charlecote is a very well-informed person, and I am glad the time was not absolutely lost. I hope you observed the condensation of the vapours on your way home.’

‘Robert was talking to me, and the nightingales were singing.’

‘It is a pity,’ said Miss Fennimore, not unkindly, ‘that you should not cultivate the habit of observation. Women can seldom theorize, but they should always observe facts, as these are the very groundwork of discovery, and such a rare opportunity as a walk at night should not be neglected.’

It was no use to plead that this was all very well when there was no brother Robert with his destiny in the scales, so Phœbe made a meek assent, and moved to the piano, suppressing a sigh as Miss Fennimore set off on a domiciliary visit to the other sisters.

Mr. Fulmort liked his establishment to prove his consequence, and to the old family mansion of the Mervyns he had added a whole wing for the educational department. Above, there was a passage, with pretty little bed-rooms opening from it; below there were two good-sized rooms, with their own door opening into the garden. The elder ones had long ago deserted it, and so completely shut off was it from the rest of the house, that the governess and her pupils were as secluded as though in a separate dwelling. The schoolroom was no repulsive-looking abode; it was furnished almost well

enough for a drawing-room; and only the easels, globes, and desks, the crayon studies on the walls, and a formidable time-table showed its real destination.

The window looked out into a square parterre, shut in with tall laurel hedges, and filled with the gayest and sweetest blossoms. It was Mrs. Fulmort's garden for cut flowers; supplying the bouquets that decked her tables, or were carried to wither at balls; and there were three long, narrow beds, that Phoebe and her younger sisters still called theirs, and loved with the pride of property; but, indeed, the bright carpeting of the whole garden was something especially their own, rejoicing their eyes, and unvalued by the rest of the house. On the like liberal scale were the salaries of the educators.

Governesses were judged according to their demands; and the highest bidder was supposed to understand her own claims best. Miss Fennimore was a finishing governess of the highest order, thinking it an insult to be offered a pupil below her teens, or to lose one till nearly beyond them; nor was she far from being the treasure that Mrs. Fulmort pronounced her, in gratitude for the absence of all the explosions produced by the various imperfections of her predecessors.

A highly able woman, and perfectly sincere, she possessed the qualities of a ruler, and had long experience in the art. Her discipline was perfect in machinery, and her instructions admirably complete. No one could look at her keen, sensible, self-possessed countenance, her decided mouth, ever busy hands, and unpretending but well-chosen style of dress, without seeing that her energy and intelligence were of a high order; and there was principle likewise, though no one ever quite penetrated to the foundation of it. Certainly she was not an irreligious person; she conformed, as she said, to the habits of each family she lived with, and she highly estimated moral perfections. Now and then a degree of scorn, for the narrowness of dogma, would appear in reading history, but in general she was understood to have opinions which she did not obtrude.

As a teacher she was excellent; but her own strong conformation prevented her from understanding that young girls were incapable of such tension of intellect as an enthusiastic scholar of forty-two, and that what was sport to her was toil to a mind unaccustomed to constant attention.

Change of labour is not rest, unless it be through gratification of the will. Her very best pupil she had killed. Finding a very sharp sword, in a very frail scabbard, she had whetted the one and worn down the other, by every stimulus in her power, till a jury of physicians might have found her guilty of manslaughter; but perfectly unconscious of her own agency in causing the atrophy, her dear Anna Webster lived foremost in her affections, the model for every subsequent pupil. She seldom remained more than two years in a family. Sometimes the young brains were over-excited; more often they fell into a dreary state of drilled diligence; but she was too much absorbed in the studies to look close into the human beings, and marvelled when the fathers and mothers were blind enough to part with her on the plea of health and need of change.

On the whole she had never liked any of her charges since the renowned Anna Webster so well as Phoebe Fulmort; although her abilities did not rise above the 'very fair,' and she was apt to be bewildered in metaphysics and political economy; but then she had none of the eccentricities of will and temper of Miss Fennimore's clever girls, nor was she like most good-humoured ones, recklessly *insouciant*. Her only drawback, in the governess's eyes, was that she never seemed desirous of going beyond what was daily required of her—each study was a duty, and not a subject of zeal.

Presently Miss Fennimore came back, followed by the two sisters, neither of them in the best of tempers. Maria, a stout, clumsily-made girl of fifteen, had the same complexion and open eyes as Phoebe, but her colouring was muddled, the gaze full-orbed and vacant, and the lips, always pouting, were just now swelled with the vexation that filled her prominent eyelids with tears. Bertha, two years younger, looked as if nature had designed her for a boy, and the change into a girl was not yet decided. She, too, was very like Maria; but Maria's open nostrils were in her a droll *retroussé*, puggish little nose; her chin had a boyish squareness and decision, her round cheeks had two comical dimples, her eyes were either stretched in defiance or narrowed up with fun, and a slight cast in one gave a peculiar archness and character to her face; her skin, face, hands, and all, were uniformly pinky; her

hair in such obstinate yellow curls, that it was to be hoped, for her sake, that the fashion of being *crépé* might continue. The brow lowered in petulance; and as she kissed Phœbe, she muttered in her ear a vituperation of the governess in schoolroom *patois*; then began tossing the lesson-books in the air and catching them again, as a preliminary to finding the places, thus drawing on herself a reproof in German. French and German were alternately spoken in lesson hours by Phœbe and Bertha, who had lived with foreign servants from infancy; but poor Maria had not the faculty of keeping the tongues distinct, and corrections only terrified her into confusion worse confounded, until Miss Fennimore had in despair decided that English was the best alternative.

Phœbe practised vigorously. Aware that nothing pleasant was passing, and that, be it what it might, she could do no good, she was glad to stop her ears with her music, until eight o'clock brought a pause in the shape of breakfast. Formerly the schoolroom party had joined the family meal, but since the two elder girls had been out, and Mervyn's friends had been often in the house, it had been decided that the home circle was too numerous; and what had once been the play-room was allotted to be the eating-room of the younger ones, without passing the red door, on the other side of which lay the world.

Breakfast was announced by the schoolroom maid, and Miss Fennimore rose. No sooner was her back turned, than Bertha indulged in a tremendous writhing yawn, wriggling in her chair, and clenching both fat fists, as she threatened with each, at her governess's retreating figure, so ludicrously, that Phœbe smiled while she shook her head, and an explosive giggle came from Maria, causing the lady to turn and behold Miss Bertha demure as ever, and a look of disconsolate weariness fast settling down on each of the two young faces. The unbroken routine pressed heavily at those fit moments for family greetings and for relaxation, and even Phœbe would gladly have been spared the German account of the Holt and of Miss Charlecote's book, for which she was called upon. Bertha meanwhile, to whom waggishness was existence, was carrying on a silent drama on her plate, her roll being a quarry, and her knife the workmen attacking it. Now she undermined, now acted an explosion, with uplifted eyebrows and an indicated 'puff!' with her lips, with constant dumb-show directed to Maria, who, without half understanding, was in a constant suppressed titter, sometimes concealed by her pocket-handkerchief.

Quick as Miss Fennimore was, and often as she frowned on Maria's outbreaks, she never could detect their provocative. Over-restraint and want of sympathy were direct instruction in unscrupulous slyness of amusement. A sentence of displeasure on Maria's ill-mannered folly was in the act of again filling her eyes with tears, when there was a knock at the door, and all the faces beamed with glad expectation.

It was Robert. This was the time of day when he knew Miss Fennimore could best tolerate him, and he seldom failed to make his appearance on his way down-stairs, the only one of the privileged race who was a wonted object on this side the baize door. Phœbe thought he looked more cheerful, and indeed gravity could hardly have withstood Bertha's face, as she gave a mischievous tweak to his hair behind, under colour of putting her arm round his neck.

'Well, Curlylocks, how much mischief did you do yesterday?'

'I'd no spirits for mischief,' she answered, with mock pitifulness, twinkling up her eyes, and rubbing them with her knuckles as if she were crying. 'You barbarous wretch, taking Phœbe to feast on strawberries and cream with Miss Charlecote, and leaving poor me to poke in that stupid drawing-room, with nothing to do but to count the scollops of mamma's flounce!'

'It is your turn. Will Miss Fennimore kindly let you have a walk with me this evening?'

'And me,' said Maria.

'You, of course. May I come for them at five o'clock?'

'I can hardly tell what to say about Maria. I do not like to disappoint her, but she knows that nothing displeases me so much as that ill-mannered habit of giggling,' said Miss Fennimore, not

without concern. Merciful as to Maria's attainments, she was strict as to her manners, and was striving to teach her self-restraint enough to be unobtrusive.

Poor Maria's eyes were glassy with tears, her chest heaved with sobs, and she broke out, 'O pray, Miss Fennimore, O pray!' while all the others interceded for her; and Bertha, well knowing that it was all her fault, avoided the humiliation of a confession, by the apparent generosity of exclaiming, 'Take us both to-morrow instead, Robin.'

Robert's journey was, however, fixed for that day, and on this plea, licence was given for the walk. Phoebe smiled congratulation, but Maria was slow in cheering up; and when, on returning to the schoolroom, the three sisters were left alone together for a few moments, she pressed up to Phoebe's side, and said, 'Phoebe, I've not said my prayers. Do you think anything will happen to me?'

