

Weyman Stanley John

The Great House



Stanley Weyman
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CHAPTER I

THE HÔTEL LAMBERT-UPSTAIRS

On an evening in March in the 'forties of last century a girl looked down on the Seine from an attic window on the Ile St. Louis. The room behind her-or beside her, for she sat on the window-ledge, with her back against one side of the opening and her feet against the other-was long, whitewashed from floor to ceiling, lighted by five gaunt windows, and as cold to the eye as charity to the recipient. Along each side of the chamber ran ten pallet beds. A black door broke the wall at one end, and above the door hung a crucifix. A painting of a Station of the Cross adorned the wall at the other end. Beyond this picture the room had no ornament; it is almost true to say that beyond what has been named it had no furniture. One bed-the bed beside the window at which the girl sat-was screened by a thin curtain which did not reach the floor. This was her bed.

But in early spring no window in Paris looked on a scene more cheerful than this window; which as from an eyrie commanded a shining reach of the Seine bordered by the lawns and foliage of the King's Garden, and closed by the graceful arches of the Bridge of Austerlitz. On the water boats shot to and fro. The quays were gay with the red trousers of soldiers and the coquettish caps of soubrettes, with students in strange cloaks, and the twin kling wheels of yellow cabriolets. The first swallows were hawking hither and thither above the water, and a pleasant hum rose from the Boulevard Bourdon.

Yet the girl sighed. For it was her birthday, she was twenty this twenty-fifth of March, and there was not a soul in the world to know this and to wish her joy. A life of dependence, toned to the key of the whitewashed room and the thin pallets, lay before her; and though she had good reason to be thankful for the safety which dependence bought, still she was only twenty, and springtime, viewed from prison windows, beckons to its cousin, youth. She saw family groups walking the quays, and father, mother, children, all, seen from a distance, were happy. She saw lovers loitering in the garden or pacing to and fro, and romance walked with every one of them; none came late, or fell to words. She sighed more deeply; and on the sound the door opened.

"*Hola!*" cried a shrill voice, speaking in French, fluent, but oddly accented. "Who is here? The Princess desires that the English Mademoiselle will descend this evening."

"Very good," the girl in the window replied pleasantly. "At the same hour, Joséphine?"

"Why not, Mademoiselle?" A trim maid, with a plain face and the faultless figure of a Pole, came a few steps into the room. "But you are alone?"

"The children are walking. I stayed at home."

"To be alone? As if I did not understand that! To be alone-it is the luxury of the rich."

The girl nodded. "None but a Pole would have thought of that," she said.

"Ah, the crafty English Miss!" the maid retorted. "How she flatters! Perhaps she needs a touch of the tongs to-night? Or the loan of a pair of red-heeled shoes, worn no more than thrice by the Princess-and with the black which is convenable for Mademoiselle, oh, so neat! Of the *ancien régime*, absolutely!"

The other laughed. "The *ancien régime*, Joséphine-and this!" she replied, with a gesture that embraced the room, the pallets, her own bed. "A curled head-and this! You are truly a cabbage-"

"But Mademoiselle descends!"

"A cabbage of-foolishness!"

"Ah, well, if I descended, you would see," the maid retorted. "I am but the Princess's second maid, and I know nothing! But if I descended it would not be to this dormitory I should return! Nor to the tartines! Nor to the daughters of Poland! Trust me for that-and I know but my prayers. While Mademoiselle, she is an artist's daughter."

"There spoke the Pole again," the girl struck in with a smile.

"The English Miss knows how to flatter," Joséphine laughed. "That is one for the touch of the tongs," she continued, ticking them off on her fingers. "And one for the red-heeled shoes. And-but no more! Let me begone before I am bankrupt!" She turned about with a flirt of her short petticoats, but paused and looked back, with her hand on the door. "None the less, mark you well, Mademoiselle, from the whitewash to the ceiling of Lebrun, from the dortoir of the Jeunes Filles to the Gallery of Hercules, there are but twenty stairs, and easy, oh, so easy to descend! If Mademoiselle instead of flattering Joséphine, the Cracovienne, flattered some pretty gentleman-who knows? Not I! I know but my prayers!" And with a light laugh the maid clapped to the door and was gone.

The girl in the window had not throughout the parley changed her pose or moved more than her head, and this was characteristic of her. For even in her playfulness there was gravity, and a measure of stillness. Now, left alone, she dropped her feet to the floor, turned, and knelt on the sill with her brow pressed against the glass. The sun had set, mists were rising from the river, the quays were gray and cold. Here and there a lamp began to shine through the twilight. But the girl's thoughts were no longer on the scene beneath her eyes.

"There goes the third who has been good to me," she pondered. "First the Polish lodger who lived on the floor below, and saved me from that woman. Then the Princess's daughter. Now Joséphine. There are still kind people in the world-God grant that I may not forget it! But how much better to give than to take, to be strong than to be weak, to be the mistress and not the puppet of fortune! How much better-and, were I a man, how easy!"

But on that there came into her remembrance one to whom it had not been easy, one who had signally failed to master fortune, or to grapple with circumstances. "Poor father!" she whispered.

CHAPTER II

THE HÔTEL LAMBERT-DOWNSTAIRS

When ladies were at home to their intimates in the Paris of the 'forties, they seated their guests about large round tables with a view to that common exchange of wit and fancy which is the French ideal. The mode crossed to England, and in many houses these round tables, fallen to the uses of the dining-room or the nursery, may still be seen. But when the Princess Czartoriski entertained in the Hôtel Lambert, under the ceiling painted by Lebrun, which had looked down on the arm-chair of Madame de Châtelet and the tabouret of Voltaire, she was, as became a Pole, a law to herself. In that beautiful room, softly lit by wax candles, her guests were free to follow their bent, to fall into groups, or to admire at their ease the Watteaus and Bouchers which the Princess's father-in-law, old Prince Adam, had restored to their native panels.

Thanks to his taste and under her rule the gallery of Hercules presented on this evening a scene not unworthy of its past. The silks and satins of the old régime were indeed replaced by the high-shouldered coats, the stocks, the pins and velvet vests of the dandies; and Thiers beaming through his glasses, or Lamartine, though beauty, melted by the woes of Poland, hung upon his lips, might have been thought by some unequal to the dead. But they were now what those had been; and the women peacocked it as of old. At any rate the effect was good, and a guest who came late, and paused a moment on the threshold to observe the scene, thought that he had never before done the room full justice. Presently the Princess saw him and he went forward. The man who was talking to her made his bow, and she pointed with her fan to the vacant place. "Felicitations, my lord," she said. She held out her gloved hand.

"A thousands thanks," he said, as he bent over it. "But on what, Princess?"

"On the success of a friend. On what we have all seen in the *Journal*. Is it not true that you have won your suit?"

"I won, yes." He shrugged his shoulders. "But what, Madame? A bare title, an empty rent-roll."

"For shame!" she answered. "But I suppose that this is your English phlegm. Is it not a thing to be proud of-an old title? That which money cannot buy and the wisest would fain wear? M. Guizot, what would he not give to be Chien de Race? Your Peel, also?"

"And your Thiers?" he returned, with a sly glance at the little man in the shining glasses.

"He, too! But he has the passion of humanity, which is a title in itself. Whereas you English, turning in your unending circle, one out, one in, one in, one out, are but playing a game-marking time! You have not a desire to go forward!"

"Surely, Princess, you forget our Reform Bill, scarce ten years old."

"Which bought off your cotton lords and your fat bourgeois, and left the people without leaders and more helpless than before. No, my lord, if your Russell-Lord John, do you call him? – had one jot of M. Thiers' enthusiasm! Or your Peel-but I look for nothing there!"

He shrugged his shoulders. "I admit," he said, "that M. Thiers has an enthusiasm beyond the ordinary."

"You do? Wonderful!"

"But," with a smile, "it is, I fancy, an enthusiasm of which the object is-M. Thiers!"

"Ah!" she cried, fanning herself more quickly. "Now there spoke not Mr. Audley, the attaché-he had not been so imprudent! But-how do you call yourself now?"

"On days of ceremony," he replied, "Lord Audley of Beaudelays."

"There spoke my lord, unattached! Oh, you English, you have no enthusiasm. You have only traditions. Poor were Poland if her fate hung on you!"

"There are still bright spots," he said slyly. And his glance returned to the little statesman in spectacles on whom the Princess rested the hopes of Poland.

"No!" she cried vividly. "Don't say it again or I shall be displeased. Turn your eyes elsewhere. There is one here about whom I wish to consult you. Do you see the tall girl in black who is engaged with the miniatures?"

"I saw her some time ago."

"I suppose so. You are a man. I dare say you would call her handsome?"

"I think it possible, were she not in this company. What of her, Princess?"

"Do you notice anything beyond her looks?"

"The picture is plain-for the frame in which I see her. Is she one of the staff of your school?"

"Yes, but with an air-

"Certainly-an air!" He nodded.

"Well, she is a countrywoman of yours and has a history. Her father, a journalist, artist, no matter what, came to live in Paris years ago. He went down, down, always down; six months ago he died. There was enough to bury him, no more. She says, I don't know" – the Princess indicated doubt with a movement of her fan-"that she wrote to friends in England. Perhaps she did not write; how do I know? She was at the last sou, the street before her, a hag of a concierge behind, and withal-as you see her."

"Not wearing that dress, I presume?" he said with a faint smile.

"No. She had passed everything to the Mont de Piété; she had what she stood up in-yet herself! Then a Polish family on the floor below, to whom my daughter carried alms, told Cécile of her. They pitied her, spoke well of her, she had done-no matter what for them-perhaps nothing. Probably nothing. But Cécile ascended, saw her, became enamoured, *enragée!* You know Cécile-for her all that wears feathers is of the angels! Nothing would do but she must bring her here and set her to teach English to the daughters during her own absence."

"The Princess is away?"

"For four weeks. But in three days she returns, and you see where I am. How do I know who this is? She may be this, or that. If she were French, if she were Polish, I should know! But she is English and of a calm, a reticence-ah!"

"And of a pride too," he replied thoughtfully, "if I mistake not. Yet it is a good face, Princess." She fluttered her fan. "It is a handsome one. For a man that is the same."

"With all this you permit her to appear?"

"To be of use. And a little that she may be seen by some English friend, who may tell me."

"Shall I talk to her?"

"If you will be so good. Learn, if you please, what she is."

"Your wishes are law," he rejoined. "Will you present me?"

"It is not necessary," the Princess answered. She beckoned to a stout gentleman who wore whiskers trimmed à la mode du Roi, and had laurel leaves on his coat collar. "A thousand thanks."

He lingered a moment to take part in the Princess's reception of the Academician. Then he joined a group about old Prince Adam Czartoriski, who was describing a recent visit to Cracow, that last morsel of free Poland, soon to pass into the maw of Austria. A little apart, the girl in black bent over the case of miniatures, comparing some with a list, and polishing others with a square of silk. Presently he found himself beside her. Their eyes met.

"I am told," he said, bowing, "that you are my countrywoman. The Princess thought that I might be of use to you."

The girl had read his errand before he spoke and a shade flitted across her face. She knew, only too well, that her hold on this rock of safety to which chance had lifted her-out of a gulf of peril and misery of which she trembled to think-was of the slightest. Early, almost from the first, she had discovered that the Princess's benevolence found vent rather in schemes for the good of many than

in tenderness for one. But hitherto she had relied on the daughter's affection, and a little on her own usefulness. Then, too, she was young and hopeful, and the depths from which she had escaped were such that she could not believe that Providence would return her to them.

But she was quick-witted, and his opening frightened her. She guessed at once that she was not to be allowed to await Cécile's return, that her fate hung on what this Englishman, so big and bland and forceful, reported of her.

She braced herself to meet the danger. "I am obliged to the Princess," she said. "But my ties with England are slight. I came to France with my father when I was ten years old."

"I think you lost him recently?" He found his task less easy than it should have been.

"He died six months ago," she replied, regarding him gravely. "His illness left me without means. I was penniless, when the young Princess befriended me and gave me a respite here. I am no part of this," with a glance at the salon and the groups about them. "I teach upstairs. I am thankful for the privilege of doing so."

"The Princess told me as much," he said frankly. "She thought that, being English, I might advise you better than she could; that possibly I might put you in touch with your relations?"

She shook her head.

"Or your friends? You must have friends?"

"Doubtless my father had-once," she said in a low voice. "But as his means diminished, he saw less and less of those who had known him. For the last two years I do not think that he saw an Englishman at home. Before that time I was in a convent school, and I do not know."

"You are a Roman Catholic, then?"

"No. And for that reason-and for another, that my account was not paid" – her color rose painfully to her face-"I could not apply to the Sisters. I am very frank," she added, her lip trembling.

"And I encroach," he answered, bowing. "Forgive me! Your father was an artist, I believe?"

"He drew for an Atelier de Porcelaine-for the journals when he could. But he was not very successful," she continued reluctantly. "The china factory which had employed him since he came to Paris, failed. When I returned from school he was alone and poor, living in the little street in the Quartier, where he died."

"But forgive me, you must have some relations in England?"

"Only one of whom I know," she replied. "My father's brother. My father had quarrelled with him-bitterly, I fear; but when he was dying he bade me write to my uncle and tell him how we were placed. I did so. No answer came. Then after my father's death I wrote again. I told my uncle that I was alone, that I was without money, that in a short time I should be homeless, that if I could return to England I could live by teaching French. He did not reply. I could do no more."

"That was outrageous," he answered, flushing darkly. Though well under thirty he was a tall man and portly, with one of those large faces that easily become injected. "Do you know-is your uncle also in narrow circumstances?"

"I know no more than his name," she said. "My father never spoke of him. They had quarrelled. Indeed, my father spoke little of his past."

"But when you did not hear from your uncle, did you not tell your father?"

"It could do no good," she said. "And he was dying."

He was not sentimental, this big man, whose entrance into a room carried with it a sense of power. Nor was he one to be lightly moved, but her simplicity and the picture her words drew for him of the daughter and the dying man touched him. Already his mind was made up that the Czartoriski should not turn her adrift for lack of a word. Aloud, "The Princess did not tell me your name," he said. "May I know it?"

"Audley," she said. "Mary Audley."

He stared at her. She supposed that he had not caught the name. She repeated it.

"Audley? Do you really mean that?"

"Why not?" she asked, surprised in her turn. "Is it so uncommon a name?"

"No," he replied slowly. "No, but it is a coincidence. The Princess did not tell me that your name was Audley."

The girl shook her head. "I doubt if she knows," she said. "To her I am only 'the English girl.'"

"And your father was an artist, resident in Paris? And his name?"

"Peter Audley."

He nodded. "Peter Audley," he repeated. His eyes looked through her at something far away. His lips were more firmly set. His face was grave. "Peter Audley," he repeated softly. "An artist resident in Paris!"

"But did you know him?" she cried.

He brought his thoughts and his eyes back to her. "No, I did not know him," he said. "But I have heard of him." And again it was plain that his thoughts took wing. "John Audley's brother, the artist!" he muttered.

In her impatience she could have taken him by the sleeve and shaken him. "Then you do know John Audley?" she said. "My uncle?"

Again he brought himself back with an effort. "A thousand pardons!" he said. "You see the Princess did not tell me that you were an Audley. Yes, I know John Audley-of the Gatehouse. I suppose it was to him you wrote?"

"Yes."

"And he did not reply?"

She nodded.

He laughed, as at something whimsical. It was not a kindly laugh, it jarred a little on his listener. But the next moment his face softened, he smiled at her, and the smile of such a man had its importance, for in repose his eyes were hard. It was clear to her that he was a man of position, that he belonged of right to this keen polished world at which she was stealing a glance. His air was distinguished, and his dress, though quiet, struck the last note of fashion.

"But I am keeping you in suspense," he said. "I must tell you, Miss Audley, why it surprised me to learn your name. Because I, too, am an Audley."

"You!" she cried.

"Yes, I," he replied. "What is more, I am akin to you. The kinship is remote, but it happens that your father's name, in its place in a pedigree, has been familiar to me of late, and I could set down the precise degree of cousinship in which you stand to me. I think your father was my fourth cousin."

She colored charmingly. "Is it possible?" she exclaimed.

"It is a fact, proved indeed, recently, in a court of law," he answered lightly. "Perhaps it is as well that we have that warrant for a conversation which I can see that the Princess thinks long. After this she will expect to hear the whole of your history."