Her awfully mysterious tone set Bertha laughing. 'Yes, Maria, all the cows in the park will run at you,' she was beginning, when the grave rebuke of Phoebe's eyes cut her short.

'How was it, my dear?' asked Phoebe, tenderly fondling her sister.

'I was so sleepy, and Bertha would blow soap-bubbles in her hands while we were washing, and then Miss Fennimore came, and I've been naughty now, and I know I shall go on, and then Robin won't take me.'

'I will ask Miss Fennimore to let you go to your room, dearest,' said Phoebe. 'You must not play again in dressing time, for there's nothing so sad as to miss our prayers. You are a good girl to care so much. Had you time for yours, Bertha?'

'Oh, plenty!' with a toss of her curly head. 'I don't take ages about things, like Maria.'

'Prayers cannot be hurried,' said Phoebe, looking distressed, and she was about to remind Bertha to whom she spoke in prayer, when the child cut her short by the exclamation, 'Nonsense, Maria, about being naughty. You know I always make you laugh when I please, and that has more to do with it than saying your prayers, I fancy.'

'Perhaps,' said Phoebe, very sadly, 'if you had said yours more in earnest, my poor Bertha, you would either not have made Maria laugh, or would not have left her to bear all the blame.'

'Why do you call me poor?' exclaimed Bertha, with a half-offended, half-diverted look.

'Because I wish so much that you knew better, or that I could help you better,' said Phoebe, gently.

There Miss Fennimore entered, displeased at the English sounds, and at finding them all, as she thought, loitering. Phoebe explained Maria's omission, and Miss Fennimore allowed her five minutes in her own room, saying that this must not become a precedent, though she did not wish to oppress her conscience.

Bertha's eyes glittered with a certain triumph, as she saw that Miss Fennimore was of her mind, and anticipated no consequences from the neglect, but only made the concession as to a superstition.

Without disbelief, the child trained only to reason, and quick to detect fallacy, was blind to all that was not material. And how was the spiritual to be brought before her?

Phoebe might well sigh as she sat down to her abstract of Schlegel's Lectures. 'If any one would but teach them,' she thought; 'but there is no time at all, and I myself do not know half so much of those things as one of Miss Charlecote's lowest classes.'

Phoebe was a little mistaken. An earnest mind taught how to learn, with access to the Bible and Prayer Book, could gain more from these fountain-heads than any external teaching could impart; and she could carry her difficulties to Robert. Still it was out of her power to assist her sisters.

Surveillance and driving absolutely left no space free from Miss Fennimore's requirements; and all that there was to train those young ones in faith, was the manner in which it *lived* and worked in her.

Nor of this effect could she be conscious.

As to dreams or repinings, or even listening to her hopes and fears for her project of pleasure, they were excluded by the concentrated attention that Miss Fennimore's system enforced. Time and capacity were so much on the stretch, that the habit of doing *what* she was doing, and nothing

else, had become second nature to the docile and duteous girl; and she had become little sensible to interruptions; so she went on with her German, her Greek, and her algebra, scarcely hearing the repetitions of the lessons, or the counting as Miss Fennimore presided over Maria's practice, a bit of drudgery detested by the governess, but necessarily persevered in, for Maria loved music, and had just voice and ear sufficient to render this single accomplishment not hopeless, but a certain want of power of sustained effort made her always break down at the moment she seemed to be doing best.

Former governesses had lost patience, but Miss Fennimore had early given up the case, and never scolded her for her failures; she made her attempt less, and she was improving more, and shedding fewer tears than under any former dynasty. Even a stern dominion is better for the subjects than an uncertain and weak one; regularity gives a sense of reliance; and constant occupation leaves so little time for being naughty, that Bertha herself was getting into training, and on the present day her lessons were exemplary, always with a view to the promised walk with her brother, one of the greatest pleasures ever enjoyed by the denizens of the west wing.

Phoebe's pleasure was less certain, and less dependent on her merits, yet it invigorated her efforts to do all she had to do with all her might, even into the statement of the pros and cons of customs and free-trade, which she was required to produce as her morning's exercise. In the midst, her ear detected the sound of wheels, and her heart throbbed in the conviction that it was Miss Charlecote's pony carriage; nay, she found her pen had indited 'Robin would be so glad,' instead of 'revenue to the government,' and while scratching the words out beyond all legibility, she blamed herself for betraying such want of self-command.

No summons came, no tidings, the wheels went away; her heart sank, and her spirit revolted against an unfeeling, unutterably wearisome captivity; but it was only a moment's fluttering against the bars, the tears were driven back with the thought, 'After all, the decision is guided from Above.

If I stay at home, it *must* be best for me. Let me try to be good!' and she forced her mind back to her exports and her customs. It was such discipline as few girls could have exercised, but the conscientious effort was no small assistance in being resigned; and in the precious minutes granted in which to prepare herself for dinner, she found it the less hard task to part with her anticipations of delight and brace herself to quiet, contented duty.

The meal was beginning when, with a very wide expansion of the door, appeared a short, consequential-looking personage, of such plump, rounded proportions, that she seemed ready to burst out of her riding-habit, and of a broad, complacent visage, somewhat overblooming. It was Miss Fulmort, the eldest of the family, a young lady just past thirty, a very awful distance from the schoolroom party, to whom she nodded with good-natured condescension, saying: 'Ah! I thought I should find you at dinner; I'm come for something to sustain nature. The riding party are determined to have me with them, and they won't wait for luncheon. Thank you, yes, a piece of mutton, if there were any under side. How it reminds me of old times. I used so to look forward to never seeing a loin of mutton again.'

'As your chief ambition?' said Miss Fennimore, who, governess as she was, could not help being a little satirical, especially when Bertha's eyes twinkled responsively.

'One does get so tired of mutton and rice-pudding,' answered the less observant Miss Fulmort, who was but dimly conscious of any one's existence save her own, and could not have credited a governess laughing at her; 'but really this is not so bad, after all, for a change; and some pale ale. You don't mean that you exist without pale ale?'

'We all drink water by preference,' said Miss Fennimore.

'Indeed! Miss Watson, our finishing governess, never drank anything but claret, and she always had little *pâtés*, or fish, or something, because she said her appetite was to be consulted, she was so delicate. She was very thin, I know; and what a figure you have, Phoebe! I suppose that is water drinking. Bridger did say it would reduce me to leave off pale ale, but I can't get on without it, I get so horridly low. Don't you think that's a sign, Miss Fennimore?'

‘I beg your pardon, a sign of what?’

‘That one can’t go on without it. Miss Charlecote said she thought it was all constitution whether one is stout or not, and that nothing made much difference, when I asked her about German wines.’

‘Oh! Augusta, has Miss Charlecote been here this morning?’ exclaimed Phœbe.

‘Yes; she came at twelve o’clock, and there was I actually pinned down to entertain her, for mamma was not come down. So I asked her about those light foreign wines, and whether they do really make one thinner; you know one always has them at her house.’

‘Did mamma see her?’ asked poor Phœbe, anxiously.

‘Oh yes, she was bent upon it. It was something about you. Oh! she wants to take you to stay with her in that horrible hole of hers in the City—very odd of her. What do you advise me to do, Miss Fennimore? Do you think those foreign wines would bring me down a little, or that they would make me low and sinking?’

‘Really, I have no experience on the subject!’ said Miss Fennimore, loftily.

‘What did mamma say?’ was poor Phœbe’s almost breathless question.

‘Oh! it makes no difference to mamma’ (Phœbe’s heart bounded); but Augusta went on: ‘she always has her soda-water, you know; but of course I should take a hamper from Bass. I hate being unprovided.’

‘But about my going to London?’ humbly murmured Phœbe.

‘What *did* she say?’ considered the elder sister, aloud. ‘I don’t know, I’m sure. I was not attending—the heat does make one so sleepy—but I know we all wondered she should want you at your age. You know some people take a spoonful of vinegar to fine themselves down, and some of those wines *are* very acid,’ she continued, pressing on with her great subject of consultation.

‘If it be an object with you, Miss Fulmort, I should recommend the vinegar,’ said Miss Fennimore. ‘There is nothing like doing a thing outright!’

‘And, oh! how glorious it would be to see her taking it!’ whispered Bertha into Phœbe’s ear, unheard by Augusta, who, in her satisfied stolidity, was declaring, ‘No, I could not undertake that. I am the worst person in the world for taking anything disagreeable.’

And having completed her meal, which she had contrived to make out of the heart of the joint, leaving the others little but fat, she walked off to her ride, believing that she had done a gracious and condescending action in making conversation with her inferiors of the west wing.

Yet Augusta Fulmort might have been good for something, if her mind and her affections had not lain fallow ever since she escaped from a series of governesses who taught her self-indulgence by example.

‘I wonder what mamma said!’ exclaimed Phœbe, in her strong craving for sympathy in her suspense.

‘I am sorry the subject has been brought forward, if it is to unsettle you, Phœbe,’ said Miss Fennimore, not unkindly; ‘I regret your being twice disappointed; but, if your mother should refer it to me, as I make no doubt she will, I should say that it would be a great pity to break up our course of studies.’

‘It would only be for a little while,’ sighed Phœbe; ‘and Miss Charlecote is to show me all the museums. I should see more with her than ever I shall when I am come out; and I should be with Robert.’

‘I intended asking permission to take you through a systematic course of lectures and specimens when the family are next in town,’ said Miss Fennimore. ‘Ordinary, desultory sight-seeing leaves few impressions; and though Miss Charlecote is a superior person, her mind is not of a sufficiently scientific turn to make her fully able to direct you. I shall trust to your good sense, Phœbe, for again submitting to defer the pleasure till it can be enhanced.’

Good sense had a task imposed on it for which it was quite inadequate; but there was something else in Phœbe which could do the work better than her unconvinced reason. Even had she been

sure of the expediency of being condemned to the schoolroom, no good sense would have brought that resolute smile, or driven back the dew in her eyes, or enabled her voice to say, with such sweet meekness, 'Very well, Miss Fennimore; I dare say it may be right.'

Miss Fennimore was far more concerned than if the submission had been grudging. She debated with herself whether she should consider her resolution irrevocable.

Ten minutes were allowed after dinner in the parterre, and these could only be spent under the laurel hedge; the sun was far too hot everywhere else. Phœbe had here no lack of sympathy, but had to restrain Bertha, who, with angry gestures, was pronouncing the governess a horrid cross-patch, and declaring that no girls ever were used as they were; while Maria observed, that if Phœbe went to London, she must go too.

'We shall all go some day,' said Phœbe, cheerfully, 'and we shall enjoy it all the more if we are good now. Never mind, Bertha, we shall have some nice walks.'

'Yes, all bothered with botany,' muttered Bertha.

'I thought, at least, you would be glad of me,' said Phœbe, smiling; 'you who stay at home.'

'To be sure, I am,' said Bertha; 'but it is such a shame! I shall tell Robin, and he'll say so too. I shall tell him you nearly cried!'

'Don't vex Robin,' said Phœbe. 'When you go out, you should set yourself to tell him pleasant things.'

'So I'm to tell him you wouldn't go on any account. You like your political economy much too well!'

'Suppose you say nothing about it,' said Phœbe. 'Make yourself merry with him. That's what you've got to do. He takes you out to entertain you, not to worry about grievances.'

'Do you never talk about grievances?' asked Bertha, twinkling up her eyes.

Phœbe hesitated. 'Not my own,' she said, 'because I have not got any.'

'Has Robert, then?' asked Bertha.

'Nobody has grievances who is out of the schoolroom,' opined Maria; and as she uttered this profound sentiment, the tinkle of Miss Fennimore's little bell warned the sisters to return to the studies, which in the heat of summer were pursued in the afternoon, that the walk might be taken in the cool of the evening. Reading aloud, drawing, and sensible plain needlework were the avocations till it was time to learn the morrow's lessons. Phœbe being beyond this latter work, drew on, and in the intervals of helping Maria with her geography, had time to prepare such a bright face as might make Robert think lightly of her disappointment, and not reckon it as another act of tyranny.

When he opened the door, however, there was that in his looks which made her spirits leap up like an elastic spring; and his 'Well, Phœbe!' was almost triumphant.

'Is it—am I—' was all she could say.

'Has no one thought it worth while to tell you?'

'Don't you know,' interposed Bertha, 'you on the other side the red baize door might be all married, or dead and buried, for aught we should hear. But is Phœbe to go?'

'I believe so.'

'Are you sure?' asked Phœbe, afraid yet to hope.

'Yes. My father heard the invitation, and said that you were a good girl, and deserved a holiday.'

Commendation from that quarter was so rare, that excess of gladness made Phœbe cast down her eyes and colour intensely, a little oppressed by the victory over her governess. But Miss Fennimore spoke warmly. 'He cannot think her more deserving than I do. I am rejoiced not to have been consulted, for I could hardly have borne to inflict such a mortification on her, though these interruptions are contrary to my views. As it is, Phœbe, my dear, I wish you joy.'

'Thank you,' Phœbe managed to say, while the happy tears fairly started. In that chilly land, the least approach to tenderness was like the gleam in which the hardy woodbine leaflets unfold to sun themselves.

Thankful for small mercies, thought Robert, looking at her with fond pity; but at least the dear child will have one fortnight of a more genial atmosphere, and soon, maybe, I shall transplant her to be Lucilla's darling as well as mine, free from task-work, and doing the labours of love for which she is made!

He was quite in spirits, and able to reply in kind to the freaks and jokes of his little sister, as she started, spinning round him like a humming-top, and singing—

Will you go to the wood, Robin a Bobbin?

giving safe vent to an ebullition of spirits that must last her a good while, poor little maiden!

Phoebe took a sober walk with Miss Fennimore, receiving advice on methodically journalizing what she might see, and on the scheme of employments which might prevent her visit from being waste of time. The others would have resented the interference with the holiday; but Phoebe, though a little sorry to find that tasks were not to be off her mind, was too grateful for Miss Fennimore's cordial consent to entertain any thought except of obedience to the best of her power.

Miss Fennimore was politely summoned to Mrs. Fulmort's dressing-room for the official communication; but this day was no exception to the general custom, that the red baize door was not passed by the young ladies until their evening appearance in the drawing-room. Then the trio descended, all alike in white muslin, made high, and green sashes—a dress carefully distinguishing Phoebe as not introduced, but very becoming to her, with the simple folds and the little net ruche, suiting admirably the tall, rounded slenderness of her shape, her long neck, and short, childish contour of face, where there smiled a joy of anticipation almost inappreciable to those who know not what it is to spend day after day with nothing particular to look forward to.

Very grand was the drawing-room, all amber-coloured with satin-wood, satin and gold, and with everything useless and costly encumbering tables that looked as if nothing could ever be done upon them. Such a room inspired a sense of being in company, and it was no wonder that Mrs. Fulmort and her two elder daughters swept in in as decidedly procession style as if they had formed part of a train of twenty.

The star that bestowed three female sovereigns to Europe seemed to have had the like influence on Hiltonbury parish, since both its squires were heiresses. Miss Mervyn would have been a happier woman had she married a plain country gentleman, like those of her own stock, instead of giving a county position to a man of lower origin and enormous monied wealth. To live up to the claims of that wealth had been her business ever since, and health and enjoyment had been so completely sacrificed to it, that for many years past the greater part of her time had been spent in resting and making herself up for her appearance in the evening, when she conducted her elder daughters to their gaieties. Faded and tallowy in complexion, so as to be almost ghastly in her blue brocade and heavy gold ornaments, she reclined languidly on a large easy-chair, saying with half-closed eyes—

‘Well, Phoebe, Miss Fennimore has told you of Miss Charlecote's invitation.’

‘Yes, mamma. I am very, *very* much obliged!’

‘You know you are not to fancy yourself come out,’ said Juliana, the second sister, who had a good tall figure, and features and complexion not far from beauty, but marred by a certain shrewish tone and air.

‘Oh, no,’ answered Phoebe; ‘but with Miss Charlecote that will make no difference.’

‘Probably not,’ said Juliana; ‘for of course you will see nobody but a set of old maids and clergymen and their wives.’

‘She need not go far for old maids,’ whispered Bertha to Maria.

‘Pray, in which class do you reckon the Sandbrooks?’ said Phoebe, smiling; ‘for she chiefly goes to meet them.’

‘She may go!’ said Juliana, scornfully; ‘but Lucilla Sandbrook is far past attending to her!’

‘I wonder whether the Charterises will take any notice of Phœbe?’ exclaimed Augusta.

‘My dear,’ said Mrs. Fulmort, waking slowly to another idea, ‘I will tell Boodle to talk to—what’s your maid’s name?—about your dresses.’

‘Oh, mamma,’ interposed Juliana, ‘it will be only poking about the exhibitions with Miss Charlecote. You may have that plaid silk of mine that I was going to have worn out abroad, half-price for her.’

Bertha fairly made a little stamp at Juliana, and clenched her fist.

If Phœbe dreaded anything in the way of dress, it was Juliana’s half-price.

‘My dear, your papa would not like her not to be well fitted out,’ said her mother; ‘and Honora Charlecote always has such handsome things. I wish Boodle could put mine on like hers.’

‘Oh, very well!’ said Juliana, rather offended; ‘only it should be understood what is to be done if the Charterises ask her to any of their parties. There will be such mistakes and confusion if she meets any one we know; and you particularly objected to having her brought forward.’

Phœbe’s eye was a little startled, and Bertha set her front teeth together on edge, and looked viciously at Juliana.

‘My dear, Honora Charlecote never goes out,’ said Mrs. Fulmort.

‘If she should, you understand, Phœbe,’ said Juliana.

Coffee came in at the moment, and Augusta criticized the strength of it, which made a diversion, during which Bertha slipped out of the room, with a face replete with mischievous exultation.

‘Are not you going to play to-night, my dears?’ asked Mrs. Fulmort. ‘What was that duet I heard you practising?’

‘Come, Juliana,’ said the elder sister, ‘I meant to go over it again; I am not satisfied with my part.’

‘I have to write a note,’ said Juliana, moving off to another table; whereupon Phœbe ventured to propose herself as a substitute, and was accepted.

Maria sat entranced, with her mouth open; and presently Mrs. Fulmort looked up from a kind of doze to ask who was playing. For some moments she had no answer. Maria was too much awed for speech in the drawing-room; and though Bertha had come back, she had her back to her mother, and did not hear. Mrs. Fulmort exerted herself to sit up and turn her head.