"I fear that she may be displeased," the girl said, wincing a little. "You have been very kind-"

"Who should be kind," he replied, "if not the head of your family? But have no fear, I will deal with the Princess. I shall be able to satisfy her, I have no doubt."

"And you" – she looked at him with appeal in her eyes-"will you be good enough to tell me who you are?"

"I am Lord Audley. To distinguish me from another of the same name, I am called Audley of Beaudelays."

"Of Beaudelays?" she repeated. He thought her face, her whole bearing, singularly composed in view of his announcement. "Beaudelays?" she repeated thoughtfully. "I have heard the name more than once. Perhaps from my father."

"It were odd if you had not," he said. "It is the name of my house, and your uncle, John Audley, lives within a mile of it."

"Oh," she said. The name of the uncle who had ignored her appeals fell on her like a cold douche.

"I will not say more now," Lord Audley continued. "But you shall hear from me. To-morrow I quit Paris for three or four days, but when I return have no fear. You may leave the matter in my hands in full confidence that I shall not fail-my cousin."

He held out his hand and she laid hers in it. She looked him frankly in the face. "Thank you," she said. "I little thought when I descended this evening that I should meet a kinsman."

"And a friend," he answered, holding her hand a little longer than was needful.

"And a friend," she repeated. "But there-I must go now. I should have disappeared ten minutes ago. This is my way." She inclined her head, and turning from him she pushed open a small door masked by a picture. She passed at once into a dark corridor, and threading its windings gained the great staircase.

As she flitted upwards from floor to floor, skirting a long procession of shadowy forms, and now ogled by a Leda whose only veil was the dusk, now threatened by the tusks of the great boar at bay, she was not conscious of thought or surprise. It was not until she had lighted her taper outside the dormitory door, and, passing between the rows of sleeping children, had gained her screened corner, that she found it possible to think. Then she set the light in her tiny washing-basin-such was the rule-and seated herself on her bed. For some minutes she stared before her, motionless and unwinking, her hands clasped about her knees, her mind at work.

Was it true, or a dream? Had this really happened to her since she had viewed herself in the blurred mirror, had set a curl right and, satisfied, had turned to go down? The danger and the delivery from it, the fear and the friend in need? Or was it a Cinderella's treat, which no fairy godmother would recall to her, with which no lost slipper would connect her? She could almost believe this. For no Cinderella, in the ashes of the hearth, could have seemed more remote from the gay ball-room than she crouching on her thin mattress, with the breathing of the children in her ears, from the luxury of the famous salon.

Or, if it was true, if it had happened, would anything come of it? Would Lord Audley remember her? Or would he think no more of her, ignoring to-morrow the poor relation whom it had been the whim of the moment to own? That would be cruel! That would be base! But if Mary had fallen in with some good people since her father's death, she had also met many callous, and a few cruel people. He might be one. And then, how strange it was that her father had never named this great kinsman, never referred to him, never even, when dying, disclosed his name!

The light wavered in the draught that stole through the bald, undraped window. A child whimpered in its sleep, awoke, began to sob. It was the youngest of the daughters of Poland. The girl rose, and going on tip-toe to the child, bent over it, kissed it, warmed it in her bosom, soothed it. Presently the little waif slept again, and Mary Audley began to make ready for bed.

But so much turned for her on what had happened, so much hung in the balance, that it was not unnatural that as she let down her hair and plaited it in two long tails for the night, she should see her new kinsman's face in the mirror. Nor strange that as she lay sleepless and thought-ridden in her bed the same face should present itself anew relieved against the background of darkness.

CHAPTER III

THE LAWYER ABROAD

Half an hour later Lord Audley paused in the hall at Meurice's, and having given his cloak and hat to a servant went thoughtfully up the wide staircase. He opened the door of a room on the first floor. A stout man with a bald head, who had been for some time yawning over the dying fire, rose to his feet and remained standing.

Audley nodded. "Hallo, Stubbs!" he said carelessly, "not in bed yet?"

"No, my lord," the other answered. "I waited to learn if your lordship had any orders for England."

"Well, sit down now. I've something to tell you." My lord stooped as he spoke and warmed his hands at the embers; then rising, he stood with his back to the hearth. The stout man sat forward on his chair with an air of deference. His double chin rested on the ample folds of a soft white stock secured by a gold pin in the shape of a wheat-sheaf. He wore black knee-breeches and stockings, and his dress, though plain, bore the stamp of neatness and prosperity.

For a minute or two Audley continued to look thoughtfully before him. At length, "May I take it that this claim is really at an end now?" he said. "Is the decision final, I mean?"

"Unless new evidence crops up," Stubbs answered—he was a lawyer—"the decision is certainly final. With your lordship's signature to the papers I brought over—"

"But the claimant might try again?"

"Mr. John Audley might do anything," Stubbs returned. "I believe him to be mad upon the point, and therefore capable of much. But he could only move on new evidence of the most cogent nature. I do not believe that such evidence exists."

His employer weighed this for some time. At length, "Then if you were in my place," he said, "you would not be tempted to hedge?"

"To hedge?" the lawyer exclaimed, as if he had never heard the word before. "I am afraid I don't understand."

"I will explain. But first, tell me this. If anything happens to me before I have a child, John Audley succeeds to the peerage? That is clear?"

"Certainly! Mr. John Audley, the claimant, is also your heir-at-law."

"To title and estates—such as they are?"

"To both, my lord."

"Then follow me another step, Stubbs. Failing John Audley, who is the next heir?"

"Mr. Peter Audley," Stubbs replied, "his only brother, would succeed, if he were alive. But it is common ground that he is dead. I knew Mr. Peter, and, if I may say it of an Audley, my lord, a more shiftless, weak, improvident gentleman never lived. And obstinate as the devil! He married into trade, and Mr. John never forgave it—never forgave it, my lord. Never spoke of his brother or to his brother from that time. It was before the Reform Bill," the lawyer continued with a sigh. "There were no railways then and things were different. Dear, dear, how the world changes! Mr. Peter must have gone abroad ten years ago, but until he was mentioned in the suit I don't think that I had heard his name ten times in as many years. And he an Audley!"

"He had a child?"

"Only one, a daughter."

"Would she come in after Mr. John?"

"Yes, my lord, she would—if living."

"I've been talking to her this evening."

"Ah!" The lawyer was not so simple as he seemed, and for a minute or two he had foreseen the *dénouement*. "Ah!" he repeated, thoughtfully rubbing his plump calf. "I see, my lord. Mr. Peter Audley's daughter? Really! And if I may venture to ask, what is she like?"

Audley paused before he answered. Then, "If you have painted the father aright, Stubbs, I should say that she was his opposite in all but his obstinacy. A calm and self-reliant young woman, if I am any judge."

"And handsome?"

"Yes, with a look of breeding. At the same time she is penniless and dependent, teaching English in a kind of charity school, cheek by jowl with a princess!"

"God bless my soul!" cried the lawyer, astonished at last. "A princess!"

"Who is a good creature as women go, but as likely as not to send her adrift to-morrow."

"Tut-tut-tut!" muttered the other.

"However, I'll tell you the story," Audley concluded. And he did so.

When he had done, "Well," Stubbs exclaimed, "for a coincidence-"

"Ah, there," the young man broke in, "I fancy, all's not said. I take it the Princess noted the name, but was too polite to question me. Anyway, the girl is there. She is dependent, friendless; attractive, and well-bred. For a moment it did occur to me-she is John Audley's heiress-that I might make all safe by-" His voice dropped. His last words were inaudible.

"The chance is so very remote," said the lawyer, aware that he was on delicate ground, and that the other was rather following out his own thoughts than consulting him.

"It is. The idea crossed my mind only for a moment-of course it's absurd for a man as poor as I am. There is hardly a poorer peer out of Ireland-you know that. Fourteenth baron without a roof to my house or a pane of glass in my windows! And a rent-roll when all is told of-"

"A little short of three thousand," the lawyer muttered.

"Two thousand five hundred, by God, and not a penny more! If any man ought to marry money, I am that man, Stubbs!"

Mr. Stubbs, staring at the fire with a hand on each knee, assented respectfully. "I've always hoped that you would, my lord," he said, "though I've not ventured to say it."

"Yes! Well-putting that aside," the other resumed, "what is to be done about her? I've been thinking it over, and I fancy that I've hit on the right line. John Audley's given me trouble enough. I'll give him some. I'll make him provide for her, d-n him, or I don't know my man!"

"I'd like to know, my lord," Stubbs ventured thoughtfully, "why he didn't answer her letters. He hated her father, but it is not like Mr. John to let the young lady drift. He's crazy about the family, and she is his next heir. He's a lonely man, too, and there is room at the Gatehouse."

Audley paused, half-way across the room. "I wish we had never leased the Gatehouse to him!"

"It's not everybody's house, my lord. It's lonely and-"

"It's too near Beaudelays!"

"If your lordship were living at the Great House, quite so," the lawyer agreed. "But, as it is, the rent is useful, and the lease was made before our time, so that we have no choice."

"I shall always believe that he had a reason for going there!"

"He had an idea that it strengthened his claim," the lawyer said indulgently. "Nothing beyond that, my lord."

"Well, I've made up my mind to increase his family by a niece!" the other replied. "He shall have the girl whether he likes it or not. Take a pen, man, and sit down. He's spoiled my breakfast many a time with his confounded Writs of Error, or whatever you call them, and for once I'll be even with him. Say-yes, Stubbs, say this:

"I am directed by Lord Audley to inform you that a young lady, believed to be a daughter of the late Mr. Peter Audley, and recently living in poverty in an obscure'-yes, Stubbs, say obscure-'part of Paris, has been rescued by the benevolence of a Polish lady. For the present she is in the lady's

house in a menial capacity, and is dependent on her charity. Lord Audley is informed that the young lady made application to you without result, but this report his lordship discredits. Still, he feels himself concerned; and if those to whom she naturally looks decline to aid her, it is his lordship's intention to make such provision as may enable her to live respectably. I am to inform you that Miss Audley's address is the Hôtel Lambert, He St. Louis, Paris. Letters should be addressed "Care of the Housekeeper."""

"He won't like the last touch!" the young man continued, with a quiet chuckle. "If that does not touch him on the raw, I'll yield up the title to-morrow. And now, Stubbs, good-night."

But Stubbs did not take the hint. "I want to say one word, my lord, about the borough-about Riddsley," he said. "We put in Mr. Mottisfont at the last election, your lordship's interest just tipping the scale. We think, therefore, that a word from you may set right what is going wrong."

"What is it?"

"There's a strong feeling," the lawyer answered, his face serious, "that the party is not being led aright. And that Mr. Mottisfont, who is old-

"Is willing to go with the party, eh, Stubbs?"

"No, my lord, with the party leaders. Which is a different thing. Sir Robert Peel-the land put him in, but, d-n me, my lord" – the lawyer's manner lost much of its deference and he spoke bluntly and strongly-"it looks as if he were going to put the land out! An income-tax in peace time, we've taken that. And less protection for the farmer, very good-if it must be. But all this taking off of duties, this letting in of Canadian corn-I tell you, my lord, there's an ugly feeling abroad! There are a good many in Riddsley say that he is going to repeal the Corn Laws altogether; that he's sold us to the League, and won't be long before he delivers us!"

The big man sitting back in his chair smiled. "It seems to me," he said, "that you are travelling rather fast and rather far, Stubbs!"

"That's just what we fear Sir Robert is doing!" the lawyer retorted smartly, the other's rank forgotten. "And you may take it from me the borough won't stand it, my lord, and the sooner Mr. Mottisfont has a hint the better. If he follows Peel too far, the bottom will fall out of his seat. There's no Corn Law leaguer will ever sit for Riddsley!"

"With your help, anyway, Stubbs," my lord said with a smile. The lawyer's excitement amused him.

"No, my lord! Never with my help! I believe that on the landed interest rests the stability of the country! It was the landed interest that supported Pitt and beat Bony, and brought us through the long war. It was the landed interest that kept us from revolution in the dark days after the war. And now because the men that turn cotton and iron and clay into money by the help of the devil's breath-because they want to pay lower wages-

"The ark of the covenant is to be overthrown, eh?" the young man laughed. "Why, to listen to you, Stubbs, one would think that you were the largest landowner in the county!"

"No, my lord," the lawyer answered. "But it's the landowners have made me what I am. And it's the landowners and the farmers that Riddsley lives by and is going to stand by! And the sooner Mr. Mottisfont knows that the better. He was elected as a Tory, and a Tory he must stop, whether Sir Robert turns his coat or not!"

"You want me to speak to Mottisfont?"

"We do, my lord. Just a word. I was at the Ordinary last fair day, and there was nothing else talked of. Free Canadian corn was too like free French corn and free Belgian corn for Stafford wits to see much difference. And Peel is too like repeal, my lord. We are beginning to see that."

Audley shrugged his shoulders. "The party is satisfied," he said. "And Mottisfont? I can't drive the man."

"No, but a word from you-

"Well, I'll think about it. But I fancy you're overrunning the scent."

"Then the line is not straight!" the lawyer retorted shrewdly. "However, if I have been too warm, I beg pardon, my lord."

"I'll bear it in mind," Audley answered. "Very good. And now, good-night, Stubbs. Don't forget to send the letter to John Audley as soon as you reach London."

Stubbs replied that he would, and took his leave. He had said his say on the borough question, lord or no lord; which to a Briton-and he was a typical Briton-was a satisfaction.

But half an hour later, when he had drawn his nightcap down to his ears and stood, the extinguisher in his hand, he paused. "He's a sober hand for a young man," he thought, "a very sober hand. I warrant he will never run his ship on the rocks for lack of a good look-out!"

CHAPTER IV

HOMeward BOUND

In the corner of the light diligence, seating six inside, which had brought her from Montreuil, Mary Audley leant forward, looking out through the dingy panes for the windmills of Calais. Joséphine slept in the corner facing her, as she had slept for two hours past. Their companions, a French shopkeeper and her child, and an English bagman, sighed and fidgeted, as travellers had cause to sigh and fidget in days when he was lucky who covered the distance from Paris to Calais in twenty-five hours. The coach rumbled on. The sun had set, a small rain was falling. The fading light tinged the plain of the Pas de Calais with a melancholy which little by little dyed the girl's thoughts.

She was on her way to her own country, to those on whom she might be dependent without shame. And common sense, of which she had a large share, told her that she had cause, great cause to be thankful. But the flush of relief, to which the opening prospect had given rise, was ebbing. The life before her was new, those amongst whom she must lead that life were strange; nor did the cold phrases of her uncle's invitation, which ignored both her father and the letters that she had written, promise an over-warm welcome.

Still, "Courage!" Mary murmured to herself, "Courage!" And she recalled a saying which she had learned from the maid, "At the worst, ten fingers!" Then, seeing that at last they were entering the streets of the town and that the weary journey was over-she had left Paris the day before-she touched Joséphine. "We are there," she said.

The maid awoke with her eyes on the bagman, who was stout. "Ah!" she muttered. "In England they are like that! No wonder that they travel seeing that their bones are so padded! But, for me I am one ache."

They jolted over the uneven pavement, crossed a bridge, lumbered through streets scarcely wider than the swaying diligence, at last with a great cracking of whips they swerved to the left and drew up amid the babel of the quay. In a twinkling they were part of it. Porters dragged down, fought for, snatched up their baggage. English-speaking touts shook dirty cards in their faces. Tide-waiters bawled questions in their ears. The postilion, the conductor, all the world stretched greedy palms under their noses. Other travellers ran into them, and they ran into other travellers. All this, in the dusk, in the rain, while the bell on the deck overhead clanged above the roar of the escaping steam, and a man shouted without ceasing, "Tower steamer! Tower steamer! Any more for England?"

Joséphine, after one bitter exchange of words with a lad who had seized her handbag, thrust her fingers into her ears and resigned herself. Even Mary for a moment was aghast. She was dragged this way and that, she lost one article and recovered it, lost another and recovered that, she lost her ticket and rescued it from a man's hand. At last, her baggage on board, she found herself breathless at the foot of the ladder, with three passengers imploring her to ascend, and six touts clinging to her skirts and crying for drink-money. She had barely time to make her little gift to the kind-hearted maid-who was returning to Paris by the night coach-and no time to thank her, before they were parted. Mary was pushed up the ladder. In a moment she was looking down from the deck on the wet, squalid quay, the pale up-turned faces, the bustling crowd.