‘Was that Phœbe?’ she said. ‘You have a clear, good touch, my dear, as they used to say I had when I was at school at Bath. Play another of your pieces, my dear.’

‘I am ready now, Augusta,’ said Juliana, advancing.

Little girls were not allowed at the piano when officers might be coming in from the dining-room, so Maria’s face became vacant again, for Juliana’s music awoke no echoes within her.

Phœbe beckoned her to a remote ottoman, a receptacle for the newspapers of the week, and kept her turning over the *Illustrated News*, an unfailing resource with her, but powerless to occupy Bertha after the first Saturday; and Bertha, turning a deaf ear to the assurance that there was something very entertaining about a tiger-hunt, stood, solely occupied by eyeing Juliana.

Was she studying ‘come-out’ life as she watched her sisters surrounded by the gentlemen who presently herded round the piano?

It was nearly the moment when the young ones were bound to withdraw, when Mervyn, coming hastily up to their ottoman, had almost stumbled over Maria’s foot.

‘Beg pardon. Oh, it was only you! What a cow it is!’ said he, tossing over the papers.

‘What are you looking for, Mervyn?’ asked Phœbe.

‘An advertisement—*Bell’s Life* for the 3rd. That rascal, Mears, must have taken it.’

She found it for him, and likewise the advertisement, which he, missing once, was giving up in despair.

‘I say,’ he observed, while she was searching, ‘so you are to chip the shell.’

‘I’m only going to London—I’m not coming out.’

‘Gammon!’ he said, with an odd wink. ‘You need never go in again, like the what’s-his-name in the fairy tale, or you are a sillier child than I take you for. They’—nodding at the piano—‘are getting a terrible pair of old cats, and we want something young and pretty about.’

With this unusual compliment, Phœbe, seeing the way clear to the door, rose to depart, most reluctantly followed by Bertha, and more willingly by Maria, who began, the moment they were in the hall—

‘Phœbe, why do they get a couple of terrible old cats? I don’t like them. I shall be afraid.’

‘Mervyn didn’t mean—’ began perplexed Phœbe, cut short by Bertha’s boisterous laughter. ‘Oh, Maria, what a goose you are! You’ll be the death of me some day! Why, Juliana and Augusta are the cats themselves. Oh, dear! I wanted to kiss Mervyn for saying so. Oh, wasn’t it fun! And now, Maria,—oh! if I could have stayed a moment longer!’

‘Bertha, Bertha, not such a noise in the hall. Come, Maria; mind, you must not tell anybody.

Bertha, come,’ expostulated Phœbe, trying to drag her sister to the red baize door; but Bertha stood, bending nearly double, exaggerating the helplessness of her paroxysms of laughter.

‘Well, at least the cat will have something to scratch her,’ she gasped out. ‘Oh, I did so want to stay and see!’

‘Have you been playing any tricks?’ exclaimed Phœbe, with consternation, as Bertha’s deportment recurred to her.

‘Tricks?—I couldn’t help it. Oh, listen, Phœbe!’ cried Bertha, with her wicked look of triumph.

‘I brought home such a lovely sting-nettle for Miss Fennimore’s peacock caterpillar; and when I heard how kind dear Juliana was to you about your visit to London, I thought she really must have it for a reward; so I ran away, and slyly tucked it into her bouquet; and I did so hope she would take it up to fiddle with when the gentlemen talk to her,’ said the elf, with an irresistibly comic imitation of Juliana’s manner towards gentlemen.

‘Bertha, this is beyond—’ began Phœbe.

‘Didn’t you sting your fingers?’ asked Maria.

Bertha stuck out her fat pink paws, embellished with sundry white lumps. ‘All pleasure,’ said she, ‘thinking of the jump Juliana will give, and how nicely it serves her.’

Phœbe was already on her way back to the drawing-rooms; Bertha sprang after, but in vain.

Never would she have risked the success of her trick, could she have guessed that Phœbe would have the temerity to return to the company!

Phœbe glided in without waiting for the sense of awkwardness, though she knew she should have to cross the whole room, and she durst not ask any one to bring the dangerous bouquet to her—not even Robert—he must not be stung in her service.

She met her mother’s astonished eye as she threaded her way; she wound round a group of gentlemen, and spied the article of which she was in quest, where Juliana had laid it down with her gloves on going to the piano. Actually she had it! She had seized it unperceived! Good little thief; it was a most innocent robbery. She crept away with a sense of guilt and desire to elude observation, positively starting when she encountered her father’s portly figure in the ante-room. He stopped her with ‘Going to bed, eh? So Miss Charlecote has taken a fancy to you, has she? It does you credit.

What shall you want for the journey?’

‘Boodle is going to see,’ began Phœbe, but he interrupted.

‘Will fifty do? I will have my daughters well turned out. All to be spent upon yourself, mind. Why, you’ve not a bit of jewellery on! Have you a watch?’

‘No, papa.’

‘Robert shall choose one for you, then. Come to my room any time for the cash; and if Miss Charlecote takes you anywhere among her set—good connections she has—and you want to be rigged out extra, send me in the bill—anything rather than be shabby.’

‘Thank you, papa! Then, if I am asked out anywhere, may I go?’

‘Why, what does the child mean? Anywhere that Miss Charlecote likes to take you of course.’

‘Only because I am not come out.’

‘Stuff about coming out! I don’t like my girls to be shy and backward. They’ve a right to show themselves anywhere; and you should be going out with us now, but somehow your poor mother doesn’t like the trouble of such a lot of girls. So don’t be shy, but make the most of yourself, for you won’t meet many better endowed, nor more highly accomplished. Good night, and enjoy yourself.’

Palpitating with wonder and pleasure, Phoebe escaped. Such permission, over-riding all Juliana’s injunctions, was worth a few nettle stings and a great fright; for Phoebe was not philosopher enough, in spite of Miss Fennimore—ay, and of Robert—not to have a keen desire to see a great party.

Her delay had so much convinced the sisters that her expedition had had some fearful consequences, that Maria was already crying lest dear Phoebe should be in disgrace; and Bertha had seated herself on the balusters, debating with herself whether, if Phoebe were suspected of the trick (a likely story) and condemned to lose her visit to London, she would confess herself the guilty person.

And when Phoebe came back, too much overcome with delight to do anything but communicate papa’s goodness, and rejoice in the unlimited power of making presents, Bertha triumphantly insisted on her confessing that it had been a capital thing that the nettles were in Juliana’s nosegay!

Phoebe shook her head; too happy to scold, too humble to draw the moral that the surest way to gratification is to remove the thorns from the path of others.

CHAPTER III

*She gives thee a garland woven fair,
Take care!
It is a fool's-cap for thee to wear,
Beware! Beware!
Trust her not,
She is fooling thee!*

—Longfellow, from *Müller*

Behold Phœbe Fulmort seated in a train on the way to London. She was a very pleasant spectacle to Miss Charlecote opposite to her, so peacefully joyous was her face, as she sat with the wind breathing in on her, in the calm luxury of contemplating the landscape gliding past the windows in all its summer charms, and the repose of having no one to hunt her into unvaried rationality.

Her eye was the first to detect Robert in waiting at the terminus, but he looked more depressed than ever, and scarcely smiled as he handed them to the carriage.

‘Get in, Robert, you are coming home with us,’ said Honor.

‘You have so much to take, I should encumber you.’

‘No, the sundries go in cabs, with the maids. Jump in.’

‘Do your friends arrive to-night?’

‘Yes; but that is no reason you should look so rueful! Make the most of Phœbe beforehand. Besides, Mr. Parsons is a Wykehamist.’

Robert took his place on the back seat, but still as if he would have preferred walking home.

Neither his sister nor his friend dared to ask whether he had seen Lucilla. Could she have refused him? or was her frivolity preying on his spirits?

Phœbe tried to interest him by the account of the family migration, and of Miss Fennimore’s promise that Maria and Bertha should have two half-hours of real play in the garden on each day when the lessons had been properly done; and how she had been so kind as to let Maria leave off trying to read a French book that had proved too hard for her, not perceiving why this instance of good-nature was not cheering to her brother.

Miss Charlecote’s house was a delightful marvel to Phœbe from the moment when she rattled into the paved court, entered upon the fragrant odour of the cedar hall, and saw the Queen of Sheba’s golden locks beaming with the evening light. She entered the drawing-room, pleasant-looking already, under the judicious arrangement of the housekeeper, who had set out the Holt flowers and arranged the books, so that it seemed full of welcome.

Phœbe ran from window to mantelpiece, enchanted with the quaint mixture of old and new, admiring carving and stained glass, and declaring that Owen had not prepared her for anything equal to this, until Miss Charlecote, going to arrange matters with her housekeeper, left the brother and sister together.

‘Well, Robin!’ said Phœbe, coming up to him anxiously.

He only crossed his arms on the mantelpiece, rested his head on them, and sighed.

‘Have you seen her?’

‘Not to speak to her.’

‘Have you called?’

‘No.’

‘Then where did you see her?’

‘She was riding in the Park. I was on foot.’

‘She could not have seen you!’ exclaimed Phœbe.

‘She did,’ replied Robert; ‘I was going to tell you. She gave me one of her sweetest, brightest smiles, such as only she can give. You know them, Phœbe. No assumed welcome, but a sudden flash and sparkle of real gladness.’

‘But why—what do you mean?’ asked Phœbe; ‘why have you not been to her? I thought from your manner that she had been neglecting you, but it seems to me all the other way.’

‘I cannot, Phœbe; I cannot put my poor pretensions forward in the set she is with. I know they would influence her, and that her decision would not be calm and mature.’

‘Her decision of what you are to be?’

‘That is fixed,’ said Robert, sighing.

‘Indeed! With papa.’

‘No, in my own mind. I have seen enough of the business to find that I could in ten years quadruple my capital, and in the meantime maintain her in the manner she prefers.’

‘You are quite sure she prefers it?’

‘She has done so ever since she could exercise a choice. I should feel myself doing her an injustice if I were to take advantage of any preference she may entertain for me to condemn her to what would be to her a dreary banishment.’

‘Not with you,’ cried Phœbe.

‘You know nothing about it, Phœbe. You have never led such a life, and you it would not hurt—attract, I mean; but lovely, fascinating, formed for admiration, and craving for excitement as she is, she is a being that can only exist in society. She would be miserable in homely retirement—I mean she would prey on herself. I could not ask it of her. If she consented, it would be without knowing her own tastes. No; all that remains is to find out whether she can submit to owe her wealth to our business.’

‘And shall you?’

‘I could not but defer it till I should meet her here,’ said Robert. ‘I shrink from seeing her with those cousins, or hearing her name with theirs. Phœbe, imagine my feelings when, going into Mervyn’s club with him, I heard “Rashe Charteris and Cilly Sandbrook” contemptuously discussed by those very names, and jests passing on their independent ways. I know how it is. Those people work on her spirit of enterprise, and she—too guileless and innocent to heed appearances. Phœbe, you do not wonder that I am nearly mad!’

‘Poor Robin!’ said Phœbe affectionately. ‘But, indeed, I am sure, if Lucy once had a hint—no, one could not tell her, it would shock her too much; but if she had the least idea that people could be so impertinent,’ and Phœbe’s cheeks glowed with shame and indignation, ‘she would only wish to go away as far as she could for fear of seeing any of them again. I am sure they were not gentlemen, Robin.’

‘A man must be supereminently a gentleman to respect a woman who does not *make* him do so,’ said Robert mournfully. ‘That Miss Charteris! Oh! that she were banished to Siberia!’

Phœbe meditated a few moments; then looking up, said, ‘I beg your pardon, Robin, but it does strike me that, if you think that this kind of life is not good for Lucilla, it cannot be right to sacrifice your own higher prospects to enable her to continue it.’

‘I tell you, Phœbe,’ said he, with some impatience, ‘I never was pledged. I may be of much more use and influence, and able to effect more extended good as a partner in a concern like this than as an obscure clergyman. Don’t you see?’

Phœbe had only time to utter a somewhat melancholy ‘Very likely,’ before Miss Charlecote returned to take her to her room, the promised brown cupboard, all wainscoted with delicious cedar, so deeply and uniformly panelled, that when shut, the door was not obvious; and it was like being in a box, for there were no wardrobes, only shelves shut by doors into the wall, which the old usage of the household tradition called *awmries* (*armoires*). The furniture was reasonably modern, but not

obtrusively so. There was a delicious recess in the deep window, with a seat and a table in it, and a box of mignonette along the sill. It looked out into the little high-walled entrance court, and beyond to the wall of the warehouse opposite; and the roar of the great city thoroughfare came like the distant surging of the ocean. Seldom had young maiden's bower given more satisfaction. Phœbe looked about her as if she hardly knew how to believe in anything so unlike her ordinary life, and she thanked her friend again and again with such enthusiasm, that Miss Charlecote laughed as she told her she liked the old house to be appreciated, since it had, like Pompeii, been potted for posterity.

'And thank you, my dear,' she added with a sigh, 'for making my coming home so pleasant. May you never know how I dreaded the finding it full of emptiness.'

'Dear Miss Charlecote!' cried Phœbe, venturing upon a warm kiss, and thrilled with sad pleasure as she was pressed in a warm, clinging embrace, and felt tears on her cheek. 'You have been so happy here!'

'It is not the past, my dear,' said Honora; 'I could live peacefully on the thought of that. The shadows that people this house are very gentle ones. It is the present!'

She broke off, for the gates of the court were opening to admit a detachment of cabs, containing the persons and properties of the new incumbent and his wife. He had been a curate of Mr. Charlecote, since whose death he had led a very hard-working life in various towns; and on his recent presentation to the living of St. Wulstan's, Honora had begged him and his wife to make her house their home while determining on the repairs of the parsonage. She ran down to meet them with gladsome steps. She had never entirely dropped her intercourse with Mr. Parsons, though seldom meeting; and he was a relic of the past, one of the very few who still called her by her Christian name, and regarded her more as the clergyman's daughter of St. Wulstan's than as lady of the Holt.

Mrs. Parsons was a thorough clergyman's wife, as active as himself, and much loved and esteemed by Honora, with whom, in their few meetings, she had 'got on' to admiration.

There they were, looking after luggage, and paying cabs so heedfully as not to remark their hostess standing on the stairs; and she had time to survey them with the affectionate curiosity of meeting after long absence, and with pleasure in remarking that there was little change. Perhaps they were rather more gray, and had grown more alike by force of living and thinking together; but they both looked equally alert and cheerful, and as if fifty and fifty-five were the very prime of years for substantial work.

Their first glances at her were full of the same anxiety for her health and strength, as they heartily shook hands, and accompanied her into the drawing-room, she explaining that Mr. Parsons was to have the study all to himself, and never be disturbed there; then inquiring after the three children, two daughters, who were married, and a son lately ordained.

'I thought you would have brought William to see about the curacy,' she said.

'He is not strong enough,' said his mother. 'He wished it, but he is better where he is; he could not bear the work here.'

'No; I told him the utmost I should allow would be an exchange now and then when my curates were overdone,' said Mr. Parsons.

'And so you are quite deserted,' said Honor, feeling the more drawn towards her friends.

'Starting afresh, with a sort of honeymoon, as I tell Anne,' replied Mr. Parsons; and such a bright look passed between them, as though they were quite sufficient for each other, that Honor felt there was no parallel between their case and her own.

'Ah! you have not lost your children yet,' said Mrs. Parsons.

'They are not with me,' said Honor, quickly. 'Lucy is with her cousins, and Owen—I don't exactly know how he means to dispose of himself this vacation; but we were all to meet here.'

Guessing, perhaps, that Mr. Parsons saw into her dissatisfaction, she then assumed their defence.

'There is to be a grand affair at Castle Blanch, a celebration of young Charles Charteris's marriage, and Owen and Lucy will be wanted for it.'

‘Whom has he married?’

‘A Miss Mendoza, an immense fortune—something in the stockbroker line. He had spent a good deal, and wanted to repair it; but they tell me she is a very handsome person, very ladylike and agreeable; and Lucy likes her greatly. I am to go to luncheon at their house to-morrow, so I shall treat you as if you were at home.’

‘I should hope so,’ quoth Mr. Parsons.

‘Yes, or I know you would not stay here properly. I’m not alone, either. Why, where’s the boy gone? I thought he was here. I have two young Fulmorts, one staying here, the other looking in from the office.’

‘Fulmort!’ exclaimed Mr. Parsons, with three notes of admiration at least in his voice. ‘What! the distiller?’

‘The enemy himself, the identical lord of gin-shops—at least his children. Did you not know that he married my next neighbour, Augusta Mervyn, and that our properties touch? He is not so bad by way of squire as he is here; and I have known his wife all my life, so we keep up all habits of good neighbourhood; and though they have brought up the elder ones very ill, they have not succeeded in spoiling this son and daughter. She is one of the very nicest girls I ever knew, and he, poor fellow, has a great deal of good in him.’

‘I think I have heard William speak of a Fulmort,’ said Mrs. Parsons. ‘Was he at Winchester?’

‘Yes; and an infinite help the influence there has been to him. I never saw any one more anxious to do right, often under great disadvantages. I shall be very glad for him to be with you. He was always intended for a clergyman, but now I am afraid there is a notion of putting him into the business; and he is here attending to it for the present, while his father and brother are abroad. I am sorry he is gone. I suppose he was seized with a fit of shyness.’

However, when all the party had been to their rooms and prepared for dinner, Robert reappeared, and was asked where he had been.

‘I went to dress,’ he answered.

‘Ah! where do you lodge? I asked Phœbe, but she said your letters went to Whittington-street.’

‘There are two very good rooms at the office which my father sometimes uses.’

Phœbe and Miss Charlecote glanced at each other, aware that Mervyn would never have condescended to sleep in Great Whittington-street. Mr. Parsons likewise perceived a straightforwardness in the manner, which made him ready to acknowledge his fellow-Wykehamist and his son’s acquaintance; and they quickly became good friends over recollections of Oxford and Winchester, tolerably strong in Mr. Parsons himself, and all the fresher on ‘William’s’ account.