She picked out the one face which she knew, and which it pained her to lose. By gestures and smiles, with a tear in the eye, she tried to make amends to Joséphine for the hasty parting, the half-spoken words. The maid on her side was in tears, and after the French fashion was proud of them. So the last minute came. The paddles were already turning, the ship was going slowly astern, when a man pushed his way through the crowd. He clutched the ladder as it was unhooked, and at some risk and much loss of dignity he was bundled on board. There was a lamp amidships, and, as he regained his balance, Mary, smiling in spite of herself, saw that he was an Englishman, a man about thirty,

and plainly dressed. Then in her anxiety to see the last of Joséphine she crossed the deck as the ship went about, and she lost sight of him.

She continued to look back and to wave her handkerchief, until nothing remained but a light or two in a bank of shadow. That was the last she was to see of the land which had been her home for ten years; and chilled and lonely she turned about and did what, had she been an older traveller, she would have done before. She sought the after-cabin. Alas, a glance from the foot of the companion was enough! Every place was taken, every couch occupied, and the air, already close, repelled her. She climbed to the deck again, and was seeking some corner where she could sit, sheltered from the wind and rain, when the captain saw her and fell foul of her.

"Now, young lady," he said, "no woman's allowed on deck at night!"

"Oh, but," she protested, "there's no room downstairs!"

"Won't do," he answered roughly. "Lost a woman overboard once, and as much trouble about her as about all the men, drunk or sober, I've ever carried. All women below, all women below, is the order! Besides," more amicably, as he saw by a ray of lantern-light that she was young and comely, "it's wet, my dear, and going to be d-d wet, and as dark as Wapping!"

"But I've a cloak," she petitioned, "if I sit quite still, and-"

A tall form loomed up at the captain's elbow. "This is the lady I am looking for," the newcomer said. "It will be all right, Captain Jones."

The captain turned sharply. "Oh, my lord," he said, "I didn't know; but with petticoats and a dark night, blest if you know where you are! I'm sure I beg the young lady's pardon. Quite right, my lord, quite right!" With a rough salute he went forward and the darkness swallowed him.

"Lord Audley?" Mary said. She spoke quietly, but to do so she had to steady her voice.

"Yes," he replied. "I knew that you were crossing to-night, and as I had to go over this week I chose this evening. I've reserved a cabin for you."

"Oh, but," she remonstrated, "I don't think you should have done that! I don't know that I can-"

"Afford it?" he said coolly. "Then-as it is a matter of some shillings-your kinsman will presume to pay for it."

It was a small thing, and she let it pass. "But who told you," she asked, "that I was crossing to-night?"

"The Princess. You don't feel, I suppose, that as you are crossing, it was my duty to stay in France?"

"Oh no!" she protested.

"But you are not sure whether you are more pleased or more vexed? Well, let me show you where your cabin is-it is the size of a milliner's box, but by morning you will be glad of it, and that may turn the scale. Moreover," as he led the way across the deck, "the steward's boy, when he is not serving gin below, will serve tea above, and at sea tea is not to be scorned. That's your number-7. And there is the boy. Boy!" he called in a voice that ensured obedience, "Tea and bread and butter for this lady in number 7 in an hour. See it is there, my lad!"

She smiled. "I think the tea and bread and butter may turn the scale," she said.

"Right," he replied. "Then, as it is only eight o'clock, why should we not sit in the shelter of this tarpaulin? I see that there are two seats. They might have been put for us."

"Is it possible that they were?" she asked shrewdly. "Well, why not?"

She had no reason to give-and the temptation was great. Five minutes before she had been the most lonely creature in the world. The parting from Joséphine, the discomfort of the boat, the dark sea and the darker horizon, the captain's rough words, had brought the tears to her eyes. And then, in a moment, to be thought of, provided for, kindly entreated, to be lapped in attentions as in a cloak-in very fact, in another second a warm cloak was about her-who could expect her to refuse this? Moreover, he was her kinsman; probably she owed it to him that she was here.

At any rate she thought that it would be prudish to demur, and she took one of the seats in the lee of the screen. Audley tucked the cloak about her, and took the other. The light of a lantern fell on their faces and the few passengers who still tramped the windy deck could see the pair, and doubtless envied him their shelter. "Are you comfortable?" he inquired-but before she could answer he whistled softly.

"What is it?" Mary asked.

"Not much." He laughed to himself.

Then she saw coming along the deck towards them a man who had not found his sea-legs. As he approached he took little runs, and now brought up against the rail, now clutched at a stay. Mary knew the man again. "He nearly missed the boat," she whispered.

"Did he?" her companion answered in the same tone. "Well, if he had quite missed it, I'd have forgiven him. He is going to be ill, I'll wager!"

When the man was close to them he reeled, and to save himself he grasped the end of their screen. His eyes met theirs. He was past much show of emotion, but his voice rose as he exclaimed, "Audley. Is that you?"

"It is. We are in for a rough night, I'm afraid."

"And-pardon me," the stranger hesitated, peering at them, "is that Miss Audley with you?"

"Yes," Mary said, much surprised.

"Oh!"

"This is Mr. Basset," Audley explained. Mary stared at the stranger. The name conveyed nothing to her.

"I came to meet you," he said, speaking with difficulty, and now and again casting a wild eye abroad as the deck heaved under him. "But I expected to find you at the hotel, and I waited there until I nearly missed the boat. Even then I felt that I ought to learn if you were on board, and I came up to see."

"I am very much obliged to you," Mary answered politely, "but I am quite comfortable, thank you. It is close below, and Lord Audley found this seat for me. And I have a cabin."

"Oh yes!" he answered. "I think I will go down then if you-if you are sure you want nothing."

"Nothing, thank you," Mary answered with decision.

"I think I-I'll go, then. Good-night!"

With that he went, making desperate tacks in the direction of the companion. Unfortunately what he gained in speed he lost in dignity, and before he reached the hatch Lord Audley gave way to laughter.

"Oh, don't!" Mary cried. "He will hear you. And it was kind of him to look for me when he was not well."

But Audley only laughed the more. "You don't catch the full flavor of it," he said. "He's come three hundred miles to meet you, and he's too ill to do anything now he's here!"

"Three hundred miles to meet me!" she cried in astonishment.

"Every yard of it! Don't you know who he is? He's Peter Basset, your uncle's nephew by marriage, who lives with him. He's come, or rather your uncle has sent him, all the way from Stafford to meet you-and he's gone to lie down! He's gone to lie down! There's a squire of dames for you! Upon my honor, I never knew anything richer!"

And my lord's laughter broke out anew.

CHAPTER V

THE LONDON PACKET

Mary laughed with him, but she was not comfortable. What she had seen of the stranger, a man plain in feature and ordinary in figure, one whom the eye would not have remarked in a crowd, did not especially commend him. And certainly he had not shown himself equal to a difficult situation. But the effort he had made to come to her help appealed to her generosity, and she was not sure how far she formed a part of the comedy. So her laughter was from the lips only, and brief. Then, "My uncle's nephew?" she asked thoughtfully.

"His wife's nephew. Your uncle married a Basset."

"But why did he send him to meet me?"

"For a simple reason-I should say that he had no one else to send. Your uncle is not a man of many friends."

"I understood that some one would meet the boat in London," she said. "But I expected a woman."

"I fancy the woman would be to seek," he replied. "And Basset is a kind of tame cat at the Gatehouse. He lives there a part of the year, though he has an old place of his own up the country. He's a Staffordshire man born and bred, and I dare say a good fellow in his way, but a dull dog! a dull dog! Are you sure that the wind does not catch you?"

She said that she was very comfortable, and they were silent awhile, listening to the monotonous slapping of a rope against the mast and the wash of the waves as they surged past the beam. A single light at the end of the breakwater shone in the darkness behind them. She marked the light grow smaller and more distant, and her thoughts went back to the convent school, to her father, to the third-floor where for a time they had been together, to his care for her-feeble and inefficient, to his illness. And a lump rose in her throat, her hands gripped one another as she strove to hide her feelings. In her heart she whispered a farewell. She was turning her back on her father's grave. The last tendril which bound her to the old life was breaking.

The light vanished, and gradually the girl's reflections sought a new channel. They turned from the past to the present, and dwelt on the man beside her, who had not only thought of her comfort, who had not only saved her from some hours of loneliness, but had probably wrought this change in her life. This was the third time only that she had seen him. Once, some days after that memorable evening, he had called at the Hôtel Lambert, and her employer had sent for her. He had greeted her courteously in the Princess's presence, had asked her kindly if she had heard from England, and had led her to believe that she would hear. And she remembered with a blush that the Princess had looked from one to the other with a smile, and afterwards had had another manner for her.

Meanwhile the man wondered what she was thinking, and waited for her to give him the clue. But she was so long silent that his patience wore thin. It was not for this, it was not to sit silent beside her, that he had taken a night journey and secured these cosy seats.

"Well?" he said at last.

She turned to him, her eyes wet with tears. "It seems so strange," she murmured, "to be leaving all and going into a world in which I know no one."

"Except the head of your family."

"Except you! I suppose that I owe it to you that I am here?"

"I should be happy if I thought so," he replied, with careful reticence. "But we set a stone rolling, we do not know where it falls. You will soon learn-Basset will tell you, if I don't-that your uncle and I are not on good terms. Therefore it is unlikely that he was moved by what I said."

"But you said something?"

"If I did," he answered, smiling, "it was against the grain—who likes to put his finger between the door and the jamb? And let me caution you. Your uncle will not suffer meddling on my part, still less a reminder of it. Therefore, as you are going to owe all to him, you will do well to be silent about me."

She was sure that she owed all to him, and she might have said so, but at that moment the boat changed its course and the full force of the wind struck them. The salt spray whipped and stung their faces. Her cloak flew out like a balloon, her scarf pennon-wise, the tarpaulin flapped like some huge bird. He had to spring to the screen, to adjust it to the new course, to secure and tuck in her cloak—and all in haste, with exclamations and laughter, while Mary, sharing the joy of the struggle, and braced by the sting of the salt wind, felt her heart rise. How kind he was, and how strong. How he towered above ordinary men. How safe she felt in his care.

When they were settled anew, she asked him to tell her something about the Gatehouse.

"It's a lonely place," he said. "It is quite out of the world. I don't know, indeed, how you will exist after the life you have led."

"The life I have led!" she protested. "But that is absurd! Though you saw me in the Princess's salon, you know that my life had nothing in common with hers. I was downstairs no more than three or four times, and then merely to interpret. My life was spent between whitewashed walls, on bare floors. I slept in a room with twenty children, ate with forty—onion soup and thick tartines. The evening I saw you I wore shoes which the maid lent me. And with all that I was thankful, most thankful, to have such a refuge. The great people who met at the Princess's—"

"And who thought that they were making history!" he laughed. "Did you know that? Did you know that the Princess was looking to them to save the last morsel of Poland?"

"No," she said. "I did not know. I am very ignorant. But if I were a man, I should love to do things like that."

"I believe you would!" he replied. "Well, there are crusades in England. Only I fear that you will not be in the way of them."

"And I am not a princess! But tell me, please, what are they?"

"You will not be long before you come upon one," he replied, a hint of derision in his tone. "You will see a placard in the streets, '*Shall the people's bread be taxed?*' Not quite so romantic as the independence of Poland? But I can tell you that heads are quite as likely to be broken over it."

"Surely," she said, "there can be only one answer to that."

"Just so," he replied dryly. "But what is the answer? The land claims high prices that it may thrive; the towns claim cheap bread that they may live. Each says that the country depends upon it. 'England self-supporting!' says one. 'England the workshop of the world!' says the other."

"I begin to see."

"'The land is the strength of the country,' argues the squire. 'Down with monopoly,' cries the cotton lord. Then each arms himself with a sword lately forged and called 'Philanthropy,' and with that he searches for chinks in the other's armor. 'See how factories work the babes, drive the women underground, ruin the race,' shout the squires. 'Vote for the land and starvation wages,' shout the mill-owners."

"But does no one try to find the answer?" she asked timidly. "Try to find out what is best for the people?"

"Ah!" he rejoined, "if by the people you mean the lower classes, they cry, 'Give us not bread, but votes!' And the squires say that that is what the traders who have just got votes don't mean to give them; and so, to divert their attention, dangle cheap bread before their noses!"

Mary sighed. "I am afraid that I must give it up," she said. "I am so ignorant."

"Well," he replied thoughtfully. "Many are puzzled which side to take, and are waiting to see how the cat jumps. In the meantime every fence is placarded with 'Speed the Plough!' on one side, and 'The Big Loaf!' on the other. The first man you meet thinks the landlord a devourer of widows' houses; to the next the mill-owner is an ogre grinding men's bones to make his bread. Even at the

Gatehouse I doubt if you will escape the excitement, though there is not a field of wheat within a mile of it!"

"To me it is like a new world," she said.

"Then, when you are in the new world," he replied, smiling as he rose, "do not forget Columbus! But here is the lad to tell you that your tea is ready."

He repented when Mary had left him that he had not made better use of his time. It had been his purpose to make such an impression on the girl as might be of use in the future, and he wondered why he had not devoted himself more singly to this; why he had allowed minutes which might have been given to intimate subjects to be wasted in a dry discussion. But there was a quality in Mary that did not lightly invite to gallantry—a gravity and a balance that, had he looked closely into the matter, might have explained his laches.

And in fact he had builded better than he knew, for while he reproached himself, Mary, safe within the tiny bathing machine which the packet company called a cabin, was giving much thought to him. The dip-candle, set within a horn lantern, threw its light on the one comfortable object, the tea-tray, seated beside which she reviewed what had happened, and found it all interesting; his meeting with her, his thought for her, the glimpses he had given her of things beyond the horizon of the convent school, even his diversion into politics. He was not on good terms with her uncle, and it was unlikely that she would see more of him. But she was sure that she would always remember his appearance on the threshold of her new life, that she would always recall with gratitude this crossing and the kindness which had lapped her about and saved her from loneliness.

In her eyes he figured as one of the brilliant circle of the Hôtel Lambert. For her he played a part in great movements and high enterprises such as those which he had revealed to her. His light treatment of them, his air of detachment, had, indeed, chilled her at times; but these were perhaps natural in one who viewed from above and from a distance the ills which it was his task to treat. How ignorant he must think her! How remote from the plane on which he lived, the standards by which he judged, the objects at which he aimed! Yet he had stooped to explain things to her and to make them clear.

She spent an hour deep in thought, and, strange as the life of the ship was to her, she was deaf to the creaking of the timbers, and the surge of the waves as they swept past the beam. At intervals hoarse orders, a rush of feet across the deck, the more regular tramp of rare passengers, caught her attention, only to lose it as quickly. It was late when she roused herself. She saw that the candle was burning low, and she began to make her arrangements for the night.

Midway in them she paused, and colored, aware that she knew his tread from the many that had passed. The footstep ceased. A hand tapped at her door. "Yes?" she said.

"We shall be in the river by daybreak," Audley announced. "I thought that you might like to come on deck early. You ought not to miss the river from the Nore to the Pool."

"Thank you," she answered.

"You shouldn't miss it," he persisted. "Greenwich especially!"

"I shall be there," she replied. "It is very good of you. Good-night."

He went away. After all, he was the only man on board shod like a gentleman; it had been odd if she had not known his step! And for going on deck early, why should she not? Was she to miss Greenwich because Lord Audley went to a good bootmaker?

So when Peter Basset, still pale and qualmish, came on deck in the early morning, a little below the Pool, the first person he saw was the girl whom he had come to escort. She was standing high above him on the captain's bridge, her hands clasping the rail, her hair blown about and shining golden in the sunshine. Lord Audley's stately form towered above her. He was pointing out this and that, and they were talking gaily; and now and again the captain spoke to them, and many were looking at them. She did not see Basset; he was on the deck below, standing amid the common crowd, and so he was free to look at her as he pleased. He might be said not to have seen her before, and what he saw

now bewildered, nay, staggered him. Unwillingly, and to please his uncle, he had come to meet a girl of whom they knew no more than this, that, rescued from some backwater of Paris life, into which a weak and shiftless father had plunged her, she had earned her living, if she had earned it at all, in a dependent capacity. He had looked to find her one of two things; either flashy and underbred, with every fault an Englishman might consider French, or a nice mixture of craft and servility. He had not been able to decide which he would prefer.

Instead he saw a girl tall, slender, and slow of movement, with eyes set under a fine width of brow and grave when they smiled, a chin fuller than perfect beauty required, a mouth a little large, a perfect nose. Auburn hair, thick and waving, drooped over each temple, and framed a face as calm as it was fair. "Surely a pearl found on a midden!" he thought. And as the thought passed through his mind, Mary looked down. Her eyes roved for a moment over the crowded deck, where some, like Basset, returned her gaze with interest, while others sought their baggage or bawled for missing companions. He was not a man, it has been said, to stand out in a crowd, and her eyes travelled over him without seeing him. Audley spoke to her, she lifted her eyes, she looked ashore again. But the unheeding glance which had not deigned to know him stung Basset! He dubbed her, with all her beauty, proud and hard. Still-to be such and to have sprung from such a life! It was marvellous.

He knew nothing of the convent school with its hourly discipline lasting through years. He did not guess that the obstinacy which had been weakness in the father was strength in the child. Much less could he divine that the improvidence of that father had become a beacon, warning the daughter off the rocks which had been fatal to him! Mary was no miracle, but neither was she proud or hard.

They had passed Erith, and Greenwich with its stately pile and formal gardens glittering in the sunshine of an April morning. The ripple of a westerly wind, meeting the flood, silvered the turbid surface. A hundred wherries skimmed like water-flies hither and thither, long lines of colliers fringed the wharves, tall China clippers forged slowly up under a scrap of foresail, dumb barges deep laden with hay or Barclay's Entire, moved mysteriously with the tide. On all sides hoarse voices bawled orders or objurgations. Charmed with the gayety, the movement, the color, Mary could not take her eyes from the scene. The sunshine, the leap of life, the pulse of spring, moved in her blood and put to flight the fears that had weighed on her at nightfall. She told herself with elation that this was England, this was her native land, this was her home.

Meanwhile Audley's mind took another direction. He reflected that in a few minutes he must part from the girl, and must trust henceforth to the impression he had made. For some hours he had scarcely given a thought to Basset, but he recalled him now, and he searched for him in the throng below. He found him at last, pressed against the rail between a fat woman with a basket and a crying child. Their eyes met. My lord glanced away, but he could not refrain from a smile as he pictured the poor affair the other had made of his errand. And Basset saw the smile and read its meaning, and though he was not self-assertive, though he was, indeed, backward to a fault, anger ran through his veins. To have travelled three hundred miles in order to meet this girl, to have found her happy in another's company, and to have accepted the second place-the position had vexed him even under the qualms of illness. This morning, and since he had seen her, it stirred in him an unwonted resentment. He d-d Audley under his breath, disengaged himself from the basket which the fat woman was thrusting into his ribs, lifted the child aside. He escaped below to collect his effects.

But in a short time he recovered his temper. When the boat began to go about in the crowded Pool and Mary reluctantly withdrew her eyes from the White Tower, darkened by the smoke and the tragedies of twenty generations, she found him awaiting them at the foot of the ladder. He was still pale, and the girl's conscience smote her. For many hours she had not given him a thought. "I hope you are better," she said gently.

"Horrid thing, *mal de mer!*" remarked my lord, with a gleam of humor in his eye.

"Thank you, I am quite right this morning," Basset answered.

"You go from Euston Grove, I suppose?"

"Yes. The morning train starts in a little over an hour."

No more was said, and they went ashore together. Audley, an old traveller, and one whose height and presence gave weight to his orders, saw to Mary's safety in the crowd, shielded her from touts and tide-waiters, took the upper hand. He watched the aproned porters disappearing with the baggage in the direction of the Custom House, and a thought struck him. "I am sorry that my servant is not here," he said. "He would see our things through without troubling us." His eyes met Basset's.

Basset disdained to refuse. "I will do it," he said. He received the keys and followed the baggage.

Audley looked at Mary and laughed. "I think you'll find him useful," he said. "Takes a hint and is not too forward."

"For shame!" she cried. "It is very good of him to go." But she could not refrain from a smile.

"Well trained," Audley continued in a whimsical tone, "fetches and carries, barks at the name of Peel and growls at the name of Cobden, gives up a stick when required, could be taught to beg by the right person."

She laughed-she could not resist his manner. "But you are not very kind," she said. "Please to call a-whatever we need. He shall not do everything."

"Everything?" Lord Audley echoed. "He should do nothing," in a lower tone, "if I had my way."

Mary blushed.

CHAPTER VI

FIELD AND FORGE

The window of the clumsy carriage was narrow, but Mary gazed through it as if she could never see enough of the flying landscape, the fields, the woods, the ivy-clad homes and red-roofed towns that passed in procession before her. The emotions of those who journeyed for the first time on a railway at a speed four times as great as that of the swiftest High-flier that ever devoured the road are forgotten by this generation. But they were vivid. The thing was a miracle. And though by this time men had ceased to believe that he who passed through the air at sixty miles an hour must of necessity cease to breathe, the novice still felt that he could never tire of the panorama so swiftly unrolled before him.

And it was not only wonder, it was admiration that held Mary chained to the window. Her infancy had been spent in a drab London street, her early youth in the heart of a Paris which was still gloomy and mediæval. Some beautiful things she had seen on fête days, the bend of the river at Meudon or St. Germain, and once the Forest of Fontainebleau; on Sundays the Bois. But the smiling English meadows, the gray towers of village churches, the parks and lawns of manor-houses, the canals with their lines of painted barges, and here and there a gay packet boat—she drank in the beauty of these, and more than once her eyes grew dim. For a time Basset, seated in the opposite corner, did not exist for her; while he, behind the *Morning Chronicle*, made his observations and took note of her at his leisure. The longer he looked the more he marvelled.

He asked himself with amusement what John Audley would think of her when he, too, should see her. He anticipated the old man's surprise on finding her so remote from their preconceived ideas of her. He wondered what she would think of John Audley.

And while he pondered, and now scanned his paper without reading it, and now stole another glance at her, he steeled himself against her. She might not have been to blame, it might not have been her fault; but, between them, the two on the boat had put him in his place and he could not forget it. He had cut a poor figure, and he resented it. He foresaw that in the future she would be dependent on him for society, and he would be a fool if he then forgot the lesson he had learned. She had a good face, but probably her up-bringing had been anything but good. Probably it had taught her to make the most of the moment and of the man of the moment, and he would be foolish if he let her amuse herself with him. He had seen in what light she viewed him when other game was afoot, and he would deserve the worst if he did not remember this.

Presently an embankment cut off the view, and she withdrew her eyes from the window. In her turn she took the measure of her companion. It seemed to her that his face was too thoughtful for his years, and that his figure was insignificant. The eye which had accustomed itself to Lord Audley's port and air found Basset slight and almost mean. She smiled as she recalled the skill with which my lord had set him aside and made use of him.

Still, he was a part of the life to which she was hastening, and curiosity stirred in her. He was in possession, he was in close relations with her uncle, he knew many things which she was anxious to know. Much of her comfort might depend on him. Presently she asked him what her uncle was like.

"You will see for yourself in a few hours," he replied, his tone cold and almost ungracious. "Did not Lord Audley describe him?"

"No. And you seem," with a faint smile, "to be equally on your guard, Mr. Basset."

"Not at all," he retorted. "But I think it better to leave you to judge for yourself. I have lived too near to Mr. Audley to-to criticise him."

She colored.

"Let me give you one hint, however," he continued in the same dry tone; "you will be wise not to mention Lord Audley to him. They are not on good terms."

"I am sorry."

He shrugged his shoulders. "It cannot be said to be unnatural, after what has happened."

She considered this. "What has happened?" she asked after a pause.

"Well, the claim to the peerage, if nothing else—"

"What claim?" she asked. "Whose claim? What peerage? I am quite in the dark."

He stared. He did not believe her. "Your uncle's claim," he said curtly. Then as she still looked a question, "You must know," he continued, "that your uncle claimed the title which Lord Audley bears, and the property which goes with it. And that the decision was only given against him three months ago."

"I know nothing of it," she said. "I never heard of the claim."

"Really?" he replied. He hardly deigned to veil his incredulity. "Yet if your uncle had succeeded you were the next heir."

"I?"

"Yes, you."

Then her face shook his unbelief. She turned slowly and painfully red. "Is it possible?" she said. "You are not playing with me?"

"Certainly I am not. Do you mean that Lord Audley never told you that? Never told you that you were interested?"

"Never! He only told me that he was not on good terms with my uncle, and that for that reason he would leave me to learn the rest at the Gatehouse."

"Well, that was right," Basset answered. "It is as well, since you have to live with Mr. Audley, that you should not be prejudiced against him."

"No doubt," she said dryly. "But I do not understand why he did not answer my letters."

"Did you write to him?"

"Twice." She was going to explain the circumstances, but she refrained. Why appeal to the sympathies of one who seemed so cold, so distant, so indifferent?

"He cannot have had the letters," Basset decided after a pause.

"Then how did he come to write to me at last?"

"Lord Audley sent your address to him."

"Ah!" she said. "I supposed so." With an air of finality she turned to the window, and for some time she was silent. Her mind had much upon which to work.

She was silent for so long that before more was said they were running through the outskirts of Birmingham, and Mary awoke with a shock to another and sadder side of England. In place of parks and homesteads she saw the England of the workers-workers at that time exploited to the utmost in pursuance of a theory of economy that heeded only the wealth of nations, and placed on that wealth the narrowest meaning. They passed across squalid streets, built in haste to meet the needs of new factories, under tall chimneys the smoke of which darkened the sky without hindrance, by vile courts, airless and almost sunless. They looked down on sallow children whose only playground was the street and whose only school-bell was the whistle that summoned them at dawn to premature toil. Haggard women sat on doorsteps with puling babes in their arms. Lines of men, whose pallor peered through the grime, propped the walls, or gazed with apathy at the train. For a few minutes Mary forgot not only her own hopes and fears, but the aloofness and even the presence of her companion. When they came to a standstill in the station, where they had to change on to the Grand Junction Railway, Basset had to speak twice before she understood that he wished her to leave the carriage.

"What a dreadful place!" she exclaimed.

"Well, it is not beautiful," Basset admitted. "One does not look for beauty in Birmingham and the Black Country."

He got her some tea, and marshalled her carefully to the upper line. But his answer had jarred upon her, and when they were again seated, Mary kept her thoughts to herself. Beyond Birmingham their route skirted towns rather than passed through them, but she saw enough to deepen the impression which the lanes and alleys of that place had made upon her. The sun had set and the cold evening light revealed in all their meanness the rows of naked cottages, the heaps of slag and cinders, the starveling horses that stood with hanging heads on the dreary lands. As darkness fell, fires shone out here and there, and threw into Dantesque relief the dark forms of half-naked men toiling with fury to feed the flames. The change which an hour had made in all she saw seemed appalling to the girl; it filled her with awe and sadness. Here, so near the paradise of the country and the plough, was the Inferno of the town, the forge, the pit! Here, in place of the thatched cottage and the ruddy faces, were squalor and sunken cheeks and misery and dearth.

She thought of the question which Lord Audley had raised twenty-four hours before, and which he had told her was racking the minds of men—should food be taxed? And she fancied that there was, there could be, but one answer. These toiling masses, these slaves of the hammer and the pick, must be fed, and, surely, so fed that a margin, however small, however meagre, might be saved out of which to better their sordid lot.

"We call this the Black Country," Basset explained, feeling the silence irksome. After all, she was in his charge, in a way she was his guest. He ought to amuse her.

"It is well named," she answered. "Is there anything in England worse than this?"

"Well, round Hales Owen and Dudley," he rejoined, "it may be worse. And at Cradley Heath it may be rougher. More women and children are employed in the pits; and where women make chains—well, it's pretty bad."

She had spoken dryly to hide her feelings. He replied in a tone as matter-of-fact, through lack of feeling. For this he was not so much to blame as she fancied, for that which horrified her was to him an everyday matter, one of the facts of life with which he had been familiar from boyhood. But she did not understand this. She judged him and condemned him. She did not speak again.

By and by, "We shall be at Penkridge in twenty minutes," he said. "After that a nine-miles drive will take us to the Gatehouse, and your journey will be over. But I fear that you will find the life quiet after Paris."

"I was very quiet in Paris."

"But you were in a large house."

"I was at the Princess Czartoriski's."

"Of course. I suppose it was there that you met Lord Audley?"

"Yes."

"Well, after that kind of life, I am afraid that the Gatehouse will have few charms for you. It is very remote, very lonely."

She cut him short with impatience, the color rising to her face. "I thought you understood," she said, "that I was in the Princess's house as a governess? It was my business to take care of a number of children, to eat with them, to sleep with them, to see that they washed their hands and kept their hair clean. That was my position, Mr. Basset. I do not wish it to be misunderstood."

"But if that were so," he stammered, "how did you—"

"Meet Lord Audley," she replied. "Very simply. Once or twice the Princess ordered me to descend to the salon to interpret. On one of these occasions Lord Audley saw me and learned—who I was."

"Indeed," he said. "I see." Perhaps he had had it in his mind to test her and the truth of Audley's letter, which nothing in her or in my lord's conduct seemed to confirm. He did not know if this had been in his mind, but in any case the result silenced him. She was either very honest or very clever. Many girls, he knew, would have slurred over the facts, and not a few would have boasted of the

Princess's friendship and the Princess's society, and the Princess's hôtel, and brought up her name a dozen times a day.

She is very clever, he thought, or she is-good. But for the moment he steeled himself against the latter opinion.

No other travellers alighted at Penkridge, and he went away to claim the baggage, while she waited, cold and depressed, on the little platform which, lit by a single oil lamp, looked down on a dim churchyard. Dusk was passing into night, and the wind, sweeping across the flat, whipped her skirts and chilled her blood. Her courage sank. A light or two betrayed the nearness of the town, but in every other direction dull lines of willows or pale stretches of water ran into the night.

Five minutes before she had resented Basset's company, now she was glad to see him return. He led the way to the road in silence. "The carriage is late," he muttered, but even as he spoke the quick tramp of a pair of horses pushed to speed broke on them, lights appeared, a moment later a fly pulled up beside them and turned. "You are late," Basset said.

"There!" the man replied. "Minutes might be guineas since trains came in, dang 'em! Give me the days when five minutes made neither man nor mouse, and gentry kept their own time."

"Well, let us get off now."

"I ask no better, Squire. Please yourself and you'll please me."

When they were shut in, Basset laughed. "Stafford manners!" he said. "You'll become used to them!"

"Is this my uncle's carriage?" she asked.

"No," he replied, smiling in the darkness. "He does not keep one."

She said no more. Though she could not see him, her shoulder touched his, and his nearness and the darkness in which they sat troubled her, though she was not timid. They rode thus for a minute or two, then trundled through a narrow street, dimly lit by shop windows; again they were in the dark and the country. Presently the pace dropped to a walk as they began to ascend.

She fancied, peering out on her side, that they were winding up through woods. Branches swept the sides of the carriage. They jolted into ruts and jolted out of them. By and by they were clear of the trees and the road seemed to be better. The moon, newly risen, showed her a dreary upland, bare and endless, here dotted with the dark stumps of trees, there of a deeper black as if fire had swept over it and scarred it. They met no one, saw no sign of habitation. To the girl, accustomed all her life to streets and towns, the place seemed infinitely desolate—a place of solitude and witches and terror and midnight murder.

"What is this?" she asked, shivering.

"This is the Great Chase," he said. "Riddsley, on the farther side, is our nearest town, but since the railway was opened we use Penkridge Station."

His practical tone steadied her, but she was tired, and the loneliness which she had felt while she waited on the bleak platform weighed heavily on her. To what was she going? How would her uncle receive her? This dreary landscape, the gaunt signpost that looked like a gibbet and might have been one, the skeleton trees that raised bare arms to heaven, the scream of a dying rabbit, all added to the depression of the moment. She was glad when at last the carriage stopped at a gate. Basset alighted and opened the gate. He stepped in again, they went on. There were now shadowy trees about them, sparsely set. They jolted unevenly over turf.

"Are we there?" she asked, a tremor in her voice.

"Very nearly," he said. "Another mile and we shall be there. This is Beaudelays Park."

She called pride to her aid, and he did not guess—for all day he had marked her self-possession—that she was trembling. Vainly she told herself that she was foolish, that nothing could happen to her, nothing that mattered. What, after all, was a cold reception, what was her uncle's frown beside the poverty and the hazards from which she had escaped? Vainly she reassured herself; she could not still the rapid beating of her heart.

He might have said a word to cheer her. But he did not know that she was suffering, and he said no word. She came near to hating him for his stolidity and his silence. He was inhuman! A block!

She peered through the misty glass, striving to see what was before them. But she could make out no more than the dark limbs of trees, and now and then a trunk, which shone as the light of the lamp slipped over it, and as quickly vanished. Suddenly they shot from turf to hard road, passed through an open gateway, for an instant the lamp on her side showed a grotesque pillar—they wheeled, they stopped. Within a few feet of her a door stood open, and in the doorway a girl held a lantern aloft in one hand, and with the other screened her eyes from the light.