Phœbe, whose experience of social intercourse was confined to the stately evening hour in the drawing-room, had never listened to anything approaching to this style of conversation, nor seen her brother to so much advantage in society. Hitherto she had only beheld him neglected in his uncongenial home circle, contemning and contemned, or else subjected to the fretting torment of Lucilla’s caprice. She had never known what he could be, at his ease, among persons of the same way of thinking. Speaking scarcely ever herself, and her fingers busy with her needle, she was receiving a better lesson than Miss Fennimore had ever yet been able to give. The acquiring of knowledge is one thing, the putting it out to profit another.

Gradually, from general topics, the conversation contracted to the parish and its affairs, known intimately to Mr. Parsons a quarter of a century ago, but in which Honora was now the best informed; while Robert listened as one who felt as if he might have a considerable stake therein, and indeed looked upon usefulness there as compensation for the schemes he was resigning.

The changes since Mr. Parsons’s time had not been cheering. The late incumbent had been a man whose trust lay chiefly in preaching, and who, as his health failed, and he became more unable to cope with the crying evils around, had grown despairing, and given way to a sort of dismal, callous indifference; not doing a little, because he could not do much, and quashing the plans of others with a

nervous dread of innovation. The class of superior persons in trade, and families of professional men, who in Mr. Charlecote's time had filled many a massively-built pew, had migrated to the suburbs, and preserved only an office or shop in the parish, an empty pew in the church, where the congregation was to be counted by tens instead of hundreds. Not that the population had fallen off. Certain streets which had been a grief and pain to Mr. Charlecote, but over which he had never entirely lost his hold, had become intolerably worse. Improvements in other parts of London, dislodging the inhabitants, had heaped them in festering masses of corruption in these untouched byways and lanes, places where honest men dared not penetrate without a policeman; and report spoke of rooms shared by six families at once.

Mr. Parsons had not taken the cue unknowing of what he should find in it; he said nothing, and looked as simple and cheerful as if his life were not to be a daily course of heroism. His wife gave one long, stifled sigh, and looked furtively upon him with her loving eyes, in something of anxious fear, but with far more of exultation.

Yet it was in no dispirited tone that she asked after the respectable poor—there surely must be some employed in small trades, or about the warehouses. She was answered that these were not many in proportion, and that not only had pew-rents kept them out of church, but that they had little disposition to go there. They did send their children to the old endowed charity schools, but as these children grew up, wave after wave lapsed into a smooth, respectable heathen life of Sunday pleasuring.

The more religious became dissenters, because the earnest inner life did not approve itself to them in Church teaching as presented to them; the worse sort, by far the most numerous, fell lower and lower, and hovered scarcely above the depths of sin and misery. Drinking was the universal vice, and dragged many a seemingly steady character into every stage of degradation. Men and women alike fell under the temptation, and soon hastened down the descent of corruption and crime.

'Ah!' said Mrs. Parsons, 'I observed gin palaces at the corner of every street.'

There was a pause. Neither her husband nor Honor made any reply. If they had done so, neither of the young Fulmorts would have perceived any connection between the gin palaces and their father's profession; but the silence caused both to raise their eyes. Phœbe, judging by her sisters' code of the becoming, fancied that their friends supposed their feelings might be hurt by alluding to the distillery, as a trade, and cast about for some cheerful observations, which she could not find.

Robert had received a new idea, one that must be put aside till he had time to look at it.

There was a ring at the door. Honor's face lighted up at the tread on the marble pavement of the hall, and without other announcement, a young man entered the room, and as she sprang up to meet him, bent down his lofty head, and kissed her with half-filial, half-coaxing tenderness.

'Yes, here I am. They told me I should find you here. Ah! Phœbe, I'm glad to see you. Fulmort, how are you?' and a well-bred shake of the hand to Mr. and Mrs. Parsons, with the ease and air of the young master, returning to his mother's house.

'When did you come?'

'Only to-day. I got away sooner than I expected. I went to Lowndes Square, and they told me I should find you here, so I came away as soon as dinner was over. They were dressing for some grand affair, and wanted me to come with them, but of course I must come to see if you had really achieved bringing bright Phœbe from her orbit.'

His simile conveyed the astronomical compliment at once to Honora and Phœbe, who were content to share it. Honora was in a condition of subdued excitement and anxiety, compared to which all other sensations were tame, chequered as was her felicity, a state well known to mothers and sisters. Intensely gratified at her darling's arrival, gladdened by his presence, rejoicing in his endowments, she yet dreaded every phrase lest some dim misgiving should be deepened, and watched for the impression he made on her friends, as though her own depended upon it.

Admiration could not but come foremost. It was pleasant to look upon such a fine specimen of manly beauty and vigour. Of unusual height, his form was so well moulded, that his superior stature

was only perceived by comparison with others, and the proportions were those of great strength. The small, well-set head, proudly carried, the short, straight features, and the form of the free massive curls, might have been a model for the bust of a Greek athlete; the colouring was the fresh, healthy bronzed ruddiness of English youth, and the expression had a certain boldness of good-humoured freedom, agreeing with the quiet power of the whole figure. Those bright gray eyes could never have been daunted, those curling, merry lips never at a loss, that smooth brow never been unwelcome, those easy movements never cramped, nor the manners restrained by bashfulness.

The contrast was not favourable to Robert. The fair proportions of the one brought out the irregular build of the other; the classical face made the plain one more homely, the erect bearing made the eye turn to the slouching carriage, and the readiness of address provoked comparison with the awkward diffidence of one disregarded at home. Bashfulness and depression had regained their hold of the elder lad almost as the younger one entered, and in the changes of position consequent upon the new arrival, he fell into the background, and stood leaning, caryatid fashion, against the mantelshelf, without uttering a word, while Owen, in a half-recumbent position on an ottoman, a little in the rear of Miss Charlecote and her tea equipage, and close to Phœbe, indulged in the blithe loquacity of a return home, in a tone of caressing banter towards the first lady, of something between good-nature and attention to the latter, yet without any such exclusiveness as would have been disregard to the other guests.

‘Ponto well! Poor old Pon! how does he get on? Was it a very affecting parting, Phœbe?’

‘I didn’t see. I met Miss Charlecote at the station.’

‘Not even your eyes might intrude on the sacredness of grief! Well, at least you dried them? But who dried Ponto’s?’ solemnly turning on Honora.

‘Jones, I hope,’ said she, smiling.

‘I knew it! Says I to myself, when Henry opened the door, Jones remains at home for the consolation of Ponto.’

‘Not entirely—’ began Honora, laughing; but the boy shook his head, cutting her short with a playful frown.

‘Cousin Honor, it grieves me to see a woman of your age and responsibility making false excuses. Mr. Parsons, I appeal to you, as a clergyman of the Church of England, is it not painful to hear her putting forward Jones’s asthma, when we all know the true fact is that Ponto’s tastes are so aristocratic that he can’t take exercise with an under servant, and the housekeeper is too fat to waddle. By the bye, how is the old thing?’

‘Much more effective than might be supposed by your account, sir, and probably wishing to know whether to get your room ready.’

‘My room. Thank you; no, not to-night. I’ve got nothing with me. What are you going to do to-morrow? I know you are to be at Charteris’s to luncheon; his Jewess told me so.’

‘For shame, Owen.’

‘I don’t see any shame, if Charles doesn’t,’ said Owen; ‘only if you don’t think yourselves at a stall of cheap jewellery at a fair—that’s all! Phœbe, take care. You’re a learned young lady.’

‘No; I’m very backward.’

‘Ah! it’s the fashion to deny it, but mind you don’t mention Shakespeare.’

‘Why not?’

‘Did you never hear of the *Merchant of Venice*?’

Phœbe, a little startled, wanted to hear whether Mrs. Charteris were really Jewish, and after a little more in this style, which Honor reasonably feared the Parsonses might not consider in good taste, it was explained that her riches were Jewish, though her grandfather had been nothing, and his family Christian. Owen adding, that but for her origin, she would be very good-looking; not that he cared for that style, and his manner indicated that such rosy, childish charms as were before him had his preference. But though this was evident enough to all the rest of the world, Phœbe did not appear

to have the least perception of his personal meaning, and freely, simply answered, that she admired dark-eyed people, and should be glad to see Mrs. Charteris.

‘You will see her in her glory,’ said Owen; ‘Tuesday week, the great concern is to come off, at Castle Blanch, and a rare sight she’ll be! Cilly tells me she is rehearsing her dresses with different sets of jewels all the morning, and for ever coming in to consult her and Rashe!’

‘That must be rather tiresome,’ said Honor; ‘she cannot be much of a companion.’

‘I don’t fancy she gets much satisfaction,’ said Owen, laughing; ‘Rashe never uses much “soft sawder.” It’s an easy-going place, where you may do just as you choose, and the young ladies appreciate liberty. By the bye, what do you think of this Irish scheme?’

Honora was so much ashamed of it, that she had never mentioned it even to Phoebe, and she was the more sorry that it had been thus adverted to, as she saw Robert intent on what Owen let fall. She answered shortly, that she could not suppose it serious.

‘Serious as a churchyard,’ was Owen’s answer. ‘I dare say they will ask Phoebe to join the party.

For my own part, I never believed in it till I came up to-day, and found the place full of salmon-flies, and the start fixed for Wednesday the 24th.’

‘Who?’ came a voice from the dark mantelshelf.

‘Who? Why, that’s the best of it. Who but my wise sister and Rashe? Not a soul besides,’ cried Owen, giving way to laughter, which no one was disposed to echo. ‘They vow that they will fish all the best streams, and do more than any crack fisherman going, and they would like to see who will venture to warn them off. They’ve tried that already. Last summer what did Lucy do, but go and fish Sir Harry Buller’s water. You know he’s a very tiger about preserving. Well, she fished coolly on in the face of all his keepers; they stood aghast, didn’t know what manner of Nixie it was, I suppose; and when Sir Harry came down, foaming at the mouth, she just shook her curls, and made him wade in up to his knees to get her fly out of a bramble!’

‘That must be exaggerated,’ said Robert.

‘Exaggerated! Not a word! It’s not possible to exaggerate Cilly’s coolness. I did say something about going with them.’

‘You must, if they go at all!’ exclaimed Honora.

‘Out of the question, Sweet Honey. They reject me with disdain, declare that I should only render them commonplace, and that “rich and rare were the gems she wore” would never have got across Ireland safe if she had a great strapping brother to hamper her. And really, as Charles says, I don’t suppose any damage can well happen to them.’

Honora would not talk of it, and turned the conversation to what was to be done on the following day. Owen eagerly proffered himself as escort, and suggested all manner of plans, evidently assuming the entire direction and protection of the two ladies, who were to meet him at luncheon in Lowndes Square, and go with him to the Royal Academy, which, as he and Honora agreed, must necessarily be the earliest object for the sake of providing innocent conversation.

As soon as the clock struck ten, Robert took leave, and Owen rose, but instead of going, lingered, talking Oxford with Mr. Parsons, and telling good stories, much to the ladies’ amusement, though increasing Honora’s trepidation by the fear that something in his tone about the authorities, or the slang of his manner, might not give her friends a very good idea of his set. The constant fear of what might come next, absolutely made her impatient for his departure, and at last she drove him away, by begging to know how he was going all that distance, and offering to send Henry to call a cab, a thing he was too good-natured to permit. He bade good night and departed, while Mr. Parsons, in answer to her eager eyes, gratified her by pronouncing him a very fine young man.

‘He is very full of spirit,’ she said. ‘You must let me tell you a story of him. They have a young new schoolmistress at Wrapworth, his father’s former living, you know, close to Castle Blanch. This poor thing was obliged to punish a school-child, the daughter of one of the bargemen on the Thames, a huge ruffianly man. Well, a day or two after, Owen came upon him in a narrow lane, bullying

the poor girl almost out of her life, threatening her, and daring her to lay a finger on his children. What do you think Owen did?

‘Fought him, I suppose,’ said Mr. Parsons, judging by the peculiar delight ladies take in such exploits. ‘Besides, he has sufficiently the air of a hero to make it incumbent on him to “kill some giant.”’

‘We may be content with something short of his killing the giant,’ said Honor, ‘but he really did gain the victory. That lad, under nineteen, positively beat this great monster of a man, and made him ask the girl’s pardon, knocked him down, and thoroughly mastered him! I should have known nothing of it, though, if Owen had not got a black eye, which made him unpresentable for the Castle Blanch gaieties, so he came down to the Holt to me, knowing I should not mind wounds gained in a good cause.’

They wished her good night in her triumph.

The receipt of a letter was rare and supreme felicity to Maria; therefore to indite one was Phœbe’s first task on the morrow; after which she took up her book, and was deeply engaged, when the door flew back, and the voice of Owen Sandbrook exclaimed, ‘Goddess of the silver bow! what, alone?’

‘Miss Charlecote is with her lawyer, and Robert at the office.’

‘The parson and parsoness parsonically gone to study parsonages, schools, and dilapidations, I suppose. What a bore it is having them here; I’d have taken up my quarters here, otherwise, but I can’t stand parish politics.’

‘I like them very much,’ said Phœbe, ‘and Miss Charlecote seems to be happy with them.’

‘Just her cut, dear old thing; the same honest, illogical, practical sincerity,’ said Owen, in a tone of somewhat superior melancholy; but seeing Phœbe about to resent his words as a disrespectful imputation on their friend, he turned the subject, addressing Phœbe in the manner between teasing and flattering, habitual to a big schoolboy towards a younger child, phases of existence which each had not so long outgrown as to have left off the mutual habits thereto belonging. ‘And what is bright Cynthia doing? Writing verses, I declare!—worthy sister of Phoebus Apollo.’

‘Only notes,’ said Phœbe, relinquishing her paper, in testimony.

‘When found make a note of—Summoned by writ—temp. Ed. III.—burgesses—knights of shire. It reads like an act of parliament. Hallam’s English Constitution. My eyes! By way of lighter study. It is quite appalling. Pray what may be the occupation of your more serious moments?’

‘You see the worst I have with me.’

‘Holiday recreation, to which you can just condescend. I say, Phœbe, I have a great curiosity to understand the Zend. I wish you would explain it to me.’

‘If I ever read it,’ began Phœbe, laughing.

‘What, you pretend to deny? You won’t put me off that way. A lady who can only unbend so far as to the English Constitution by way of recreation, must—’

‘But it is not by way of recreation.’

‘Come, I know my respected cousin too well to imagine she would have imposed such a task. That won’t do, Phœbe.’

‘I never said she had, but Miss Fennimore desired me.’

‘I shall appeal. There’s no act of tyranny a woman in authority will not commit. But this is a free country, Phœbe, as maybe you have gathered from your author, and unless her trammels have reached to your soul—’ and he laid his hand on the book to take it away.

‘Perhaps they have,’ said Phœbe, smiling, but holding it fast, ‘for I shall be much more comfortable in doing as I was told.’

‘Indeed!’ said Owen, pretending to scrutinize her as if she were something extraordinary (really as an excuse for a good gaze upon her pure complexion and limpid eyes, so steady, childlike, and

unabashed, free from all such consciousness as would make them shrink from the playful look).

‘Indeed! Now, in my experience the comfort would be in the *not* doing as you were told.’

‘Ah! but you know I have no spirit.’

‘I wish to heaven other people had none!’ cried Owen, suddenly changing his tone, and sitting down opposite to Phœbe, his elbow on the table, and speaking earnestly. ‘I would give the world that my sister were like you. Did you ever hear of anything so preposterous as this Irish business?’

‘She cannot think of it, when Miss Charlecote has told her of all the objections,’ said Phœbe.

‘She will go the more,’ returned Owen. ‘I say to you, Phœbe, what I would say to no one else.

Lucilla’s treatment of Honora Charlecote is abominable—vexes me more than I can say. They say some nations have no words for gratitude. One would think she had come of them.’

Phœbe looked much shocked, but said, ‘Perhaps Miss Charlecote’s kindness has seemed to her like a matter of course, not as it does to us, who have no claim at all.’

‘We had no claim,’ said Owen; ‘the connection is nothing, absolutely nothing. I believe, poor dear, the attraction was that she had once been attached to my father, and he was too popular a preacher to *keep* well as a lover. Well, there were we, a couple of orphans, a nuisance to all our kith and kin—nobody with a bit of mercy for us but that queer old coon, Kit Charteris, when she takes us home, treats us like her own children, feels for us as much as the best mother living could; undertakes to provide for us. Now, I put it to you, Phœbe, has she any right to be cast off in this fashion?’

‘I don’t know in what fashion you mean.’

‘Don’t you. Haven’t you seen how Cilly has run restive from babyhood? A pretty termagant she was, as even I can remember. And how my poor father spoilt her! Any one but Honor would have given her up, rather than have gone through what she did, so firmly and patiently, till she had broken her in fairly well. But then come in these Charterises, and Cilly runs frantic after them, her own *dear* relations. Much they had cared for us when we were troublesome little pests. But it’s all the force of blood. Stuff! The whole truth is that they are gay, and Honora quiet; they encourage her to run riot. Honora keeps her in order.’

‘Have you spoken to her?’

‘As well speak to the wind. She thinks it a great favour to run down to Hiltonbury for the Horticultural Show, turn everything topsy-turvy, keep poor dear Sweet Honey in a perpetual ferment, then come away to Castle Blanch, as if she were rid of a troublesome duty.’

‘I thought Miss Charlecote sent Lucy to enjoy herself! We always said how kind and self-denying she was.’

‘Denied, rather,’ said Owen; ‘only that’s her way of carrying it off. A month or two in the season might be very well; see the world, and get the tone of it; but to racket about with Ratia, and leave Honor alone for months together, is too strong for me.’

Honora came in, delighted at her boy’s visit, and well pleased at the manner in which he was engrossed. Two such children needed no chaperon, and if that sweet crescent moon were to be his guiding light, so much the better.

‘Capital girl, that,’ he said, as she left the room. ‘This is a noble achievement of yours.’

‘In getting my youngest princess out of the castle. Ay! I do feel in a beneficent enchanter’s position.’

‘She has grown up much prettier than she promised to be.’

‘And far too good for a Fulmort. But that is Robert’s doing.’

‘Poor Robert! how he shows the old distiller in grain. So he is taking to the old shop?—best thing for him.’

‘Only by way of experiment.’

‘Pleasant experiment to make as much as old Fulmort! I wish he’d take me into partnership.’

‘You, Owen?’

‘I am not proud. These aren’t the days when it matters how a man gets his tin, so he knows what to do with it. Ay! the world gets beyond the dear old Hiltonbury views, after all, Sweet Honey, and you see what City atmosphere does to me.’