CHAPTER VII

MR. JOHN AUDLEY

An hour later Basset was seated on one side of a wide hearth, on the other John Audley faced him. The library in which they sat was the room which Basset loved best in the world. It was a room of silence and large spaces, and except where four windows, tall and narrow, broke one wall, it was lined high with the companions of silence-books. The ceiling was of black oak, adorned at the crossings of the joists and beams with emblems, butterflies, and Stafford knots and the like, once bright with color, and still soberly rich. A five-sided bay enlarged each of the two inner corners of the room and broke the outlines. One of these bays shrined a window, four-mullioned, the other a spiral staircase. An air of comfort and stateliness pervaded the whole; here the great scutcheon over the mantel, there the smaller coats on the chair-backs blended their or and gules with the hues of old rugs and the dun bindings of old folios. There were books on the four or five tables, and books on the Cromwell chairs; and charts and deeds, antique weapons and silver pieces, all the tools and toys of the antiquary, lay broadcast. Against the door hung a blazoned pedigree of the Audleys of Beaudelays. It was six feet long and dull with age.

But Basset, as he faced his companion, was not thinking of the room, or of the pursuits with which it was connected in his mind, and which, more than affection and habit, bound him to John Audley. He moved restlessly in his chair, then stretched his legs to meet the glow of the wood fire. "All the same," he said, "I think you would have done well to see her to-night, sir."

"Pooh! pooh!" John Audley answered with lazy good humor. "Why? It doesn't matter what I think of her or she thinks of me. It's what Peter thinks of Mary and Mary thinks of Peter that matters. That's what matters!" He chuckled as he marked the other's annoyance. "She is a beauty, is she?"

"I didn't say so."

"But you think it. You don't deceive me at this time of day. And stand-off, is she? That's for the marines and innocent young fellows like you who think women angels. I'll be bound that she's her mother's daughter, and knows her value and will see that she fetches it! Trading blood will out!"

To the eye that looked and glanced away John Audley, lolling in his chair, in a quilted dressing-gown with silk facings, was a plump and pleasant figure. His face was fresh-colored, and would have been comely if the cheeks had not been a little pendulous. His hair was fine and white and he wore it long, and his hands were shapely and well cared for. As he said his last word he poured a little brandy into a glass and filled it up with water. "Here's to the wooing that's not long adoin!" he said, his eyes twinkling. He seemed to take a pleasure in annoying the other.

He was so far successful that Basset swore softly. "It's silly to talk like that," he said, "when I have hardly known the girl twenty-four hours and have scarcely said ten times as many words to her."

"But you're going to say a good many more words to her!" Audley retorted, grinning. "Sweet, pretty words, my boy! But there, there," he continued, veering between an elfish desire to tease and a desire equally strong to bring the other to his way of thinking. "I'm only joking. I know you'll never let that devil have his way! You'll never leave the course open for *him*! I know that. But there's no hurry! There's no hurry. Though, lord, how I sweated when I read his letter! I had never a wink of sleep the night after."

"I don't suppose that he's given a thought to her in that way," Basset answered. "Why should he?"

John Audley leant forward, and his face underwent a remarkable change. It became a pale, heavy mask, out of which his eyes gleamed, small and malevolent. "Don't talk like a fool!" he said harshly. "Of course he means it. And if she's fool enough all my plans, all my pains, all my rights-and once you come to your senses and help me I shall have my rights-all, all, all will go for nothing."

For nothing!" He sank back in his chair. "There! now you've excited me. You've excited me, and you know that I can't bear excitement!" His hand groped feebly for his glass, and he raised it to his lips. He gasped once or twice. The color came back to his face.

"I am sorry," Basset said.

"Ay, ay. But be a good lad. Be a good lad. Make up your mind to help me at the Great House." Basset shook his head.

"To help me, and twenty-four hours-only twenty-four hours, man-may make all the difference! All the difference in the world to me."

"I have told you my views about it," Basset said doggedly. He shifted uneasily in his chair. "I cannot do it, sir, and I won't."

John Audley groaned. "Well, well!" he answered. "I'll say no more now. I'll say no more now. When you and she have made it up" – in vain Basset shook his head – "you'll see the question in another light. Ay, believe me, you will. It'll be your business then, and your interest, and nothing venture, nothing win! You'll see it differently. You'll help the old man to his rights then."

Basset shrugged his shoulders, but thought it useless to protest. The other sighed once or twice and was silent also. At length, "You never told me that you had heard from her," Basset said.

"That I'd-" John Audley broke off. "What is it, Toft?" he asked over his shoulder.

A man-servant, tall, thin, lantern-jawed, had entered unseen. "I came to see if you wanted anything more, sir?" he said.

"Nothing, nothing, Toft. Good-night!" He spoke impatiently, and he watched the man out before he went on. Then, "Perhaps I heard from her, perhaps I didn't," he said. "It's some time ago. What of it?"

"She was in great distress when she wrote."

John Audley raised his eyebrows. "What of it!" he repeated. "She was that woman's daughter. When Peter married a tradesman's daughter-married a-" He did not continue. His thoughts trickled away into silence. The matter was not worthy of his attention.

But by and by he roused himself. "You've ridiculous scruples," he said. "Absurd scruples. But," briskly, "there's that much of good in this girl that I think she'll put an end to them. You must brighten up, my lad, and spark it a little! You're too grave."

"Damn!" said Basset. "For God's sake, don't begin it all again. I've told you that I've not the least intention-"

"She'll see to that if she's what I think her," John Audley retorted cheerfully. "If she's her mother's daughter! But very well, very well! We'll change the subject. I've been working at the Feathers-the Prince's Feathers."

"Have you gone any farther?" Basset asked, forcing an interest which would have been ready enough at another time.

"I might have, but I had a visitor."

Visitors were rare at the Gatehouse, and Basset wondered. "Who was it?" he asked.

"Bagenal the maltster from Riddsley. He came about some political rubbish. Some trouble they are having with Mottisfont. D-n Mottisfont! What do I care about him? They think he isn't running straight-that he's going in for corn-law repeal. And Bagenal and the other fools think that that will be the ruin of the town."

"But Mottisfont is a Tory," Basset objected.

"So is Peel. They are both in Bagenal's bad books. Bagenal is sure that Peel is going back to the cotton people he came from. Spinning Jenny spinning round again!"

"I see."

"I asked him," Audley continued, rubbing his knees with sly enjoyment, "what Stubbs the lawyer was doing about it. He's the party manager. Why didn't he come to me?"

Basset smiled. "What did he say to that?"

"Hummed and hawed. At last he said that owing to Stubbs's connection with-you know who-it was thought that he was not the right person to come to me. So I asked him what Stubbs's employer was going to do about it."

"Ah!"

"He didn't know what to say to that, the ass! Thought I should go the other way, you see. So I told him" – John Audley laughed maliciously as he spoke-"that, for the landed interest, the law had taken away my land, and, for politics, I would not give a d-n for either party in a country where men did not get their rights! Lord! how he looked!"

"Well, you didn't hide your feelings."

"Why should I?" John Audley asked cheerfully. "What will they do for me? Nothing. Will they move a finger to right me? No. Then a plague on both their houses!" He snapped his fingers in schoolboy fashion and rose to his feet. He lit a candle, taking a light from the fire with a spill. "I am going to bed now, Peter. Unless-" he paused, the candlestick in his hand, and gazed fixedly at his companion. "Lord, man, what we could do in two or three hours! In two or three hours. This very night!"

"I've told you that I will have nothing to do with it!" Basset repeated.

John Audley sighed, and removing his eyes, poked the wick of the candle with the snuffers. "Well," he said, "good-night. We must look to bright eyes and red lips to convert you. What a man won't do for another he will do for himself, Peter. Good-night."

Left alone, Basset stared fretfully at the fire. It was not the first time by scores that John Audley had tried him and driven him almost beyond bearing. But habit is a strong tie, and a common taste is a bond even stronger. In this room, and from the elder man, Basset had learned to trace a genealogy, to read a coat, to know a bar from a bend, to discourse of badges and collars under the guidance of the learned Anstie or the ingenious Le Neve. There he had spent hours flitting from book to book and chart to chart in the pursuit, as thrilling while it lasted as any fox-chase, of some family link, the origin of this, the end of that, a thing of value only to those who sought it, but to them all-important. He could recall many a day so spent while rain lashed the tall mullioned windows or sunlight flooded the window-seat in the bay; and these days had endeared to him every nook in the library from the folio shelves in the shadowy corner under the staircase to the cosey table near the hearth which was called "Mr. Basset's," and enshrined in a long drawer a tree of the Bassets of Blore.

For he as well as Audley came of an ancient and shrunken stock. He also could count among his forbears men who had fought at Blore Heath and Towton, or had escaped by a neck from the ruin of the Gunpowder Plot. So he had fallen early under the spell of the elder man's pursuits, and, still young, had learned from him to live in the past. Later the romantic solitude of the Gatehouse, where he had spent more of the last six years than in his own house at Blore, had confirmed him in the habit.

Under the surface, however, the two men remained singularly unlike. While a fixed idea had narrowed John Audley's vision to the inhuman, the younger man, under a dry and reserved exterior-he was shy, and his undrained acres, his twelve hundred a year, poorly supported an ancient name-was not only human, but in his way was something of an idealist. He dreamed dreams, he had his secret aspirations, at times ambition of the higher kind stirred in him, he planned plans and another life than this. But always-this was a thing inbred in him-he put forward the commonplace, as the cuttle-fish sheds ink, and hid nothing so shyly as the visions which he had done nothing to make real. On those about him he made no deep impression, though from one border of Staffordshire to the other his birth won respect. Politics viewed as a game, and a selfish game, had no attraction for him. Quarter Sessions and the Bench struck no spark from him. At the Races and the County Ball richer men outshone him. But given something to touch his heart and fire his ambition, he had qualities. He might still show himself in another light.

Something of this, for no reason that he could imagine, some feeling of regret for past opportunities, passed through his mind as he sat fretting over John Audley's folly. But after a time

he roused himself and became aware that he was tired; and he rose and lit a candle. He pushed back the smouldering logs and slowly and methodically he put out the lights. He gave a last thought to John Audley. "There was always one maggot in his head," he muttered, "now there's a second. What I would not do to please him, he thinks I shall do to please another! Well, he does not know her yet!"

He went to bed.

CHAPTER VIII

THE GATEHOUSE

It is within the bounds of imagination that death may make no greater change in our inner selves than is wrought at times by a new mood or another outlook. When Mary, an hour before the world was astir on the morning after her arrival, let herself out of the Gatehouse, and from its threshold as from a ledge saw the broad valley of the Trent stretched before her in all the beauty of a May morning, her alarm of the past night seemed incredible. At her feet a sharp slope, clothed in gorse and shrub, fell away to meet the plain. It sank no more than a couple of hundred feet, but this was enough to enable her to follow the silver streak of the river winding afar between park and coppice and under many a church tower. Away to the right she could see the three graceful spires of Lichfield, and southward, where an opal haze closed the prospect, she could imagine the fringe of the Black Country, made beautiful by distance.

In sober fact few parts of England are less inviting than the low lands of Staffordshire, when the spring floods cover them or the fogs of autumn cling to the cold soil. But in spring, when larks soar above them and tall, lop-sided elms outline the fields, they have their beauty; and Mary gazed long at the fair prospect before she turned her back on it and looked at the house that was fated to be her home.

It was what its name signified, a gatehouse; yet by turns it could be a sombre and a charming thing. Some Audley of noble ideas, a man long dead, had built it to be the entrance to his demesne. The park wall, overhung by trees, still ran right and left from it, but the road which had once passed through the archway now slid humbly aside and entered the park by a field gate. A wide-latticed Tudor tower, rising two stories above the arch and turreted at the four corners, formed the middle. It was buttressed on either hand by a lower building, flush with it and of about the same width. The tower was of yellowish stone, the wings were faced with stained stucco. Right and left of the whole a plot of shrubs masked on the one hand the stables, on the other the kitchens—modern blocks set back to such a distance that each touched the old part at a corner only.

He who had planned the building had set it cunningly on the brow of the Great Chase, so that, viewed from the vale, it rose against the skyline. On dark days it broke the fringe of woodland and stood up, gloomy and forbidding, the portal of a Doubting Castle. On bright days, with its hundred diamond panes a-glitter in the sunshine, it seemed to be the porch of a fairy palace, the silent home of some Sleeping Beauty. At all times it imposed itself upon men below and spoke of something beyond, something unseen, greater, mysterious.

To Mary Audley, who saw it at its best, the very stains of the plaster glorified by the morning light, it was a thing of joy. She fancied that to live behind those ancient mullioned windows, to look out morning and evening on that spacious landscape, to feel the bustle of the world so remote, must in itself be happiness. For a time she could not turn from it.

But presently the desire to explore her new surroundings seized her and she re-entered the house. A glance at the groined roof of the hall—many a gallant horseman had ridden under it in his time—proved that it was merely the archway closed and fitted with a small door and window at either end. She unlocked the farther door and passed into a paved court, in which the grass grew between the worn flags. In the stables on the left a dog whined. The kitchens were on the other hand, and before her an opening flanked by tall heraldic beasts broke a low wall, built of moss-grown brick. She ventured through it and uttered a cry of delight.

Near at hand, under cover of a vast chestnut tree, were traces of domestic labor: a grindstone, a saw-pit, a woodpile, coops with clucking hens. But beyond these the sward, faintly lined at first with ruts, stretched away into forest glades, bordered here by giant oaks brown in bud, there by the

yellowish-green of beech trees. In the foreground lay patches of gorse, and in places an ancient thorn, riven and half prostrate, crowned the russet of last year's bracken with a splash of cream. Heedless of the spectator, rabbits sat making their toilet, and from every brake birds filled the air with a riot of song.

To one who had seen little but the streets of Paris, more sordid then than now, the scene was charming. Mary's eyes filled, her heart swelled. Ah, what a home was here! She had espied on her journey many a nook and sheltered dell, but nothing that could vie with this! Heedless of her thin shoes, with no more than a handkerchief on her head, she strayed on and on. By and by a track, faintly marked, led her to the left. A little farther, and old trees fell into line on either hand, as if in days long gone, before age thinned their ranks, they had formed an avenue.

For a time she sat musing on a fallen trunk, then the hawthorn that a few paces away perfumed the spring air moved her to gather an armful of it. She forgot that time was passing, almost she forgot that she had not breakfasted, and she might have been nearly a mile from the Gatehouse when she was startled by a faint hail that seemed to come from behind her. She looked back and saw Basset coming after her.

He, too, was hatless—he had set off in haste—and he was out of breath. She turned with concern to meet him. "Am I very late, Mr. Basset?" she asked, her conscience pricking her. What if this first morning she had broken the rules?

"Oh no," he said. And then, "You've not been farther than this?"

"No. I am afraid my uncle is waiting?"

"Oh no. He breakfasts in his own room. But Etruria told me that you had gone this way, and I followed. I see that you are not empty-handed."

"No." And she thrust the great bunch of may under his nose—who would not have been gay, who would not have lost her reserve in such a scene, on such a morning? "Isn't it fresh? Isn't it delicious?"

As he stooped to the flowers his eyes met hers smiling through the hawthorn sprays, and he saw her as he had not seen her before. Her gravity had left her. Spring laughed in her eyes, youth fluttered in the tendrils of her hair, she was the soul of May. And what she had found of beauty in the woodland, of music in the larks' songs, of perfume in the blossoms, of freshness in the morning, the man found in her; and a shock, never to be forgotten, ran through him. He did not speak. He smelled the hawthorn in silence.

But a few seconds later—as men reckon time—he took note of his feelings, and he was startled. He had not been prepared to like her, we know; many things had armed him against her. But before the witchery of her morning face, the challenge of her laughing eyes, he awoke to the fact that he was in danger. He had to own that if he must live beside her day by day and would maintain his indifference, he must steel himself. He must keep his first impressions of her always before him, and be careful. And be very careful—if even that might avail.

For a hundred paces he walked at her side, listening without knowing what she said. Then his coolness returned, and when she asked him why he had come after her without his hat he was ready.

"I had better tell you," he answered, "this path is little used. It leads to the Great House, and your uncle, owing to his quarrel with Lord Audley, does not like any one to go farther in that direction than the Yew Tree Walk. You can see the Walk from here—the yews mark the entrance to the gardens. I thought that it would be unfortunate if you began by displeasing him, and I came after you."

"It was very good of you," she said. Her face was not gay now. "Does Lord Audley live there—when he is at home?"

"No one lives there," he explained soberly. "No one has lived there for three generations. It's a ruin—I was going to say, a nightmare. The greater part of the house was burnt down in a carouse held to celebrate the accession of George the Third. The Audley of that day rebuilt it on a great scale, but before it was finished he gave a housewarming, at which his only son quarrelled with a guest. The two fought at daybreak, and the son was killed beside the old Butterfly in the Yew Walk—you will see

the spot some day. The father sent away the builders and never looked up again. He diverted much of his property, and a cousin came into the remainder and the title, but the house was never finished, the windows in the new part were never glazed. In the old part some furniture and tapestry decay; in the new are only bats and dust and owls. So it has stood for eighty years, vacant in the midst of neglected gardens. In the sunlight it is one of the most dreary things you can imagine. By moonlight it is better, but unspeakably melancholy."

"How dreadful," she said in a low voice. "I almost wish, Mr. Basset, that you had not told me. They say in France that if you see the dead without touching them, you dream of them. I feel like that about the house."

It crossed his mind that she was talking for effect. "It is only a house after all," he said.

"But our house," with a touch of pride. Then, "What are those?" she asked, pointing to the gray shapeless beasts, time-worn and weather-stained, that flanked the entrance to the courtyard.

"They are, or once were, Butterflies, the badge of the Audleys. These hold shields. You will see the Butterflies in many places in the Gatehouse. You will find them with men's faces and sometimes with a fret on the wings. Your uncle says that they are not butterflies, but moths, that have eaten the Audley fortunes."

It was a thought that matched the picture he had drawn of the deserted house, and Mary felt that the morning had lost its brightness. But not for long. Basset led her into a room on the right of the hall, and the sight drew from her a cry of pleasure. On three sides the dark wainscot rose eight feet from the floor; above, the walls were whitewashed to the ceiling and broken by dim portraits, on stretchers and without frames. On the fourth side where the panelling divided the room from a serving-room, once part of it, it rose to the ceiling. The stone hearth, the iron dogs, the matted floor, the heavy chairs and oak table, all were dark and plain and increased the austerity of the room.

At the end of the table places were laid for three, and Toft, who had set on the breakfast, was fixing the kettle amid the burning logs.

"Is Mr. Audley coming down?" Basset asked.

"He bade me lay for him," Toft replied dryly. "I doubt if he will come. You had better begin, sir. The young lady," with a searching look at her, "must want her breakfast."

"I am afraid I do," Mary confessed.

"Yes, we will begin," Basset said. He invited her to make the tea.

When they were seated, "You like the room?"

"I love it," she answered.

"So do I," he rejoined, more soberly. "The panelling is linen-pattern of the fifteenth century-you see the folds? It was saved from the old house. I am glad you like it."

"I love it," she said again. But after that she grew thoughtful, and during the rest of the meal she said little. She was thinking of what was before her; of the unknown uncle, whose bread she was eating, and upon whom she was going to be dependent. What would he be like? How would he receive her? And why was every one so reticent about him-so reticent that he was beginning to be something of an ogre to her? When Toft presently appeared and said that Mr. Audley was in the library and would see her when she was ready, she lost color. But she answered the man with self-possession, asked quietly where the library was, and had not Basset's eyes been on her face he would have had no notion that she was troubled.

As it was, he waited for her to avow her misgiving-he was prepared to encourage her. But she said nothing.

None the less, at the last moment, with her hand on the door of the library, she hesitated. It was not so much fear of the unknown relative whom she was going to see that drove the blood from her cheek, as the knowledge that for her everything depended upon him. Her new home, its peace, its age, its woodland surroundings, fascinated her. It promised her not only content, but happiness. But as her stay in it hung upon John Audley's will, so her pleasure in it, and her enjoyment of it, depended

upon the relations between them. What would they be? How would he receive her? What would he be like? At last she called up her courage, turned the handle, and entered the library.

For a moment she saw no one. The great room, with its distances and its harmonious litter, appeared to be empty. Then, "Mary, my dear," said a pleasant voice, "welcome to the Gatehouse!" And John Audley rose from his seat at a distant table and came towards her.

The notion which she had formed of him vanished in a twinkling, and with it her fears. She saw before her an elderly gentleman, plump and kindly, who walked with a short tripping step, and wore the swallow-tailed coat with gilt buttons which the frock-coat had displaced. He took her hand with a smile, kissed her on the forehead, and led her to a chair placed beside his own. He sat for a moment holding her hand and looking at her.

"Yes, I see the likeness," he said, after a moment's contemplation. "But, my dear, how is this? There are tears in your eyes, and you tremble."

"I think," she said, "I was a little afraid of you, sir."

"Well, you are not afraid now," he replied cheerfully. "And you won't be again. You won't be again. My dear, welcome once more to the Gatehouse. I hope that it may be your home until another is offered you. Things came between your father and me-I shall never mention them again, and don't you, my dear!" – this a little hurriedly-"don't you; all that is buried now, and I must make it up to you. Your letters?" he continued, patting her hand. "Yes, Peter told me that you wrote to me. I need not say that I never had them. No, never had them-Toft, what is it?"

The change in his voice struck her. The servant had come in quietly. "Mr. Basset, sir, has lost-

"Another time!" John Audley replied curtly. "Another time! I am engaged now. Go!" Then when the door had closed behind the servant, "No, my dear," he continued, "I need not say that I never had them, so that I first heard of your troubles through a channel upon which I will not dwell. However, many good things come by bad ways, Mary. I hope you like the Gatehouse?"

"It is charming!" she cried with enthusiasm.

"It has only one drawback," he said.

She was clever enough to understand that he referred to its owner, and to escape from the subject. "This room," she said, "is perfection. I have never seen anything like it, sir."

"It is a pleasant room," he said, looking round him. "There is our coat over the mantel, gules, a fret or; like all old coats, very simple. Some think it is the Lacy Knot; the Audley of Edward the First's time married a Lacy. But we bore our old coat of three Butterflies later than that, for before the fall of Roger Mortimer, who was hung at Tyburn, he married his daughter to an Audley, and the escheaters found the wedding chamber in his house furnished with our Butterflies. Later the Butterfly survived as our badge. You see it there!" he continued, pointing it out among the mouldings of the ceiling. "There is the Stafford Knot, the badge of the great Dukes of Buckingham, the noblest of English families; it is said that the last of the line, a cobbler, died at Newport, not twenty miles from here. We intermarried with them, and through them with Peter's people, the Bassets. That is the Lovel Wolf, and there is the White Wolf of the Mortimers-all badges. But you do not know, I suppose, what a badge is?"

"I am afraid not," she said, smiling. "But I am as proud of our Butterfly, and as proud to be an Audley, sir, as if I knew more."

"Peter must give you some lessons in heraldry," he answered. "We live in the past here, my dear, and we must indoctrinate you with a love of our pursuits or you will be dull." He paused to consider. "I am afraid that we cannot allot you a drawing-room, but you must make your room upstairs as comfortable as you can. Etruria will see to that. And Peter shall arrange a table for you in the south bay here, and it shall be your table and your bay. That is his table; this is mine. We are orderly, and so we do not get in one another's way."

She thanked him gratefully, and with tears in her eyes, she said something to which he would not listen-he only patted her hand-as to his kindness, his great kindness, in receiving her. She could

not, indeed, put her relief into words, so deep was it. Nowhere, she felt, could life be more peaceful or more calm than in this room which no sounds of the outer world except the songs of birds, no sights save the swaying of branches disturbed; where the blazoned panes cast their azure and argent on lines of russet books, where an aged hound sprawled before the embers, and the measured tick of the clock alone vied with the scratching of the pen. She saw herself seated there during drowsy summer days, or when firelight cheered the winter evenings. She saw herself sewing beside the hearth while her companions worked, each within his circle of light.

Then, she also was an Audley. She also had her share in the race which had lived long on this spot. Already she was fired with the desire to know more of them, and that flame John Audley was well fitted to fan. For he was not of the school of dry-as-dust antiquaries. He had the knack of choosing the picturesque in story, he could make it stand out for others, he could impart life to the actors in it. And, anxious to captivate Mary, he bent himself for nearly an hour to the display of his knowledge. Taking for his text one or other of the objects about him, he told her of great castles, from which England had been ruled, and through which the choicest life of the country had passed, that now were piles of sherds clothed with nettles. He told her of that woodland country on the borders of three counties, where the papists had long lived undisturbed and where the Gunpowder Plot had had its centre. He told her of the fashion which came in with Richard the Second, of adorning the clothes with initials, reading and writing having become for the first time courtly accomplishments; and to illustrate this he showed her the Westminster portrait of Richard in a robe embroidered with letters of R. He quoted Chaucer:

And thereon hung a broch of gold ful schene
On which was first i-written a crowned A
And after that, Amor vincit omnia.

Then, turning his back on her, he produced from some secret place a key, and opening a masked cupboard in the wall, he held out for her inspection a small bowl, bent and mis-shapen by use, and supported by two fragile butterflies. The whole was of silver so thin that to modern eyes it seemed trivial. Traces of gilding lingered about some parts of it, and on each of the wings of the butterflies was a capital A.

She was charmed. "Of all your illustrations," she cried, "I prefer this one! It is very old, I suppose?"

"It is of the fifteenth century," he said, turning it about. "We believe that it was made for the Audley who fell early in the Wars of the Roses. Pages and knights, maids and matrons, gloves of silk and gloves of mail, wrinkled palms and babies' fingers, the men, the women, the children of twelve generations of our race, my dear, have handled this. Once, according to an old inventory, there were six; this one alone remains."

"It must be very rare?" she said, her eyes sparkling.

"It is very rare," he said, and he handled it as if he loved it. He had not once allowed it to go out of his fingers. "Very rare. I doubt if, apart from the City Companies, there is another in the hands of the original owners."

"And it came to you by descent, sir?"

He paused in the act of returning it to its hiding-place. "Yes, that is how it came to me," he said in a muffled tone. But he seemed to be a long time putting it away; and when he turned with the key in his hand his face was altered, and he looked at her—well, had she done anything to anger him, she would have thought he was angry. "To whom besides me could it descend!" he asked, his voice raised a tone. "But there, I must not grow excited. I think—I think you had better go now. Go, my dear, now. But come back presently."

Mary went. But the change in tone and face had been such as to startle her and to dash the happy mood of a few moments earlier. She wondered what she had said to annoy him.

CHAPTER IX

OLD THINGS

The Gatehouse, placed on the verge of the upland, was very solitary. Cut off from the vale by an ascent which the coachmen of the great deemed too rough for their horses, it was isolated on the other three sides by Beaudelays Park and by the Great Chase, which flung its barren moors over many miles of table-land. In the course of the famous suit John Audley had added to the solitude of the house by a smiling aloofness which gave no quarter to those who agreed with his rival. The result was that when Mary came to live there, few young people would have found the Gatehouse a lively abode.

But to Mary during the quiet weeks that followed her arrival it seemed a paradise. She spent long hours in the open air, now seated on a fallen trunk in some glade of the park, now watching the squirrels in the clear gloom of the beech-wood, or again, lying at length on the carpet of thyme and heather that clothed the moor. She came to know by heart every path through the park-except that which led to the Great House; she discovered where the foxgloves clustered, where the meadow-sweet fringed the runlet, where the rare bog-bean warned the traveller to look to his footing. Even the Great Chase she came to know, and almost daily she walked to a point beyond the park whence she could see the distant smoke of a mining village. That was the one sign of life on the Chase; elsewhere it stretched vast and unpeopled, sombre under a livid sky, smiling in sunshine, here purple with ling, there scarred by fire-always wide under a wide heaven, raised high above the common world. Now and again she met a shepherd or saw a gig, lessened by distance, making its slow way along a moorland track. But for days together she might wander there without seeing a human being.

The wide horizon became as dear to her as the greenwood. Pent as she had been in cities, straitened in mean rooms where sight and smell had alike been outraged, she revelled in this sweet and open life. The hum of bees, the scent of pines, the flight of the ousel down the water, the whistle of the curlew, all were to her pleasures as vivid as they were new.

Meantime Basset made no attempt to share her excursions. He was fighting a battle with himself, and he knew better than to go out of his way to aid the enemy. And for her part she did not miss him. She did not dislike him, but the interest he excited in her was feeble. The thought of comparing him with Lord Audley, with the man to whose intervention she owed this home, this peace, this content, never occurred to her. Of Audley she did think as much perhaps as was prudent, sometimes with pensive gratitude, more rarely with a smile and a blush at her folly in dwelling on him. For always she thought of him as one, high and remote, whom it was not probable that she would ever see again, one whose course through life lay far from hers.

Presently, it is not to be denied, Basset began to grow upon her. He was there. He was part of her life. Morning and evening she had to do with him. Often she read or sewed in the same room with him, and in many small ways he added to her comfort. Sometimes he suggested things which would please her uncle; sometimes he warned her of things which she would do well to avoid. Once or twice he diverted to himself a spurt of John Audley's uncertain temper; and though Mary did not always detect the manœuvre, though she was far from suspecting the extent of his vigilance or the care which he cast about her, it would have been odd if she had not come to think more kindly of him, and to see merits in him which had escaped her at first.

Meanwhile he thought of her with mingled feelings. At first with doubt-it was never out of his mind that she had made much of Lord Audley and little of him. Then with admiration which he withstood more feebly as time went on, and the cloven hoof failed to appear. Later, with tenderness, which, hating the scheme John Audley had formed, he masked even from himself, and which he was sure that he would never have the courage to express in her presence.

For Basset was conscious that, aspire as he might, he was not a hero. The clash of life, the shock of battle, had no attraction for him. The library at the Gatehouse was, he owned it frankly, his true sphere. She, on the other hand, had had experiences. She had sailed through unknown seas, she had led a life strange to him. She had seen much, done much, suffered much, had held her own among strangers. Before her calmness and self-possession he humbled himself. He veiled his head.

He did not attempt, therefore, to accompany her abroad, but at home he had no choice save to see much of her. There was only one living room for all, and she glided with surprising ease into the current of the men's occupations. At first she was astray on the sea of books. Her knowledge was not sufficient to supply chart or compass, and it fell to Basset to point the way, to choose her reading, to set in a proper light John Audley's vivid pictures of the past, to teach her the elements of heraldry and genealogy. She proved, however, an apt scholar, and very soon she dropped into the position of her uncle's secretary. Sometimes she copied his notes, at other times he set her on the track of a fact, a relationship, a quotation, and she would spend hours in a corner, embedded in huge tomes of the county histories. Dugdale, Leland, Hall, even Polydore Vergil, became her friends. She pored over the Paston Letters, probed the false pedigrees of Banks, and could soon work out for herself the famous discovery respecting the last Lovel.

For a young girl it was an odd pursuit. But the past was in the atmosphere of the house, it went with the fortunes of a race whose importance lay in days long gone. Then all was new to her, enthusiasm is easily caught, and Mary, eager to please her uncle, was glad to be of use. She found the work restful after the suspense of the past year. It sufficed for the present, and she asked no more.

She never forgot the lamplit evenings of that summer; the spacious room, the fluttering of the moths that entered by the open windows, the flop of the old dog as it sought a cooler spot, the whisper of leaves turned ceaselessly in the pursuit of a fact or a fancy. In the retrospect all became less a picture than a frame containing a past world, a fifteenth-century world of color and movement, of rooms stifled in hangings and tapestries, of lines of spear-points and rows of knights in surcoats, of tolling bells and praying monks, of travellers kneeling before wayside shrines, of strange changes of fortune. For says the chronicler:

"I saw one of them, who was Duke of Exeter (but he concealed his name) following the Duke of Burgundy's train barefoot and bare-legged, begging his bread from door to door-this person was the next of the House of Lancaster and had married King Edward's sister."

And of dark sayings:

"Thys sayde Edward, Duke of Somerset, had herde a fantastyk prophecy that he sholde dy under a Castelle, wherefore he, as meche as in him was, he lete the King that he sholde not come in the Castelle of Wynsore, dredynge the sayde prophecy; but at Seint Albony's there was an hostelry havynge the sygne of a Castelle, and before that hostelry he was slayne."