‘You know I never wished to press any choice on you,’ she faltered.

‘What!’ with a good-humoured air of affront, ‘you thought me serious? Don’t you know I’m the ninth, instead of the nineteenth-century man, under your wing? I’d promise you to be a bishop, only, you see, I’m afraid I couldn’t be mediocre enough.’

‘For shame, Owen!’ and yet she smiled. That boy’s presence and caressing sweetness towards herself were the greatest bliss to her, almost beyond that of a mother with a son, because more uncertain, less her right by nature.

Phoebe came down as the carriage was at the door, and they called in Whittington Street for her brother, but he only came out to say he was very busy, and would not intrude on Mrs. Charteris—bashfulness for which he was well abused on the way to Lowndes Square.

Owen, with his air of being at home, put aside the servants as they entered the magnificent house, replete with a display of state and luxury analogous to that of Beauchamp, but with better taste and greater ease. The Fulmorts were in bondage to ostentation; the Charterises were lavish for their own enjoyment, and heedless alike of cost and of appearance.

The great drawing-room was crowded with furniture, and the splendid marqueterie tables and crimson ottomans were piled with a wild confusion of books, prints, periodicals, papers, and caricatures, heaped over ornaments and bijouterie, and beyond, at the doorway of a second room, even more miscellaneously filled, a small creature sprang to meet them, kissing Honora, and exclaiming, ‘Here you are! Have you brought the pig’s wool? Ah! but you’ve brought something else! No—what’s become of that Redbreast!’ as she embraced Phoebe.

‘He was so busy that he could not come.’

‘Ill-behaved bird; a whole month without coming near me.’

‘Only a week,’ said Phoebe, speaking less freely, as she perceived two strangers in the room, a gentleman in moustaches, who shook hands with Owen, and a lady, whom from her greeting to Miss Charlecote (for introductions were not the way of the house) she concluded to be the formidable Rashe, and therefore regarded with some curiosity.

Phoebe had expected her to be a large masculine woman, and was surprised at her dapper proportions and not ungraceful manner. Her face, neither handsome nor the reverse, was one that neither in features nor complexion revealed her age, and her voice was pitched to the tones of good society, so that but for a certain ‘don’t care’ sound in her words, and a defiant freedom of address, Phoebe would have set down all she had heard as a mistake, in spite of the table covered with the brilliant appliances of fly-making, over which both she and Lucilla were engaged. It was at the period when ladies affected coats and waistcoats, and both cousins followed the fashion to the utmost; wearing tightly-fitting black coats, plain linen collars, and shirt-like under-sleeves, with black ties round the neck. Horatia was still in mourning for her mother, and wore a black skirt, but Lucilla’s was of rich deep gentianella-coloured silk, and the buttons of her white vest were of beautiful coral. The want of drapery gave a harshness to Miss Charteris’s appearance, but the little masculine affectations only rendered Lucy’s miniature style of feminine beauty still more piquant. Less tall than many girls of fourteen, she was exquisitely formed; the close-fitting dress became her taper waist, the ivory fairness of the throat and hands shone out in their boyish setting, and the soft delicacy of feature and complexion were enhanced by the vivid sparkling of those porcelain blue eyes, under the long lashes, still so fair and glossy as to glisten in the light, like her profuse flaxen tresses, arranged in a cunning wilderness of plaits and natural ringlets. The great charm was the minuteness and refinement of the mould containing the energetic spirit that glanced in her eyes, quivered on her lips, and pervaded every movement of the elastic feet and hands, childlike in size, statue-like in symmetry, elfin in quickness and dexterity. ‘Lucile la Fée,’ she might well have been called, as she sat manipulating the

gorgeous silk and feathers with an essential strength and firmness of hands such as could hardly have been expected from such small members, and producing such lovely specimens that nothing seemed wanting but a touch of her wand to endow them with life. It was fit fairy work, and be it farther known, that few women are capable of it; they seldom have sufficient accuracy of sustained attention and firmness of finger combined, to produce anything artistic or durable, and the accomplishment was therefore Lucilla's pride. Her cousin could prepare materials, but could not finish. 'Have you brought the pig's wool?' repeated Lucy, as they sat down. 'No? That *is* a cruel way of testifying. I can't find a scrap of that shade, though I've nearly broke my heart in the tackle shops. Here's my last fragment, and this butcher will be a wreck for want of it.'

'Let me see,' quoth the gentleman, bending over with an air of intimacy.

'You may see,' returned Lucilla, 'but that will do no good. Owen got this at a little shop at Elverslope, and we can only conclude that the father of orange pigs is dead, for we've tried every maker, and can't hit off the tint.'

'I've seen it in a shop in the Strand,' he said, with an air of depreciation, such as set both ladies off with an ardour inexplicable to mere spectators, both vehemently defending the peculiarity of their favourite hue, and little personalities passing, exceedingly diverting apparently to both parties, but which vexed Honora and dismayed Phoebe by the coolness of the gentleman, and the ease with which he was treated by the ladies.

Luncheon was announced in the midst, and in the dining-room they found Miss Charteris, a dark, aquiline beauty, of highly-coloured complexion, such as permitted the glowing hues of dress and ornament in which she delighted, and large languid dark eyes of Oriental appearance.

In the scarlet and gold net confining her sable locks, her ponderous earrings, her massive chains and bracelets, and gorgeous silk, she was a splendid ornament at the head of the table; but she looked sleepily out from under her black-fringed eyelids, turned over the carving as a matter of course to Owen, and evidently regarded the two young ladies as bound to take all trouble off her hands in talking, arranging, or settling what she should do with herself or her carriage.

'Lolly shall take you there,' or 'Lolly shall call for that,' passed between the cousins without the smallest reference to Lolly herself (otherwise Eloisa), who looked serenely indifferent through all the plans proposed for her, only once exerting her will sufficiently to say, 'Very well, Rashe, dear, you'll tell the coachman—only don't forget that I must go to Storr and Mortimer's.'

Honora expressed a hope that Lucilla would come with her party to the Exhibition, and was not pleased that Mr. Calthorp exclaimed that there was another plan.

'No, no, Mr. Calthorp, I never said any such thing!'

'Miss Charteris, is not that a little too strong?'

'You told me of the Dorking,' cried Lucilla, 'and you said you would not miss the sight for anything; but I never said you should have it.'

Rashe meanwhile clapped her hands with exultation, and there was a regular chatter of eager voices—'I should like to know how you would get the hackles out of a suburban poultry fancier.'

'Out of him?—no, out of his best Dorking. Priced at £120 last exhibition—two years old—wouldn't take £200 for him now.'

'You don't mean that you've seen him?'

'Hurrah!' Lucilla opened a paper, and waved triumphantly five of the long tippet-plumes of chanticleer.

'You don't mean—'

'Mean! I more than mean! Didn't you tell us that you had been to see the old party on business, and had spied the hackles walking about in his yard?'

'And I had hoped to introduce you.'

'As if we needed that! No, no. Rashe, and I started off at six o'clock this morning, to shake off the remains of the ball, rode down to Brompton, and did our work. No, it was not like the macaw

business, I declare. The old gentleman held the bird for us himself, and I promised him a dried salmon.'

'Well, I had flattered myself—it was an unfair advantage, Miss Sandbrook.'

'Not in the least. Had you gone, it would have cast a general clumsiness over the whole transaction, and not left the worthy old owner half so well satisfied. I believe you had so little originality as to expect to engage him in conversation while I captured the bird; but once was enough of that.'

Phoebe could not help asking what was meant; and it was explained that, while a call was being made on a certain old lady with a blue and yellow macaw, Lucilla had contrived to abstract the prime glory of the creature's tail—a blue feather lined with yellow—an irresistible charm to a fisherwoman.

But here even the tranquil Eloïsa murmured that Cilly must never do so again when she went out with her.

'No, Lolly, indeed I won't. I prefer honesty, I assure you, except when it is too commonplace. I'll meddle with nothing at Madame Sonnini's this afternoon.'

'Then you cannot come with us?'

'Why, you see, Honor, here have Rashe and I been appointed band-masters, Lord Chamberlains, masters of the ceremonies, major-domos, and I don't know what, to all the Castle Blanch concern; and as Rashe neither knows nor cares about music, I've got all that on my hands; and I must take Lolly to look on while I manage the programme.'

'Are you too busy to find a day to spend with us at St. Wulstan's?'

A discussion of engagements took place, apparently at the rate of five per day; but Mrs. Charteris interposed an invitation to dinner for the next evening, including Robert; and farther it appeared that all the three were expected to take part in the Castle Blanch festivities. Lolly had evidently been told of them as settled certainties among the guests, and Lucilla, Owen, and Rashe vied with each other in declaring that they had imagined Honor to have brought Phoebe to London with no other intent, and that all was fixed for the ladies to sleep at Castle Blanch the night before, and Robert Fulmort to come down in the morning by train.

Nothing could have been farther from Honora's predilections than such gaieties, but Phoebe's eyes were growing round with eagerness, and there would be unkindness in denying her the pleasure, as well as churlishness in disappointing Lucy and Owen, who had reckoned on her in so gratifying a manner. Without decidedly accepting or refusing, she let the talk go on.

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