"His badge was a Portcullis," her uncle said, when she read this to him, "so it was natural that he should fall before a castle. He used the Beanstalk, too, and if his name had been John, a pretty thing might have been raised upon it. But you're divagating, my dear," he continued, smiling-and seldom had Mary seen him in a better humor-"you're divagating, whereas I-I believe that I have solved the problem of the Feathers."

"The Prince of Wales's? No!"

"I believe so. Of course there is no truth in the story which traces them to the blind King of Bohemia, killed at Crécy. His crest was two vulture wings."

"But what of Arderne, who was the Prince's surgeon?" Basset objected. "He says clearly that the Prince gained it from the King of Bohemia."

"Not at all!" John Audley replied arrogantly-at this moment he was an antiquary and nothing more. "Where is the Arderne extract? Listen. 'Edward, son of Edward the King, used to wear such a feather, and gained that feather from the King of Bohemia, whom he slew at Crécy, and so assumed to himself that feather which is called an ostrich feather which the first-named most illustrious King,

used to wear on his crest.' Now who was the first-named most illustrious King, who before that used to wear it?"

"The King of Bohemia."

"Rubbish! Arderne means his own King, 'Edward the King.' He means that the Black Prince, after winning his spurs by his victory over the Bohemian, took his father's insignia. He had only been knighted six weeks and waited to wear his father's crest until he had earned it."

"By Jove, sir!" Basset exclaimed, "I believe you are right!"

"Of course I am! The evidence is all that way. The Black Prince's brothers wore it; surely not because their brother had done something, but because it was their father's crest, probably derived from their mother, Philippa of Hainault? If you will look in the inventory of jewels made on the usurpation of Henry the Fourth you will see this item, 'A collar of the livery of the Queen, on whom God have mercy, with an ostrich.'"

"But that," Basset interposed, "was Queen Anne of Bohemia-she died seven years before. There you get Bohemia again!"

"Compare this other entry," replied the antiquary, unmoved: "'A collar of the livery of Queen Anne, of branches of rosemary.' Now either Queen Anne of Bohemia had two liveries-which is unlikely-or the inventory made by order of Henry IV. quotes verbatim from lists made during the lifetime of Queen Anne; if this be the case, the last deceased Queen, on whom God have mercy, would be Philippa of Hainault; and we have here a clear statement that her livery was an ostrich, of which ostrich her husband wore a feather on his crest."

Basset clapped his hands. Mary beat applause on the table. "Hurrah!" she cried. "Audley for ever!"

"Miss Audley," Basset said, "Toft shall bring in hot water, and we will have punch!"

"Miss Audley!" her uncle exclaimed, with a wrinkling nose. "Why don't you call her Mary? And why, child, don't you call him Peter?"

Mary curtsied. "Why not, my lord?" she said. "Peter it shall be-Peter who keeps the keys that you discover!"

And Peter laughed. But he saw that she used his name without a blush or a tremor, whereas he knew that if he could force his lips to frame her name, the word would betray him. For by this time, from his seat at his remote table, and from the ambush of his book, he had watched her too often for his peace, and too closely not to know that she was indifferent to him. He knew that at the best she felt a liking for him, the growth of habit, and tinged, he feared, with contempt.

He was so far right that there were three persons in the house who had a larger share of the girl's thoughts than he had. The first was John Audley. He puzzled her. There were times when she could not doubt his affection, times when he seemed all that she could desire, kind, good-humored, frank, engaged with the simplicity of a child in innocent pursuits, and without one thought beyond them. But touch a certain spot, approach with steps ever so delicate a certain subject-Lord Audley and his title-and his manner changed, the very man changed, he became secretive, suspicious, menacing. Nor, however quickly she might withdraw from the danger-line, could the harm be undone at once. He would remain for hours gloomy and thoughtful, would eye her covertly and with suspicion, would sit silent through meals, and at times mutter to himself. More rarely he would turn on her with a face which rage made inhuman, a face that she did not know, and with a shaking hand he would bid her go-go, and leave the room!

The first time that this happened she feared that he might follow up his words by sending her away. But nothing ensued, then or later. For a while after each outburst he would appear ill at ease. He would avoid her eyes, and look away from her in a manner almost as unpleasant as his violence; later, in a shamefaced way, he would tell her that she must not excite him, she must not excite him, it was bad for him. And the man-servant meeting her in the hall, would take the liberty of giving her the same advice.

Toft, indeed, was the second who puzzled her. He was civil, with the civility of the trained servant, but always there was in his manner a reserve. And she fancied that he watched her. If she left the house and glanced back she was certain to see his face at a window, or his figure in a doorway. Within doors it was the same. He slept out, living with his wife in the kitchen wing, which had a separate entrance from the courtyard. But he was everywhere at all hours. Even his master appeared uneasy in his presence, and either broke off what he was saying when the man entered, or continued the talk on another note. More rarely he turned on Toft and without rhyme or reason would ask him harshly what he wanted.

The third person to share Mary's thoughts, but after a more pleasant fashion, was Toft's daughter, Etruria. "I hope you will like her, my dear," John Audley had said. "She will give you such attendance as you require, and will share the south wing with you at night. The two bedrooms there are on a separate staircase. I sleep above the library in this wing, and Peter in the tower room—we have our own staircase. I have brought her into the house because I thought you might not like to sleep alone in that wing."

Mary had thanked him, and had said how much she liked the girl. And she had liked her, but for a time she had not understood her. Etruria was all that was good and almost all that was beautiful. She was simple, kindly, helpful, having the wide low brow, the placid eyes, and perfect complexion of a Quaker girl—and to add to these attractions she was finely shaped, though rather plump than slender; and she was incredibly neat. Nor could any Quaker girl have been more gentle or more demure.

But she might have had no tongue, she was so loth to use it; and a hundred times Mary wondered what was behind that reticence. Sometimes she thought that the girl was merely stupid. Sometimes she yoked her with her father in the suspicions she entertained of him. More often, moved by the girl's meek eyes, she felt only a vague irritation. She was herself calm by nature, and reserved by training, the last to gossip with a servant, even with one whose refinement appeared innate. But Etruria's dumbness was beyond her.

One day in a research which she was making she fancied that she had hit on a discovery. It happened that Etruria came into the room at the moment, and in the fulness of her heart Mary told her of it. "Etruria," she said, "I've made a discovery all by myself."

"Yes, Miss."

"Something that no one has known for hundreds of years! Think of that!"

"Indeed, Miss."

Provoked, Mary took a new line. "Etruria," she asked, "are you happy?"

The girl did not answer.

"Don't you hear me? I asked if you were happy."

"I am content, Miss."

"I did not ask that. Are you happy?"

And then, moved on her side, perhaps, by an impulse towards confidence, Etruria yielded. "I don't think that we can any of us be happy, Miss," she said, "with so much sorrow about us."

"You strange girl!" Mary cried, taken aback. "What do you mean?"

But Etruria was silent.

"Come," Mary insisted. "You must tell me what you mean."

"Well, Miss," the girl answered reluctantly, "I'm sad and loth to think of all the suffering in the world. It's natural that you should not think of it, but I'm of the people, and I'm sad for them."

Balaam when the ass spoke was scarcely more surprised than Mary. "Why?" she asked.

The girl pointed to the open window. "We've all we could ask, Miss—light and air and birds' songs and sunshine. We've all we need, and more. But I come of those who have neither light nor air, nor songs nor sunshine, who've no milk for children nor food for mothers! Who, if they've work, work every hour of the day in dust and noise and heat. Who are half clemmed from year's end to year's end, and see no close to it, no hope, no finish but the pauper's deals! It's for them I'm sad, Miss."

"Etruria!"

"They've no teachers and no time to care," Etruria continued in desperate earnest now that the floodgates were raised. "They're just tools to make money, and, like the tools, they wear out and are cast aside! For there are always more to do their work, to begin where they began, and to be worn out as they were worn out!"

"Don't!" Mary cried.

Etruria was silent, but two large tears rolled down her face. And Mary marvelled. So this mild, patient girl, going about her daily tasks, could think, could feel, could speak, and upon a plane so high that the listener was sensible of humiliation as well as surprise! For a moment this was the only effect made upon her. Then reflection did its part-and memory. She recalled that glimpse of the under-world which she had had on her journey from London. She remembered the noisome alleys, the cinder wastes, the men toiling half-naked at the furnaces, the pinched faces of the women; and she remembered also the account which Lord Audley had given her of the fierce contest between town and country, plough and forge, land-lord and cotton-lord, which had struck her so much at the time.

In the charms of her new life, in her new interests, these things had faded from her mind. They recurred now, and she did not again ask Etruria what she meant. "Is it as bad as that?" she asked.

"It is not as bad as it has been," Etruria answered. "Three years ago there were hundreds of thousands out of work. There are thousands, scores of thousands, still; and thousands have no food but what's given them. And charity is bitter to many," she added, "and the poorhouse is bitter to all."

"But what has caused things to be so bad?"

"Some say one thing and some another. But most that machines lower wages, Miss, and the bread-tax raises food."

"Ah!" Mary said. And she looked more closely at the girl who knew so much that was at odds with her station.

"Others," Etruria continued, a faint color in her cheeks, "think that it is selfishness, that every one is for himself and no one for one another, and-

"Yes?" Mary said, seeing that she hesitated.

"And that if every one thought as much of his neighbor as of himself, or even of his neighbor as well as of himself, it would not be machines nor corn-taxes nor poorhouses would be strong enough to take the bread out of the children's mouths or the work out of men's hands!"

Mary had an inspiration. "Etruria," she cried, "some one has been teaching you this."

The girl blushed. "Well, Miss," she said simply, "it was at church I learned most of it."

"At church? What church? Not Riddsley?" For it was to Riddsley, to a service as dull as it was long, that they proceeded on Sundays in a chaise as slow as the reader.

"No, Miss, not Riddsley," Etruria answered. "It's at Brown Heath on the Chase. But it's not a real church, Miss. It's a room."

"Oh!" Mary replied. "A meeting-house!"

For some reason Etruria's eyes gleamed. "No, Miss," she said. "It's the curate at Riddsley has a service in a room at Brown Heath on Thursdays."

"And you go?"

"When I can, Miss."

The idea of attending church on a week-day was strange to Mary; as strange as to that generation was the zeal that passed beyond the common channel to refresh those whom migrations of population or changes in industry had left high and dry. The Tractarian movement was giving vigor not only to those who supported it, but to those who withstood it.

"And you've a sermon?" Mary said. "What was the text last Thursday, Etruria?"

The girl hesitated, considered, then looked with appeal at her mistress. She clasped her hands. "'Two are better than one,'" she replied, "'because they have good reward for their labor. For if they

fall, one will lift up his fellow, but woe to him that is alone when he falleth, for he hath not another to lift him up."

"Gracious, Etruria!" Mary cried. "Is that in the Bible?"

Etruria nodded.

"And what did your preacher say about it?"

"That the employer and the workman were fellows, and if they worked together and each thought for the other they would have a good reward for their labor; that if one fell, it was the duty of the other to help him up. And again, that the land and the mill were fellows-the town and the country-and if they worked together in love they would have a good return, and if trouble came to one the other should bear with him. But all the same," Etruria added timidly, "that the bread-taxes were wrong."

"Etruria," Mary said. "To-morrow is Thursday. I shall go with you to Brown Heath."

CHAPTER X

NEW THINGS

Mary Audley, crossing the moor to a week-day service, was but one of many who in the 'forties were venturing on new courses. In religion there were those who fancied that by a return to primitive forms they might recapture the primitive fervor; and those again who, like the curate whom Mary was going to hear, were bent on pursuing the beaten path into new places. Some thought that they had found a panacea for the evils of the day in education, and put their faith in workmen's institutes and night schools. Others were satisfied with philanthropy, and proclaimed that infants of seven ought not to toil for their living, that coal-pits were not fit places for women, and that what paid was not the only standard of life. A few dreamt of a new England in which gentle and simple were to mix on new-old terms; and a multitude, shrewd and hard-headed, believed in the Corn Law League, whose speakers travelled from Manchester to carry the claims of cheap bread to butter crosses and market towns, and there bearded the very landlord's agent.

The truth was that the country was lying sick with new evils, and had perforce to find a cure, whether that cure lay in faith, or in the primer, or in the Golden Rule, or in Adam Smith. For two generations men had been quitting the field for the mill, the farm for the coal-pit. They had followed their work into towns built haphazard, that grew presently into cities. There, short of light, of air, of water, lacking decency, lacking even votes-for the Reform Bill, that was to give everything to everybody, had stopped at the masters-lacking everything but wages, they swarmed in numbers stupendous and alarming to the mind of that day. And then the wages failed. Machines pushed out hands, though

Tools were made, and born were hands,
Every farmer understands.

Machines lowered wages, machines glutted the markets. Men could get no work, masters could sell no goods. On the top of this came bad seasons and dear bread. Presently hundreds of thousands were living on public charity, long lists of masters were in the *Gazette*. In the gloomy cities of the North, masses of men heaved and moaned as the sea when the south-west wind falls upon it.

All but the most thoughtless saw danger as well as unhappiness in this, and called on their gods. The Chartists proclaimed that safety lay in votes. The landed interest thought that a little more protection might mend matters. The Golden Rulers were for shorter hours. But the men who were the loudest and the most confident cried that cheap bread would mend all. The poor, they said, would have to eat and to spend. They would buy goods, the glut would cease. The wheels would turn again, there would be work and wages. The Golden Age would return. So preached the Manchester men.

In the meantime the doctors wrangled, and the patient grew a little, not much, better. And Mary Audley and Etruria walked across the moorland in the evening sunshine, with a light breeze stirring the bracken, and waves of shadow moving athwart the stretches of purple ling. They seemed very far, very remote from the struggle for life and work and bread that was passing in the world below.

Presently they dropped into a fern-clad dingle and saw below them, beside the rivulet that made music in its bottom, a house or two. Descending farther, they came on more houses, crawling up the hill slopes, and on a few potato patches and ash-heaps. As the sides of the valley rose higher and closed in above the walkers cottages fell into lines on either side of the brook, and began to show one behind the other in rough terraces, with middens that slid from the upper to the lower level. The valley bent to the left, and quickly tall chimneys became visible, springing from a huddle of mean

roofs through which no other building of size, no tower, no steeple, rose to break the ugly sameness. This was Brown Heath.

"It's a rough place," Etruria said as they picked their way. "But don't be afraid, Miss. I'm often passing, and they know me."

Still it was a rough place. The roadway was a cinder-track, and from the alleys and lanes above it open drains wormed their way across the path and into the stream, long grown foul. The air was laden with smoke, coal dust lay everywhere; the most cleanly must have despaired. Men seated, pipe in mouth, on low walls, watched the two go by—not without some rude banter; frowsy women crouching on door-steps and nursing starveling babes raised sullen faces. Lads in clogs made way for them unwillingly. In one place a crowd seethed from a side street and, shouting and struggling, overflowed the roadway before them and threatened to bar their path.

"It's a dog-fight," Etruria said. "They are rare and fond of them, Miss. We'd best get by quickly."

They passed in safety, passed, too, a brawl between two colliers, the air about them thick with oaths, passed a third eddy round two women fighting before a public-house. "The chaps are none so gentle," Etruria said, falling unconsciously into a commoner way of speaking. "They're all for fighting, dogs or men, and after dark I'm not saying we'd be safe. But we'll be over the moor by dusk, Miss."

They came, as she spoke, to a triangular space, sloping with the hill, skirted by houses, and crossed by an open sewer. It was dreary and cinder-covered, but five publics looked upon it and marked it for the centre of Brown Heath. Etruria crossed the triangle to a building a little cleaner than its neighbors; it was the warehouse, she told her mistress, of a sack-maker who had failed. She entered, and her companion followed her.

Mary found herself in a bare barn-like room, having two windows set high in the walls, the light from which fell coldly on a dozen benches ranged one behind the other, but covering only a portion of the floor. On these were seated, when they entered, about twenty persons, mainly women, but including three or four men of the miner class. No attempt had been made to alter the character of the place, and of formality there was as little. The two had barely seated themselves before a lean young man, with a long pale face and large nose, rose from the front bench, and standing before the little congregation, opened his book. He wore shabby black, but neither surplice nor gown.

The service lasted perhaps twenty minutes, and Mary was not much moved by it. The young man's voice was weak, the man himself looked under-fed. She noticed, however, that as the service went on the number in the room grew, and when it closed she found that all the seats were filled, and that there were even a few men—some of them colliers fresh from the pit—standing at the back. Remembering the odd text that the clergyman had given out the week before, she wondered what he would choose to-day, and, faintly amused, she stole a glance at her companion. But Etruria's rapt face was a reproach to her levity.

The young clergyman pushed back the hair from his forehead. His posture was ungainly, he did not know what to do with his hands, he opened his mouth and shut it again. Then with an effort he began. "My text, my friends," he said, "is but one word, 'Love.' Where will you find it in the Scriptures? In every chapter and in every verse. In the dark days of old the order was 'Thou shalt live!' The new order in these days is 'Thou shalt love!'" He began by describing the battle of life in the animal and vegetable world, where all things lived at the cost of others; and he admitted that the struggle for life, for bread, for work, as they saw it around them, resembled that struggle. In moving terms he enlarged on the distress, on the vast numbers lately living on the rates, on the thousands living, where even the rates fell short, on Government aid. He described the fireless homes, the foodless children, the strong men hopeless. And he showed them that others were stricken, that masters suffered, tradesmen were ruined, the country languished. "The worst may be past," he said. "You are working half-time, you are living on half-wages, you are thankful that things are better." Then he told them that for his part he did not presume to say what was at the root of these unhappy

conditions, but that of one thing he felt sure-and this was his message to them-that if the law of love, if the golden rule of preferring another to one's self, if the precept of that charity,

Which seeketh not itself to please
Nor for itself hath any care,
But for another gives its ease,

if that were followed by all, then all

Might build a heaven in hell's despair.

And in words more eloquent than he had yet compassed he begged them to set that example of brotherhood, in the certainty that the worst social evils, nay, all evils save pain and death, would be cured by the love that thought for others, that in the master preferred the servant's welfare and in the servant put first his master's interests. Finally he quoted his old text, "Let two work together, for if they fall, one will lift up his fellow!"

It seemed as if he had done. He was silent; his hearers waited. Then with an effort he continued:

"I have a word to say about something which fell from me in this place last week. While I did not venture, unskilled as I am, to say where lies the cause of our distress, I did say that I found it hard to believe that the system which taxes the bread you earn in the sweat of your brow, which takes a disproportionate part from the scanty crust of the widow and from the food of the child, was in accordance with the law of love. I repeat that now; and because I have been told that I dare not say in the pulpit of Riddsley church what I say here, I shall on the first opportunity state my belief there. You may ask why I have not done so; my answer is, that I am there the representative of another, whereas in this voluntary work I am myself more responsible. In saying that I ask you to judge me, as we should judge all, with that charity which believeth no evil."

A moment later Mary, deeply moved, was passing out with the crowd. As she stood, caught in the press by the door, an old man in horn-rimmed glasses, who was waiting there, held out his hand. She was going to take it, when she saw that it was not meant for her, but for the young clergyman who was following at her heels.

"Master, dunno you do it," the old fellow growled. "You'll break your pick, and naught gotten. Naught gotten, that'll serve. Your gaffer'll not abide it, and you'll lose your job!"

"Would you have me take it," the young man answered, "and not do the work, Cluff? Never fear for me."

"Dunno you be rash, master!" the other rejoined, clutching his sleeve and detaining him. "You be sure-"

Mary heard no more. She felt Etruria's hand pressing her arm. "We'd best lose no time," the girl whispered. And she drew Mary onward, across the triangle and into the lane which led to the moor.

"Are we so late?" The sun had set, but it was still light. "We'd best hurry," Etruria persisted, increasing her speed.

Mary looked at her and saw that she was troubled, but at the moment she set this down to the influence of the sermon, and her own mind went back to it. "I am glad you brought me, Etruria," she said. "I shall always be glad that I came."

"We'd best be getting home now," was Etruria's only answer, but this time Mary's ear caught the sound of footsteps behind them, and she turned. The young clergyman was hastening after them.

"Etruria!" he cried.

For a moment Mary fancied that Etruria did not hear. The girl hurried on. But Mary saw no occasion to run away, and she halted. Then Etruria, with a gesture of despair, stopped.

"It is no use," she said.

The young man came up with them. His head was bare, his hat was in his hand, his long plain face was aglow with the haste he had made. He had heard Etruria's words, and "It is of every use," he said.

"This is-my mistress," Etruria said.

"Miss Audley?"

"I am Miss Audley," Mary announced, wondering much.

"I thought that it might be so," he replied. "I have waited for such an occasion. I am Mr. Colet, the curate at Riddsley. Etruria and I love one another," he continued. "We are going to be married, if ever my means allow me to marry."

"No, we are not," the girl rejoined sharply. "Mr. Colet knows my mind," she continued, her eyes turned away. "I have told him many times that I am a servant, the daughter of a servant, in a different class from his, and I'll never be the one to ruin him and be a disgrace to him! I'll never marry him! Never!"

"And I have told Etruria," he replied, "that I will never take that answer. We love one another. It is nothing to me that she is a servant. My work is to serve. I am as poor as it is possible to be, with as poor prospects as it is possible to have. I shall never be anything but what I am, and I shall think myself rich when I have a hundred pounds a year. I who have so little, who look for so little, am I to give up this happiness because Etruria has less? I, too, say, Never!"

Mary, standing between them, did not know what to answer, and it was Etruria who replied. "It is useless," she said. And then, in a tone of honest scorn, "Who ever heard," she cried, "of a clergyman who married a servant? Or who ever heard of good coming of it?"

Mary had an inspiration. "Does Etruria's father know?" she asked.

"He knows and approves," the young man replied, his eyes bent fondly on his mistress.

Mary too looked at Etruria-beautiful, patient, a servant, loved. And she wondered. All these weeks she had been rubbing elbows with this romance, and she had not discerned it! Now, while her sympathies flew to the lover's side, her prejudices rose up against him. They echoed Etruria's words, "Who ever heard of good coming of such a match?" The days had been, as Mary knew, when the chaplain had married the lady's maid. But those days were gone. Meantime the man waited, and she did not know what to say.

"After all," she said at last, "it is for Etruria to decide."

"No, it is for us both to decide," he replied. And then, as if he thought that he had sufficiently stated his case, "I ask your pardon, Miss Audley, for intruding," he continued. "I am keeping you, and as I am going your way that is needless. I have had a message from a sick woman, and I am on my way to see her."

He took permission for granted, and though Etruria's very shoulders forbade him, he moved on beside them. "Conditions are better here than in many places," he said, "but in this village you would see much to sadden you."

"I have seen enough," Mary answered, "to know that."

"Ten years ago there was not a house here. Now there is a population of two thousand, no church, no school, no gentry, no one of the better class. There is a kind of club, a centre of wild talk; better that, perhaps, than apathy."

"Is it in Riddsley parish?" Mary asked. They were nearly clear of the houses, and the slopes of the hill, pale green in the peaceful evening light, began to rise on either side. It was growing dusk, and from the moorland above came the shrill cries of plovers.

"Yes, it is in Riddsley parish," he answered, "but many miles from the town, and as aloof from it-Riddsley is purely agricultural-as black from white. In such places as this-and there are many of them in Staffordshire, as raw, as rough, and as new-there is work for plain men and plain women. In these swarming hives there is no room for any refinement but true refinement. And the Church must learn to do her work with plain tools, or the work will pass into other hands."

"You may cut cheese with an onion knife," Etruria said coldly. "I don't know that people like it."

"I know nothing better than onions in the right place," he replied.

"That's not in cheese," she rejoined, to Mary's amusement.

"The poor get little cheese," he said, "and the main thing is to cut their bread for them. But here I must leave you. My errand is to that cottage."

He pointed to a solitary house, standing a few score paces above the road on the hillside. Mary shook hands with him, but Etruria turned her shoulder resolutely.

"Good-bye, Etruria," he said. And then to Mary, "I hope that I have made a friend?"

"I think you have," she answered. "I am sure that you deserve one."

He colored, raised his hat, and turned away, and the two went on, without looking back; darkness was coming apace, and they were still two miles from home. Mary kept silence, prudently considering how she should deal with the matter, and what she should say to her companion. As it fell out, events removed her difficulty. They had not gone more than two hundred yards, and were still some way below the level of the Chase, when a cry reached them. It came out of the dusk behind them, and might have been the call of a curlew on the moor. But first one, and then the other stood. They turned, and listened, and suddenly Etruria, more anxious or sharper of eye than her mistress, uttered a cry and broke away at a run across the sloping turf towards the solitary cottage. Alarmed, Mary looked intently in that direction, and made out three or four figures struggling before the door of the house. She guessed then that the clergyman was one of them, and that the cry had come from him, and without a thought for herself she set off, running after Etruria as fast as she could.

Twice Etruria screamed as she ran, and Mary echoed the cry. She saw that the man was defending himself against the onset of three or four—she could hear the clatter of sticks on one another. Then she trod on her skirt and fell. When she had got, breathless, to her feet again, the clergyman was down and the men appeared to be raining blows on him. Etruria shrieked once more and the next moment was lost amid the moving figures, the brandished sticks, the struggle.

Mary ran on desperately. She caught sight of the girl on her knees over the fallen man, she saw her fend off more than one blow, she heard more than one blow fall with a sickening thud. She came up to them. With passion that drove out fear, she seized the arm of the nearest and dragged him back.

"You coward!" she cried. "You coward! I am Miss Audley! Do you hear! Leave him! Leave him, I say!"

Her appearance, the surprise, checked the man; her fearlessness, perhaps her name, gave the others pause. They retreated a step. The man she had grasped shook himself free, but did not attempt to strike her. "Oh, d-n the screech-owls!" he cried. "The place is alive with them! Hold your noise, you fools! We'll have the parish on us!"

"I am Miss Audley!" Mary repeated, and in her indignation she advanced on him. "How dare you?" Etruria, still on her knees, continued to shriek.

"You're like to get a wipe over the head, dang you!" the man growled, "whoever you be! Go to- and mind your own brats! He'll know better now than to preach against them as he gets his living by! You be gone!"

But Mary stood her ground. She declared afterwards that, brutally as the man spoke, the fight had gone out of him. Etruria, on the contrary, maintained that, finding only women before them, the ruffians would have murdered them. Fortunately, while the event hung in the balance, "What is it?" some one shouted from the road below. "What's the matter there?"

"Murder!" cried Etruria shrilly. "Help! Help!"

"Help!" cried Mary. She still kept her face to the men, but for the first time she began to know fear.

Footsteps thudded softly on the turf, figures came into view, climbing the slope. It needed no more. With a volley of oaths the assailants turned tail and made off. In a trice they were round the corner of the house and lost in the dusk.

A moment later two men, equally out of breath and each carrying a gun, reached the spot. "Well!" said the bigger of the two, "What is it?"

He spoke as if he had not come very willingly, but Mary did not notice this. The crisis over, her knees shook, she could barely stand, she could not speak. She pointed to the fallen man, over whom Etruria still crouched, her hair dragged down about her shoulders, her neckband torn, a ghastly blotch on her white cheek.

"Is he dead?" the new-comer asked in a different tone.

"Ay, dead!" Etruria echoed. "Dead!"

Fortunately the curate gave the lie to the word. He groaned, moved, with an effort he raised himself on his elbow. "I'm-all right!" he gasped. "All right!"

Etruria sprang to her feet. She stepped back as if the ground had opened before her.

"I'm not-hurt," Colet added weakly.

But it was evident that he was hurt, even if no bones were broken. When they came to lift him he could not stand, and he seemed to be uncertain where he was. After watching him a moment, "He should see a doctor," said the man who had come up so opportunely. "Petch," he continued, addressing his companion, who wore a gamekeeper's dress, "we must carry him to the trap and get him down to Brown Heath. Who is he, do you know? He looks like a parson."

"He's Mr. Colet of Riddsley," Mary said.

The man turned and looked at her. "Hallo!" he exclaimed. And then in the same tone of surprise, "Miss Audley!" he said. "At this time of night?"

Mary collected herself with an effort. "Yes," she said, "and very fortunately, for if we had not been here the men would have murdered him. As it is, you share the credit of saving him, Lord Audley."

"The credit of saving you is a good deal more to me," he answered gallantly. "I did not think that we should meet after this fashion."

CHAPTER XI

TACT AND TEMPER

He looked at Etruria, and Mary explained who she was.

"I am afraid that she is hurt."

The girl's temple was bruised and there was blood on her cheek; more than one of the blows aimed at her lover had fallen on her. But she said eagerly that it was "Nothing! Nothing!"

"Are you sure, Etruria?" Mary asked with concern.

"It is nothing, indeed, Miss," the girl repeated. She was trying with shaking fingers to put up her hair.

"Then the sooner," Audley rejoined, "we get this-this gentleman to my dogcart, the better. Take his other arm, Petch. Miss Audley, can you carry my gun? – it is not loaded. And you," he continued to Etruria, "if you are able, take Petch's."

They took the guns, and the little procession wound down the path to the road, where they found a dogcart awaiting them, and, peering from the cart, two setters, whining and fretting. The dogs were driven under the seat, and the clergyman, still muttering that he was all right, was lifted in. "Steady him, Petch," Audley said; "and do you drive slowly," he added, to the other man. "You will be at the surgeon's at Brown Heath in twenty minutes. Stay with him, Petch, and send the cart back for me."

"But are you not going?" Mary cried.

"I am not going to leave you in the dark with only your maid," he answered with severity. "One adventure a night is enough, Miss Audley."

She murmured a word or two, but submitted. The struggle had shaken her; she could still see the men's savage faces, still hear the thud of their blows. And she and Etruria had nearly a mile to go before they reached the park.

When they were fairly started, "How did it happen?" he asked.

Mary told the story, but said no word of Etruria's romance.

"Then you were not with him when they set on him?"

"No, we had parted."

"And you went back?"

"Of course we did!"

"It was imprudent," he said, "very imprudent. If we had not come up at that moment you might have been murdered."

"And if we had not gone back, Mr. Colet might have been murdered!" she answered. "What he had done to offend them—"

"I think I can tell you that. He's the curate at Riddsley, isn't he? Who's been preaching up cheap bread and preaching down the farmers?"

"Perhaps so," Mary answered. "He may be. But is he to be murdered for that? From your tone one might think so."

"No," he replied slowly, "he is not to be murdered for it. But whether he is wise to preach cheap bread to starving men, whether he is wise to tell them that they would have it but for this man or that man, this class or that class—is another matter."

She was not convinced—the sermon had keyed her thoughts to a high pitch. But he spoke reasonably, and he had the knack of speaking with authority, and she said no more. And on his side he had no wish to quarrel. He had come down to Riddsley partly to shoot, partly to look into the political situation, but a little—there was no denying it—to learn how Mary Audley fared with her uncle.

For he had thought much of her since they had parted, and much of the fact that she was John Audley's heir. Her beauty, her spirit, her youth, had caught his fancy. He had looked forward to

renewing his acquaintance with her, and he was in no mood, now he saw her, to spoil their meeting by a quarrel. He thought Colet, whose doings had been reported to him, a troublesome, pestilent fellow, and he was not sorry that he had got his head broken. But he need not tell her that. Circumstances had favored him in bringing them together and giving him the beau rôle, and he was not going to cross his luck.

So, "Fire is an excellent thing of course," he continued with an air of moderation, "but, believe me, it's not safe amid young trees in a wind. Whatever your views, to express them in all companies may be honest, but is not wise. I have no doubt that a parson is tried. He sees the trouble. He is not always the best judge of the remedy. However, enough of that. We shall agree at least in this, that our meetings are opportune?"

"Most opportune," Mary answered. "And from my point of view very fortunate!"

"There really is a sort of fate in it. What but fate could have brought about our meeting at the Hôtel Lambert? What but fate could have drawn us to the same spot on the Chase to-night?"

There was a tone in his voice that brought the blood to her cheek and warned her to keep to the surface of things. "The chance that men call fate," she answered lightly.

"Or the fate that fools call chance," he urged, half in jest, half in earnest. "We have met by chance once, and once again-with results! The third time-what will the third time bring? I wonder."

"Not a fright like this, I hope!" Mary answered, remaining cheerfully matter of fact. "Or if it does," with a flash of laughter, "I trust that the next time you will come up a few moments earlier!"

"Ungrateful!"

"I?" she replied. "But it was Etruria who was in danger!"

For the peril had left her with a sense of exhilaration, of lightness, of ease. She was pleased to feel that she could hold her own with him, relieved that she was not afraid of him. And she was glad-she was certainly glad-to see him again. If he were inclined to make the most of his advantage, well, a little gallantry was quite in the picture; she was not deceived, and she was not offended. While he on his side, as they walked over the moor, thought of her as a clever little witch who knew her value and could keep her head; and he liked her none the less for it.

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